Misunderstood Pair: Alfa Romeos and New Jersey

New Toyota Camry: Jaguar in Disguise

AUTOMOBILE MAGAZINE

MARCH 1992

4 FASTEST CORVETTES

Banking and cranking on the Charlotte Motor Speedway

190-mph Lingenfelter ZR-1
185-mph Callaway Twin Turbo
175-mph ZR-1
163-mph LT1

U.S.A. $2.95
CANADA $3.50
U.K. £2.20

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The Blue Ridge Mountains northeast of Asheville, North Carolina, provided roads as exciting as those used for the Targa Florio. Our quartet of speed merchants: stock ZR-1 (blue), Lingenfelter ZR-1 (red), stock LT1 (purple), and Callaway Twin Turbo (omigod candy tangerine).

Reeves Callaway and John Lingenfelter believe that Corvettes aren't fast enough—and they've been doing something about it.

THE FOUR FASTEST CORVETTES

Asheville, North Carolina—

"Did y'all bring us our Christmas presents early?" asked the young woman behind the counter at the Texaco station mini-mart. She smiled broadly and looked through the plate glass window at the quartet of gleaming, low-slung beauties drinking deeply from the super unleaded pumps. "I'll take the blue one, uh-huh."

If you'd like to know what it feels like to be a celebrity, you don't have to host the "Tonight Show," play in the Super Bowl, or even own a Ferrari Testarossa. Just bring four Corvettes together and drive around. One Vette alone won't do the trick—too common a sight. But put four in close proximity, especially if one is painted candy tangerine and has more slots and scoops than an F-15 fighter plane, and suddenly, there's enough voltage to blast a good-size hole through the general public's wall of ennui. A brace of missile launchers bolted to the roof of a Subaru couldn't get you more attention.

Notoriety was just one element in this expedition to Dixie. We came to North Carolina—an unseasonably cold North Carolina, it turned out—to lose ourselves in the hills on the contentious two-lanes that crisscross the Appalachian Trail and flirt with the Tennessee border. Like trysting lovers, we wanted privacy. We wouldn't be passing this way again, and never with these four cars. You see, we were driving the four fastest Corvettes money can buy.

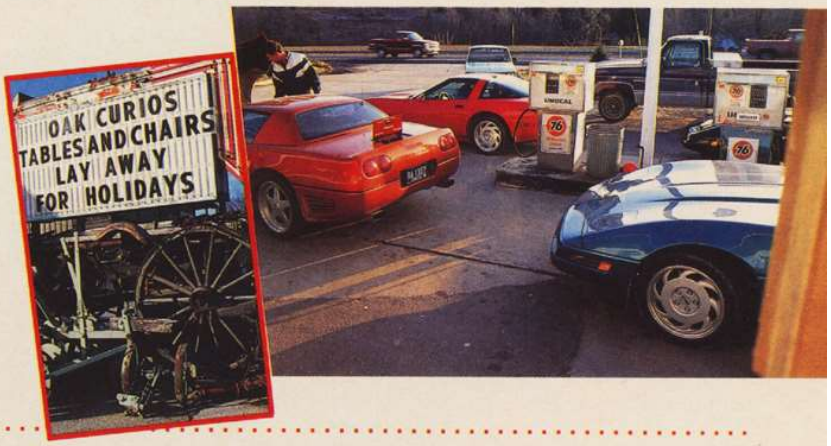
Let us, as Tricky Dick used to say, make one thing perfectly clear: The cars we are talking about are the four fastest *EPA-legal* Corvettes for sale in America. They pollute no more than the most respectful Toyota. They pass the EPA's stringent exhaust emissions test, the one conducted in a laboratory by white-coated technicians—not the perfunctory sniffer-up-the-tailpipe charade administered at local emissions-check stations.

Currently, there are three sources for whizzer EPA-legal Corvettes. First, as you would expect, is the Chevrolet Motor Division. Two of the four fastest Corvettes come straight from the factory: the base car, which is fitted with the new 300-bhp, 5.7-liter LT1 V-8; and the well-known ZR-1, which packs a 32-valve, 375-bhp V-8.

Our LT1 came with the optional four-speed automatic, a combination that jumps to 60 mph in 5.3 seconds and pulls to 163 mph. (Thanks to more favorable gearing, automatic LT1s are 4 mph faster than six-speed manual versions.) The ZR-1 will make the trip to 60 mph in a scant 4.3 seconds, and it doesn't stop accelerating until it has reached 175 mph. That kind of performance, however, hasn't been enough to keep it selling briskly. (Sales fell from 3011 in 1990 to 2037 in 1991.)

Stock Corvettes ought to be fast enough for just about any sane person, which tells you something about Reeves Callaway and John Lingenfelter. These two gentlemen both make decent livings building special Corvettes that make the factory cars look a little sleepy—and their handiwork is strictly EPA legal (see sidebar). Lingenfelter Performance Engineering in Decatur, Indiana, and Callaway Cars of Old Lyme, Connecticut, feed the speed lust of a handful of Corvette lovers and have been doing so for some years. We asked each of these aftermarket tuners to bring one of his automobiles—and himself—along for this trip.

Lingenfelter and Callaway are as different as Perrier-Jouët and Bud, and their interpretations of the Ultimate Fast Corvette are mirror images of their personalities. Readers of this magazine know the Callaway name. Reeves Callaway, 44, has been proffering twin-turbocharged versions of the Corvette since 1987, more than 500 of them so far. The scion of a for-real tycoon—his father was head of Burlington Industries, founded Callaway Vineyards, and now runs Callaway Golf, a wildly successful



BY RICH CEPPOS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG JAREM

equipment manufacturer—he majored in art history in college and then went on to road-race formula cars in SCCA. Before hanging up his Nomex, he came within spitting distance of the Formula Vee national championship.

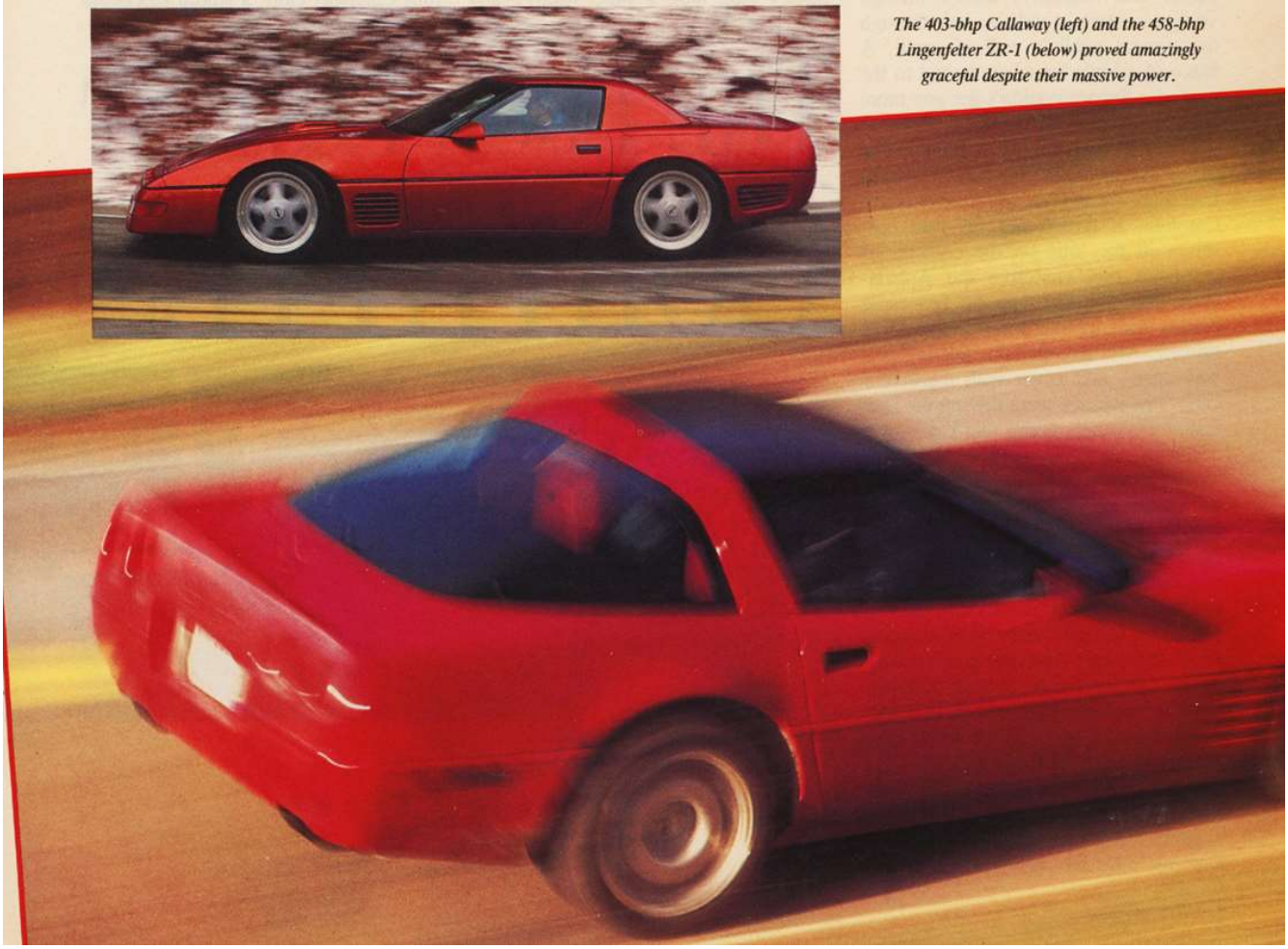
All of that personal history was reflected in the Callaway Twin Turbo roadster Reeves brought along for this test. From its voluptuous Paul Deutschman–designed bodywork (new nose and tail pieces plus recontoured lower-body cladding) to its custom Spies Hecker candy tangerine paint to the gentle curve of its chrome intercooler tubing, the Twin Turbo is as much art as science.

This uncompromising attention to detail costs big—$106,504 big in the case of our test car. In return, you get 403 bhp and a top speed of 185 mph. If you think that's a scandalous amount to pay for a Corvette, you may be missing the point. Says Callaway: "I think that one of the reasons people buy a car like this is because they enjoy being involved in the process. We have kind of an architect-client relationship with our customers." Even though the Twin Turbo has been a reasonable sales success, Callaway is about to change the way he does business. Our tangerine test car was one of the last Twin Turbos that will ever be built. "It's very hard to sell cars in this price range," says Callaway, "and we've been turning a lot of people away. From now on, instead of selling only complete cars, I intend to have a menu of choices for anyone who wants to spend five dollars or five thousand." Callaway will soon begin modifying ZR-1s for more speed. He'll call them CR-1s, and they'll be available in several stages of tune. He'll also offer a range of accessories through a mail-order catalog.

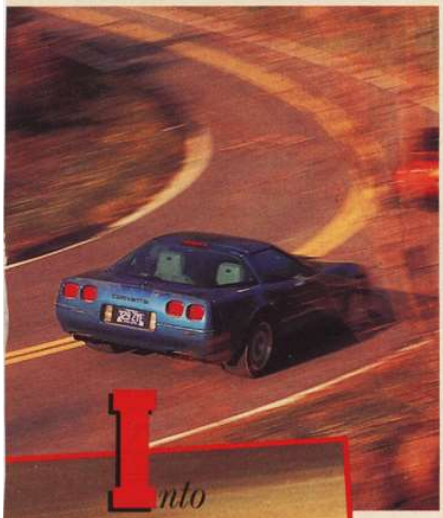
John Lingenfelter has been playing this power game altogether differently. Next to Callaway, the forty-six-year-old, silver-haired Lingenfelter seems as quintessentially Midwestern as the characters who inhabit Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon. Lingenfelter came up through the dirty-fingernails school of drag racing, winning eleven NHRA national championships along the way. He doesn't talk much, and when he does, it's usually about excessive amounts of horsepower.

Flashing a big grin, he admitted to having built a mega-engined truck to haul his racing car—"It went 135 mph with the racing car on the back"—and to having driven 217 mph on the road. "I had to get this customer's car checked out, and I was running kind of late." These days, he has slowed down a lot. To blow off steam, he runs a 900-bhp A/Econo dragster that will do the quarter-mile in 6.94 seconds at 190 mph. It's the quickest in the country.

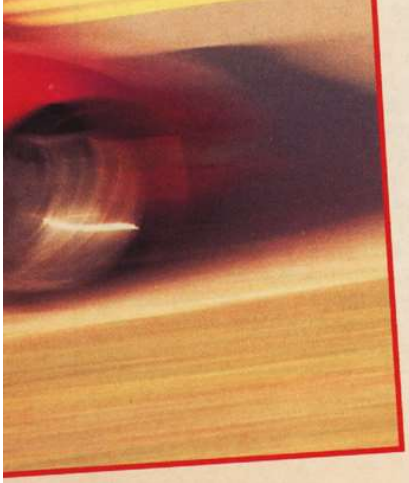
Lingenfelter knows more than he lets on. He got into drag racing only after graduating from Penn State with an engineering degree. He also spent seven years as an engine engineer for International Harvester. He doesn't work under any shade trees, either; his shop encompasses two buildings, employs twenty-four people, and does all manner of engine work, for racing cars and street machines alike.



The 403-bhp Callaway (left) and the 458-bhp Lingenfelter ZR-1 (below) proved amazingly graceful despite their massive power.



Into North Carolina's mountains we plunged, in search of truth, g-loads, and capillary-bursting acceleration.



The Lingenfelter ZR-1 is as straightahead as the man who builds it. Not a badge or sticker anywhere to give away the sinew underneath: 458 bhp at 6500 rpm. He's managed that feat with what amounts to Zen-like attention to detail. He won't reveal his secrets, but the work involves doing what the factory can't: blueprinting the engine and then going beyond, using a drag racer's instincts about making horsepower balanced by an engineer's knowledge of emissions. He even reworks the stock mufflers for better flow.

A while back, Lingenfelter tested this same red ZR-1 coupe at the Bridgestone 7.7-mile oval in Fort Stockton, Texas. It topped out at 190 mph. You pay plenty for the extra speed, too—$15,000 on top of the price of a ZR-1. That would make a Lingenfelter conversion about an $80,000 proposition, but with ZR-1s going for well below sticker, the real cost could be as low as $65,000. Not bad, if what you want is no-frills thrust.

So into North Carolina's mountains we plunged, in search of truth, g-loads, and capillary-bursting acceleration. Beginning from our base in Asheville, a comfortable town nestled in the western corner of the state, we headed north. The Great Smoky Mountains stood guard to the west. A few miles to the east, the Blue Ridge Mountains jutted into the sky. Among the snowcapped peaks was Mount Mitchell, at 6684 feet the tallest mountain east of the Mississippi.

What we found just a few miles outside of Asheville was . . . snow. Snow? Yes, sir. A cold wave was ravaging the South, and it left us wondering what on earth to do with 1536 bhp. Luckily, the weather cleared before noon, the roads dried out, and we had nearly two full days to indulge ourselves.

We wound through towns with names like Bald Creek, Ramseytown, Celo—some of them spots on the map with nothing more than a few cabins. The lonely roads wriggled through thick forests and up and down the Blue Ridge Mountains. The shallow valleys were sparsely populated. Plain houses and weather-beaten cabins—some seemingly abandoned—were wedged into tight clearings. For a while, we paralleled a stream. One isolated cabin was reachable only by a rope bridge. You could imagine moonshiners deep in these hills, sitting by their stills. Maybe they were there even now.

It took only a handful of miles to see that the LT1 was simply not in the same league as the three faster Corvettes. In most circumstances, a stock LT1 is nearly impossible to fault (which is why we chose it as one of this year's All-Stars). But in this company, it seemed almost subdued. The stock ZR-1, by comparison, rushed the corners in a way that made you take a deep breath and put on the brakes. We were dealing with supercars here, and the LT1's performance just wasn't up to it.

Hard through the twists and turns, the two new stock Vettes proved to be smooth and progressive handlers. Their recalibrated FX3 adjustable shock systems and new Goodyear Eagle GS-C tires made them more confidence inspiring to hustle along than Corvettes have ever been. The tuner cars—both on Bridgestone rubber—surprised us by being almost as happy.

We descended from the mountains to lunch in the somnolent burg of Erwin, Tennessee, and then tore back into the hills. Although the Callaway's engine is turbocharged and the Lingenfelter ZR-1 engine is normally aspirated, the two behaved very much alike: They had to be driven with the revs up to extract the juice. The knock-your-socks-off acceleration was locked in a band about 2500 rpm wide. If you kept the Callaway at 3000 or above, the turbos would spool up as quickly as your right foot went down and pump 575 pounds-feet of torque down the pipe like *that*. The Callaway launched itself toward the next corner with an o*migod-woweee* catapult blast that made your eyes widen. But let the revs drop too far, and it was like running into a sand trap.

The Lingenfelter ZR-1 acted much the same, only at significantly higher rpm. To let the animal out, you had to buzz the engine beyond 5000 rpm, which it was only too happy to do. From there to the 7400-rpm redline, it was like a racing car, plain and simple. Intoxicating, frenetic, amazing. *Brraanngg!* You were topped out in second gear on the short straights, up to nearly 85 mph, and it was time to get on the brakes *hard* for the next hairpin. No, 458 bhp is not too much for the street, at least when it is delivered as smoothly and controllably as this.

We stopped to refuel at a general store in Riverview, Tennessee. The country folk were at once friendly and wary. We took the time to explain who

we were and what we were doing. When we asked what the local hills were named, a grandmotherly woman shot back: "These here ain't hills. These are *mountains*. Look over there," she said, and chuckled. "That's Mount Mitchell." Silly Yankee flatlanders.

We finished our first day's drive with a short blast along the Blue Ridge Parkway, a 469-mile-long road that clings to the mountains for much of their length. It is one of America's most enchanting stretches of asphalt, for both the scenery and its scintillating twists and turns. It had been a marvelous day.

The following morning, we hit the Interstate and headed due east to Charlotte and the famous Charlotte Motor Speedway. The smooth, evenly surfaced North Carolina roads are the kind Vettes still like best. On the way out from Connecticut, the Callaway's huge front tires—Reeves had fitted some new 295/35ZR-18 Bridgestone Expedias—had been grabbing the wheel ruts worn by heavy trucks and had caused the car to dart uncomfortably. Not now.

We found that the 1992 versions did a better job of filtering out road noise than the older tuner cars (both 1991 models), but the quietest driveline belonged to the Callaway. "We found," said Reeves, "that a side benefit of all that heat

REEVES CALLAWAY JOHN LINGENFELTER

REEVES CALLAWAY, JOHN LINGENFELTER

Like business owners everywhere, Reeves Callaway and John Lingenfelter are spending a lot of time considering their place in the universe these days. With so much in common, it was no surprise that America's foremost Corvette tuners spent a lot of time riding together during our trip, talking shop and telling lies. We asked them to share their thoughts with us.

Gentlemen, what does the future hold for aftermarket tuners like yourselves?
Callaway: The new regulations coming down from Washington are something that we have to deal with in the future, but they're not a threat because we're already in sync with what it takes to be a manufacturer. We have to have on-board diagnostics in 1994 regardless of all the hurdles. If you as a manufacturer decide to jump over those hurdles, then you do. That part is just a technical exercise.

From my vantage point, having gone to all the trouble to become a small-volume manufacturer, I have one other burden on me—to find enough people to buy what I make in order to recoup my expenses. I'm glad that I became a manufacturer. It seemed the right way to deal with the rules at the time. Would I do it again? Those are annual expenses, and when you certify as a manufacturer, you sign yourself up for them year after year. In this economic climate . . .

Who buys your cars, and what are they looking for?
Lingenfelter: The guys who buy my cars want to get to 120 mph as fast as they can—and that's it. They don't care about what happens above that speed. They're usually in their late thirties, early forties. Actually, most of them preferred the small-block, 383-automatic combination I used to build. It had tons of torque. That thing was incredible off the line. The customers who drove my ZR-1 didn't like it, because all the power is way up high. They'd come back and say, "Hey, it doesn't go."

We're also doing a lot of business in pre-1967 muscle cars, because you can do anything to them that you want. The newer cars we work on are almost all Corvettes, by a margin of 100 to one.

Callaway: The guy who buys a Callaway is between forty-five and sixty-five, generally owns his own company, and is the decision maker—so he can have any car he wants. This is one of several special cars in his fleet. The characteristic my customers all share is that they all probably admired Corvettes when they were sixteen, and now they've decided it's time for them to have one of their own. And if they're going to buy one, they want the meanest, baddest, best-looking Corvette there is.

So what's the next step for your companies?
Lingenfelter: Well, we haven't come to any conclusions. We'll keep doing what we're doing now. Business isn't bad, really. I've bought a couple of chassis dynamometers to use in emissions development. I'd like to buy an emissions *lab*—they sell them sometimes, and I just missed out on one. I've been thinking of hiring myself a designer, like Reeves did, to do some special bodywork. I think only about half of my customers care what the car looks like. The other half of them are only interested in the engine.

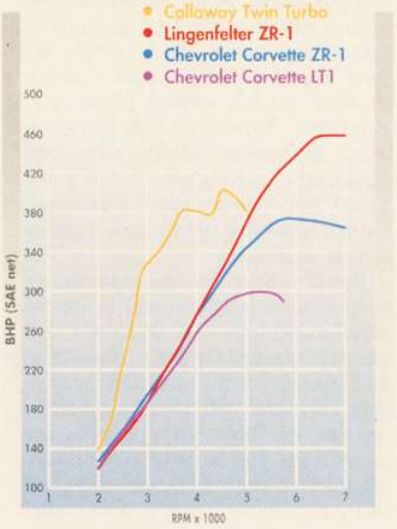
Callaway: Actually, we're going in John's direction in the short term in that we'll be offering a full menu of choices for buyers, like over-the-fender engine improvements using stock ZR-1 engine components and, logically, a version that will go as far as we know how to go. Unfortunately, in the long run, I think we're being pushed into producing a whole car of our own. When you spend your life modifying someone else's product, you are not the master of your own destiny. I know *exactly* what that new vehicle is—but I'm leaving that unanswered for the moment. I can tell you that there's no point in attempting to build the same kind of car as Honda. All of our recent contract engineering projects were taken on with the idea that they would teach us something about building cars. We've learned a lot.

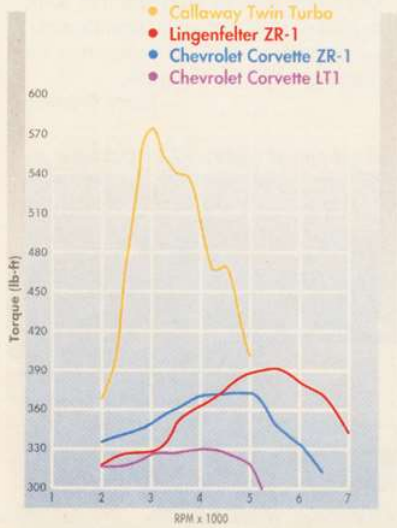
shielding we put on the fire wall and under the transmission tunnel because of the turbos is a significant reduction in noise." The Lingenfelter ZR-1 was the loudest, but its full-bodied throb was wholly appropriate.

We lunched at the Charlotte Motor Speedway's posh Speedway Club, six floors above the front straight. Below us, pairs of NASCAR stockers from the NASTRAK driving shool circulated at breathtaking speeds.

When school let out, it was our turn. While the Nomex-clad students ogled the Callaway, NASCAR driver Rodney

HORSEPOWER AND TORQUE COMPARISON





1991 LINGENFELTER ZR-1
Base price $80,318 (+ luxury tax of 10% over $30,000)

GENERAL:
Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive coupe
2-passenger, 2-door fiberglass body

POWERTRAIN:
32-valve DOHC V-8, 350 cu in (5735 cc)
Power SAE net 458 bhp @ 6500 rpm
Torque SAE net 393 lb-ft @ 5500 rpm
6-speed manual transmission

CHASSIS:
Independent front and rear suspension
Power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering
Vented front and rear disc brakes
275/40ZR-17 front, 315/35ZR-17 rear Bridgestone RE71 tires

MEASUREMENTS:
Wheelbase 96.2 in
Length x width x height 178.5 x 73.2 x 46.7 in
Curb weight 3465 lb
Fuel capacity 20.0 gal

PERFORMANCE (manufacturer's data):
0–60 mph in 4.1 sec
Standing ¼-mile in 12.3 sec @ 118 mph
Top speed 190 mph
Pounds per bhp 7.6
EPA city driving 16 mpg

CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1
Base price $65,318/price as tested $65,868
(+ luxury tax of 10% over $30,000)

GENERAL:
Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive coupe
2-passenger, 2-door fiberglass body

POWERTRAIN:
32-valve DOHC V-8, 350 cu in (5735 cc)
Power SAE net 375 bhp @ 5800 rpm
Torque SAE net 370 lb-ft @ 4800 rpm
6-speed manual transmission

CHASSIS:
Independent front and rear suspension
Power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering
Vented front and rear disc brakes
275/40ZR-17 front, 315/35ZR-17 rear Goodyear Eagle GS-C tires

MEASUREMENTS:
Wheelbase 96.2 in
Length x width x height 178.5 x 73.2 x 46.7 in
Curb weight 3465 lb
Fuel capacity 20.0 gal

PERFORMANCE (manufacturer's data):
0–60 mph in 4.3 sec
Standing ¼-mile in 12.9 sec @ 112 mph
Top speed 175 mph
Pounds per bhp 9.2
EPA city driving 16 mpg

1991 CALLAWAY TWIN TURBO CORVETTE
Base price $83,970/price as tested $106,504
(+ $2100 gas guzzler tax and luxury tax of 10% over $30,000)

GENERAL:
Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive convertible
2-passenger, 2-door fiberglass body

POWERTRAIN:
Twin-turbocharged OHV V-8, 350 cu in (5735 cc)
Power SAE net 403 bhp @ 4500 rpm
Torque SAE net 575 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm
6-speed manual transmission

CHASSIS:
Independent front and rear suspension
Power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering
Vented front and rear disc brakes
295/35ZR-18 Bridgestone Expedia S-01 tires

MEASUREMENTS:
Wheelbase 96.2 in
Length x width x height 176.5 x 71.0 x 46.7 in
Curb weight 3440 lb
Fuel capacity 20.0 gal

PERFORMANCE (manufacturer's data):
0–60 mph in 4.4 sec
Standing ¼-mile in 12.8 sec @ 113 mph
Top speed 185 mph
Pounds per bhp 8.5
EPA city driving 14 mpg

CHEVROLET CORVETTE LT1
Base price $33,635/price as tested $37,739
(+ luxury tax of 10% over $30,000)

GENERAL:
Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive coupe
2-passenger, 2-door fiberglass body

POWERTRAIN:
OHV V-8, 350 cu in (5735 cc)
Power SAE net 300 bhp @ 5000 rpm
Torque SAE net 330 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm
4-speed automatic transmission

CHASSIS:
Independent front and rear suspension
Power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering
Vented front and rear disc brakes
275/40ZR-17 Goodyear Eagle GS-C tires

MEASUREMENTS:
Wheelbase 96.2 in
Length x width x height 178.6 x 71.0 x 46.7 in
Curb weight 3223 lb
Fuel capacity 20.0 gal

PERFORMANCE (manufacturer's data):
0–60 mph in 5.3 sec
Standing ¼-mile in 13.9 sec @ 102 mph
Top speed 163 mph
Pounds per bhp 10.7
EPA city driving 16 mpg

SMALL MANUFACTURERS, BIG RESPONSIBILITIES

For aftermarket car modification, the law is hard and fast.

One quick peek at Greg Jarem's great Corvette photos instantly reveals that John Lingenfelter's rocket-quick car is visually indistinguishable from a stock ZR-1, whereas Reeves Callaway's 500-series twin-turbo car is uniquely identifiable. Apart from the marketing and image rationale behind these differences, they are a metaphor for the types of operation the two men run.

Most people don't know it, but there are distinct differences between companies with small-manufacturer status and aftermarket car converters operating under the Memo 1A antitampering clause of the EPA regulations. Reeves Callaway has followed the onerous Small Volume Manufacture Certification route because of the extent of the modifications he makes to his cars. John Lingenfelter enjoys the relative freedom from certification formalities allowed by Memo 1A, but even that provision entails considerable responsibility.

Memo 1A allows someone to modify a vehicle if those modifications do not affect the emissions control equipment or calibration. Tampering is considered to be any modification that might alter the vehicle's emissions performance, and that includes body, wheel, transmission, and exhaust alterations. The provision entitles the modifier who has "a reasonable basis for the assumption that the changes have had no adverse effect on emission" to make legal changes. No clearer definitions are provided, and there is no legal overview of the procedure.

However, if the EPA catches a Memo 1A offender, the maximum penalty is $10,000 *per car*. Despite the penalties, it is commonly accepted that many aftermarket tuners do not comply with the EPA provisions. Many people assume that the vague terminology of Memo 1A means they can take liberties with its interpretation. On the contrary, the vague terminology enables the EPA to pounce on car converters for any alterations they consider to be associated with exhaust emissions.

But even Memo 1A isn't good enough for California. There, you have to obtain an Executive Order (for exemption from Section 27156 of the California code) to sell aftermarket parts. The procedure entails back-to-back testing with and without the part or modification to prove emissions compatibility. The results accompany a formal application, and almost all cases require confirmation testing by the California Air Resources Board (CARB). Successful testing and documentation procedures result in the issue of an EO, all of which explains why so many Californian aftermarket parts bear the legend: "Not for use on the highway."

But for a real bureaucratic slog, there's little to beat the Small Volume Manufacture Certification—the procedure that has to be followed by all small original-equipment manufacturers and anyone whose modifications do not fall under the provisions of Memo 1A. These include Ferrari, Lotus, Rolls-Royce, and, specific to our investigation, Callaway. The process starts with an application to the EPA followed by emissions lab testing and accumulation of 4000 miles on an approved route, followed by more emissions testing and then the application of EPA-assigned deterioration factors (related to the degradation of emissions control equipment over time). The EPA assigns these factors according to its own historic database. Large auto companies may opt to run extensive precertification tests to establish their own documented deterioration rates, but this is often impractical for smaller firms.

Supporting documentation for Small Volume Manufacture Certification includes vehicle and emissions control system specifications, component durability verification, and supporting test data from the EPA laboratory. To obtain fifty-state certification, California requires additional procedures, including the submission of California data entry forms, an explanation of the on-board diagnostic logic, production-line test and audit procedures, and details of the emissions control system warranty.

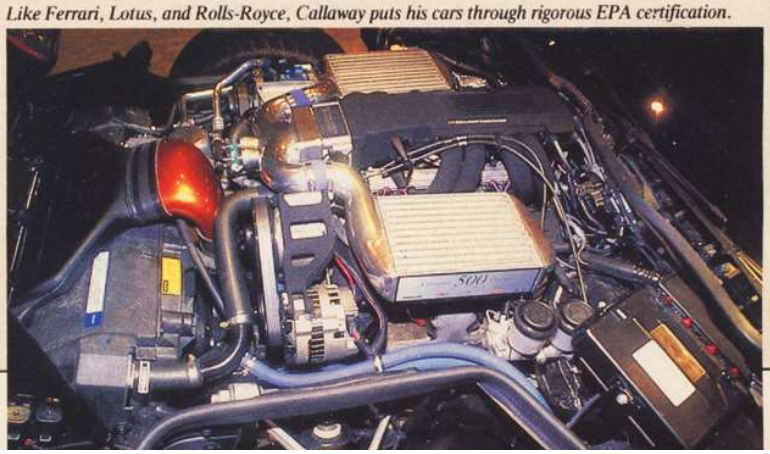
Manufacturers that are lucky and diligent enough to navigate this bureaucratic maze successfully will also have to shoulder certain responsibilities. These include a five-year/50,000-mile emissions control system warranty for forty-nine states (plus a seven-year/70,000-mile equivalent for California), CAFE compliance (where Callaway, without any small models to offset the consumption of his Corvettes, is severely penalized), plus gas guzzler and luxury tax compliance.

Callaway's managing director, Alan Bogdonoff, a specialist in vehicle regulatory procedures, points out the common misconceptions people have in regard to vehicle certification. Many people believe that if a car can pass a simple "sniffer" test it is certified. Not so, says Bogdonoff. Meaningful legalization requires the Federal Test Procedure, and the exhaust analysis part of that is the $1500, forty-minute chassis dynamometer test involving urban and highway driving simulations.

People believe that an engine can be certified once and then used in various vehicles. No way, says Bogdonoff. Engines are certified for use in conjunction with specific vehicle packages, dependent on model, year, engine, gearing, tire size, emissions control system, and other factors. Nor are small volume manufacturers exempt from emissions and safety regulations. There is some reduction in certification documentation requirements, and the elimination of some durability demonstration requirements, but otherwise, small manufacturers are treated just like the big guys.

—Barry Winfield

Like Ferrari, Lotus, and Rolls-Royce, Callaway puts his cars through rigorous EPA certification.



Combs (one of the school's proprietors, along with Richard Petty) treated us to a few laps in the stock ZR-1. We wailed into Turn One's 24-degree banking with the speedo showing 140 mph. It felt as if we were driving into a wall. Only after the car was squishing down into the banking did he brake. Ugh.

"Coulda gone faster," Combs said afterward. He squinted like a gunfighter. "But I take it easy with passengers."

Then Lingenfelter pressed the keys to his ZR-1 into Combs's hand. Photographer Greg Jarem hopped aboard. Three laps later Combs was back, a broad grin on his face. Jarem was pale. "Man, that's *somethin'!*" Combs said. "I saw 152 goin' into One." Said Jarem: "He must have liked it. When we came down the straight, all he said was 'shee-hit.' "

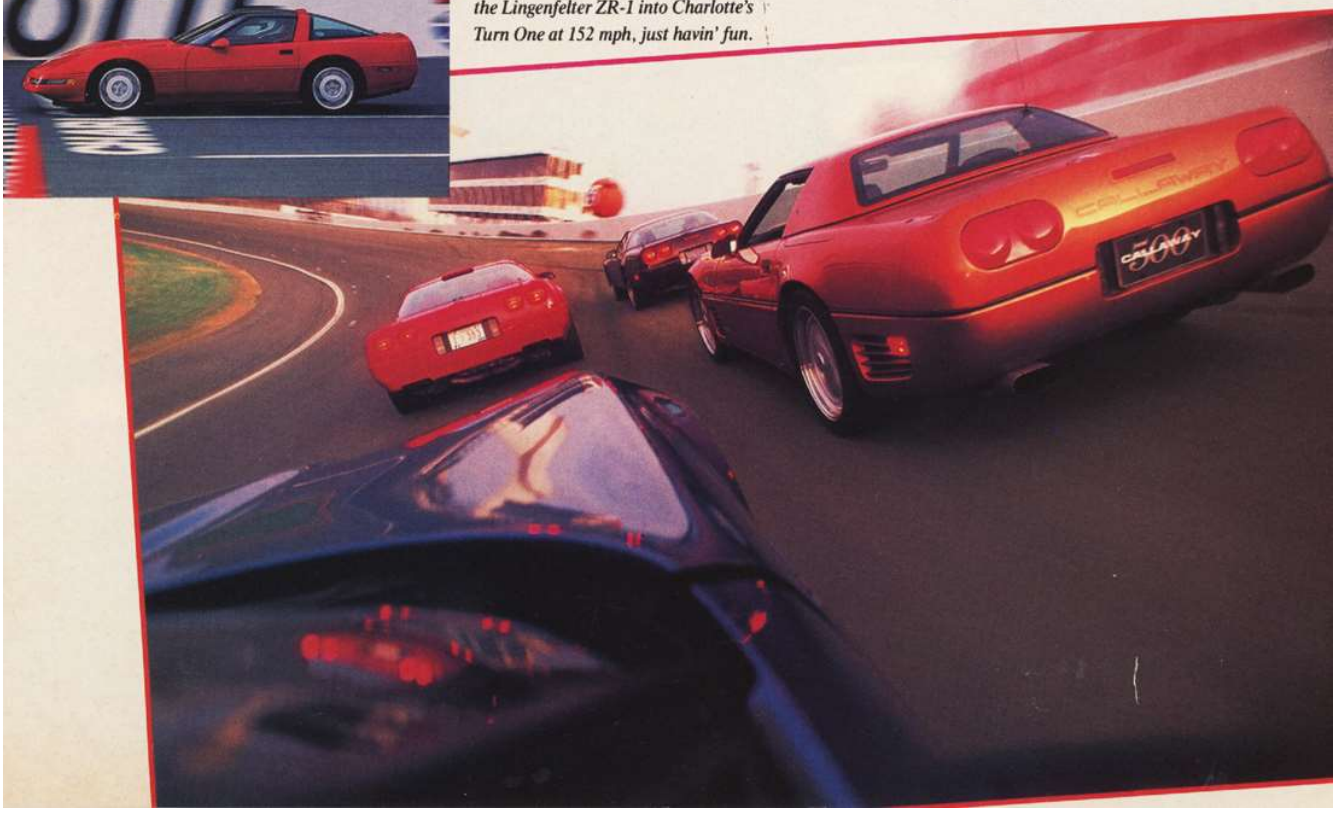
We had time for a few brisk laps. We kept our speed well below Mr. Combs's (except for wild man Lingenfelter, who blasted his own car into Turn Three a couple of times at 145 mph), but we went fast enough to find the Vettes surprisingly at home on the oval and on Charlotte's tight infield road course as well. The Lingenfelter especially drove like a stocker, charging through the road course's tight turns like a bull, the rear tires fighting to put all the power down. What joy.

Joy, in fact, was present in large measure in each of these four fast Corvettes. They were all comfortable, well-mannered cruisers and sensational handlers. Equally impressive was the docility of the tuner specials: Aside from an idle hiccup in the Callaway, they were as flawless as the stockers. All that and EPA legality.

And personality. Driving the Callaway was an event. It's a car that makes your body temperature climb a couple of degrees just looking at it. It can make you feel special even if you're only tooling down to the 7-Eleven to pick up a bag of pretzels. The Lingenfelter ZR-1, on the other hand, only makes you feel like a king when you make it sweat. But it stirs your gut so thoroughly every time you run it through the gears that you want to jump up and sing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

It's flat wonderful that cars like these can still be had in America. And it's encouraging to know that men like Reeves Callaway and John Lingenfelter have scienced-out the technology and learned to navigate the regulatory backwaters to make it all happen. We can only hope that the noose of regulation doesn't get any tighter around their necks. We need the magic that they sell.

NASCAR driver Rodney Combs bends the Lingenfelter ZR-1 into Charlotte's Turn One at 152 mph, just havin' fun.



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