



# Corvette Z06

An affordable, tractable 198 mph supercar

BY CRAIG PETERSON

**HAMMERING DOWN THE WISPY BLACK-**top byway threading its way among the sheer rock walls and thousand-foot dropoffs through California's Vallecito Mountains, I saw the built-in G-meter in the Z06 Corvette peak at 1.22 lateral Gs. The occasion was marked only by a growing howl from the steamroller Goodyear Eagle F1 Supercar rear tires, letting me know they'd reached the limit of adhesion and were gently beginning to slide. Yet there was no lurid broadside, no need for frantic steering corrections, very little drama. Can any \$65-grand sports car be this good? In a word, yes..

While the base car now sports the 400 hp LS2 engine from the last-generation Z06, the 2006 Z06 gets a unique 427-cubic-inch engine with a rousing 505 hp and 470 pound-feet of torque. Redline is 7000 rpm.

The lofty specific output is achieved through the liberal applica-

tion of premium materials and careful attention to airflow management. A big front air scoop feeds high-pressure, cool air to aluminum heads that feature big titanium intake valves and sodium-filled exhausts. Tubular headers dump the spent exhaust into dual-path mufflers, each with a primary chamber to keep things quiet at low revs; a vacuum-controlled valve opens a second, low-restriction chamber for maximum power at higher engine speeds.

Significant alterations were made to the Z06 in the quest for optimal handling. The engine cradle and roof support are made of weight-saving magnesium. Aluminum frame rails and carbon fiber wheel-houses and front fenders shave off additional pounds. The battery is relocated to the trunk to further improve weight distribution.

Stopping power is augmented by enormous 14-inch-diameter front brake rotors clamped by six-piston calipers wearing six pads each. Revised shock valving and thicker anti-roll bars complete the package.

Inside, the Z06 shares the significantly improved interior of all C6 Corvettes. Materials are noticeably higher in quality and appearance. Instrument panel and door coverings are leather-like and seats are swathed in the real stuff. A smaller, three-spoke wheel is both attractive and allows more-precise corrections. Z06 seats receive fixed side bolsters rather than power-adjustable and the passenger seat adjusts manually--more weight-saving measures.

The Slim Fast approach to car construction pays dividends, not that 505 hp isn't helpful. From rest, 60 mph is achieved in 3.7 seconds in first gear. Second is good for 90 mph, third for 120 and I saw 150 mph in fourth before running out of room. The quarter mile is dispatched in 12.2 seconds at 122 mph.

Massive torque makes shifting almost optional; the car will pull from just off idle to 150 mph in a seamless rush of acceleration--in fourth gear. In sixth I saw 24 mpg at a steady 85 mph, a remarkable achievement. A claimed 198 mph is available and I've absolutely no inclination to doubt it.

**...THE PERFORMANCE BARGAIN OF THE DECADE.**

Handling is benign and shows none of the twitchy hallmarks that might be expected from a vehicle with a 1:6 power-weight ratio. Steering weighting and feel are both good; not quite as scalpel-precise as, say, a Ferrari F430, but good enough. Turn-in is crisp, body roll is negligible and grip is so high that very few will ever experience more than a portion of the car's capabilities, at least on public roads.

For the unwary or unlucky, traction control and a sophisticated stability-control system are on hand to lend assistance. The latter is so capable that when test-driving a last-generation Z06, it averted disaster when I rounded a narrow mountain curve at retina-detaching speed and found myself atop a vast sheet of solid ice. That kind of helpful electronic intervention isn't available on the \$180,000 Ferrari, either.

Aside from almost imperceptibly higher interior noise levels, in ride quality and tractability the Z06 displays none of the temperamental behavior commonly found in 200 mph sports cars. Driven with restraint, it's little different than the base Corvette and I actually found ride quality superior to that of a Z51 coupe I also sampled at the GM press launch. This is one of the few supercars that can actually be driven to the office each day.

One design hiccup: The brake pedal sits too high for heel-and-toe shifting unless you're wearing 16AAA-size footwear, an irritating blunder on a sports car like this. But then, I'd surmise that perhaps 0.05 percent of its buyers know how to heel-and-toe downshift anyway.

With a base price of \$65,000, the Corvette Z06 is the performance bargain of the decade. If you don't have that much I'd suggest selling something. The house, if necessary.

**What's Hot**

505 hp aluminum V-8  
Supercar levels of handling, performance  
Drive-to-work, everyday practicality

**What's Not**

Ineffective auto-dimming rearview mirror  
Modest level of steering feel  
Improper brake pedal height