



Photos by Michael Cooney

2011 Chevrolet Corvette ZR1 and Volt Chevy Showdown: 'Vette vs. Volt

Here's an unlikely Corvette ZR1 and Volt "showdown." Both are champions, but fight in different arenas.

Corvettes offer three engine choices. The base 'Vette and Grand Sport get 430 hp; the Z06 gets 505 hp. And finally, the ZR1 with a 6.2L supercharged V8 pumps out 638 hp.

Everything you see is functional for aerodynamics and performance—scoops, vents, rear spoiler, front splitter, etc. Inside, the optional leather-wrapped dash and upper door panels look great. Seats are extremely comfortable. The interior, though, has a "plastic-y" aroma that soon dissipates with AC on or windows down.

The ZR1 is amazing in performance and flexibility. Its acceleration is ferocious, brutal, addictive. Try 0–60 in 3.3 seconds. Under full throttle, the w-i-d-e 335/25 x 20 rear tires claw for traction as the tail end squirms from side to side, catapulting you forward, engine roaring. Reaching 100 takes another three seconds. Imagine going 60, count to three, and then busting through 100. Top speed? 205. Yep, it's fast. As for cornering, the ZR1 is glued to the road. Pushing hard through tight curves, there's no drama. It just sticks and goes 'round. No squealing. No sliding. Even as I pulled 0.98 lateral-Gs as shown on the windshield's heads-up display.

And then it's a pussycat around town. In sixth gear (stick shift only) I let it coast down to 600 rpm—its idle speed—gave it light throttle, and it smoothly rumbled back up to speed. No bucking, it just takes

off. That's what 604 lb.-ft. of torque does for you. Whether going fast or slow, the ZR1 amazes.

In another arena, the Volt is also amazing. As an extended-range electric, it carries its own on-board generator in the form of a 1.4L 4-cylinder gas engine. Plug the Volt into your household outlet overnight to recharge and its 111 kW drive motor is good for 35–45 miles depending on how you drive and the terrain.

If you commute within that range and you plug in every night, you may never buy gas except for longer journeys. That's the beauty of the Volt. If you drive further and deplete the battery, the engine automatically starts and charges the battery pack as you drive. Under heavier loads, like steep hills, the engine can send part or all the electricity it generates directly to the electric motor. If you want to drive to New York—no worries. The gas engine

will charge the lithium-ion batteries, and you'll just pull into gas stations along the way as with any other car. With a pure electric like Nissan's Leaf, if you deplete the batteries while driving, well, all you can do then is call for a tow truck.

The Volt handles well, is smooth, very comfortable, and has surprising punch. Cruising at 80 was eerily silent. Top speed is a claimed 100. After my first five days on battery only, I took to the mountains for a torture test. The batteries' charge depleted, the gas engine came on, and I continued to drive up long freeway and mountain grades, eventually driving up an extremely steep street to the top—no problem. The Volt's sophisticated electric-gas interface works seamlessly.

In this "showdown," of course, the 'Vette pounds the Volt in acceleration, top speed and handling. But the Volt decimates the Corvette—and your car—in fuel economy and in stealthy silent running.

The ZR1 begins at \$109,800 and this loaded one totaled \$122,445. It is EPA-rated at 14-city, 20-highway mpg. I averaged 16.1, but got 28 mpg with cruise control set at 70. The Volt was \$41,000 nicely equipped including Nav. Fed and state tax credits may bring that down to around \$28,000 in CA. It's EPA-rated at 93 overall mpg; 37 mpg if running on gas only. I drove the Volt 266 miles and used 1.4 gallons of premium gas (\$5.88), plus about \$6.00 in electricity (four over-nighters). I averaged 190 mpg for just gas. On a cost-equivalent basis, the \$11.88 spent for both gas and electricity would buy 2.83 gallons of gas currently. For 266 miles, that's 94 mpg on an adjusted basis—nicely meeting the EPA estimate of 93.

To sum up: I want a ZR1. I want a Volt. If you might too, visit chevrolet.com. (A tip for you: the Volt looks Killer in black!) ⚡

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