

COLLECTOR'S CORNER



— FRED NELSON, Nelson Racing

Phantom 'Vette's got Canadian connection

Calgary's Chris Chamberlain enjoyed playing with his '97 Corvette. It was a coupe with the LS1 engine and a supercharger.

But what he really wanted was a convertible. When Chevrolet released the Z06 model, it was meant to honour the famed Zora Arkus-Duntov, who authorized this option number on a 1965 model.

That car had bypassed the showroom, going directly from the assembly line to the racetracks.

The 2003 Z06 featured the LS6 engine, with 405 horsepower. There were improvements in suspension, clutch, and valve train. Being the Corvette's 50th Anniversary, Chris pondered the situation.

A visit to Steve Eisenberg at Davenport Motorsports made the decision. Since the 50th Anniversary Z06 was only offered as a coupe, the solution would be to build a phantom — a car built the way the factory should have, but never did.

Besides, a friend of Steve's would buy the '97 from Chris.

Early the next morning, as the doors to Shaganappi Chevrolet opened, Chris was there with his nose pressed against the glass doors, ready to order the Z06.

It was springtime, so he put 3,000 km on the new 'Vette almost immediately. He liked it. Time for Stage II.

The car was shipped to John Caravaggio in Woodbridge, Ont. The top was removed and made into a convertible, with a removable hardtop also.

All fifth-generation Corvettes have the frame designed to be a convertible, so rigidity was not a problem.

Chris flew to Ontario and drove the car back, making a holiday out of the trip. Once back in Calgary, it was again dropped off at Steve's shop.

A set of headers and special catalytic converters were installed, which uncorked more power. And even though one of these cars will stop from 60 mph in a scant 125 ft., a set of Baer brakes shortened even that distance.

With Stage III completed, Chris drove the car for the rest of the season.

Once the weather turned ugly, it was back to Davenport for Stage IV. First, the car was turned over to Shannon, the shop foreman, for a series of baseline runs on the chassis dynamometer.

Then came a polished Vortech supercharger with an intercooler. A few things had to be moved slightly, but everything fits

under the hood.

Steve has invested several hundred thousand dollars and he and Shannon have spent several hundred hours testing, in

order to develop their own programs for the Vortech blowers. This is where it pays off.

Chris' Corvette was set up conservatively, with a big pulley on the blower.

Reliability is the first priority, with no compromise. Next, the car will run pump gas, although premium grade is a must.

Once Shannon had the engine running, it was time to clean up the fuel curve. This program is even able to set what temperature the electric fans kick in.

I was fortunate to watch as the final dyno runs produced 536.2 horsepower to the rear wheels, with 457 lb.-ft. of torque. And this is at 6,500 RPM; the rev limiter is set at 7,200.

Even the folks at Vortech are amazed these boys can make that much power at Calgary's altitude of 3,500 ft. above sea level. But the tuning is the key.

Having done 100 blower installations in the past three years, they have never had a failure. And the blower is on warranty for as long as Chris owns the car.

I couldn't help but notice when Chris picked the car up the other day and took it out for a real-world test. When he came back, you couldn't pry the grin off his face.

To make that kind of horsepower to the back wheels, the engine is making at least 625 HP at the flywheel (that's 900 in the bar). And this is without emissions, and without affecting the warranty.

With that kind of horsepower available, the car will still make 30 miles per gallon! If it gets too hot, just turn on the air conditioning.

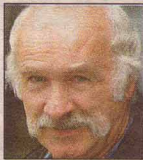
It's time to disregard what the old-timers told us. You CAN have it all — and in Canada too.

If you're waiting to hear a downside to this, there isn't one.

Naturally, you'll have to reach for your wallet, but you don't have to lift a finger to have a toy like this.

Steve even has a demonstrator, a truck equipped with a blower for interested parties who want to experience that instant, kick-in-the-pants feeling of driving a supercharged vehicle with big horsepower. He'll also have a display at the upcoming World of Wheels, and Chris' Corvette will be there.

What are you waiting for?



Fred
Nelson
Classic Affair