

Peeking into the Rear View Mirror: A Brief History of the Z06*
(plus a bonus look at the 2023 version)
by Ken Peak, RCC Historian

Some 60 years ago GM – and Zora Duntov - established a legacy of what would become one of Corvette’s most successful options: a “Special Performance Equipment” package with dealer code Z06 that cost the buyer an extra \$1,818. This 1963 model launched the totally redesigned 1963 Sting Ray and included such options as a 360-hp fuel-injected L84 engine, 4-speed close-ratio manual transmission, Positraction rearend, and – for 199 of 21,513 (less than one percent) of the purchasers of that year’s model – an N03 36-gallon fuel tank (more on that option below). Also featured were heavy duty brake and master cylinder equipment, firmer shocks/springs, and front antiroll bar. This package could compete with Europe’s best on road courses and in the quarter-mile, running in the 14s.

Indeed, the Z06 was ready to race right out of the factory, with four of the initially produced cars being transported (three were driven, one was trucked) from St. Louis to Los Angeles for break-in. After some minimal prep, these four cars were entered in the LA Grand Prix at Riverside, to compete against the Shelby Cobra, which was a half-ton lighter. But the Z06 was victorious; a winner in its first racing effort, this would be the first of many racing victories to come.

Then Z06 lovers would endure a 38-year hiatus in its production; not until the 2001 model year would it be released again, available only with a six-speed transmission and a 385 hp LS6 engine. The base model was priced at \$47,500 and 5,773 were purchased.

The Z06 option was discontinued again at the end of 2004 with the launch of the C6, to reappear again in 2006 with a 505 hp engine 427 ci LS7 and an all-aluminum frame. This model, priced at \$65,800 with 6,272 being sold, continued until the end of C6 production in 2013.

With the advent of the C7 in 2014, the Z06 would again surface the following year, available in either manual or automatic transmission and as a coupe or convertible. Its LT4 engine produced 650 hp and sold at a base price of \$78,995 (the convertible was \$5,000 higher). This model sold 8,653 units in 2015 and the model continued through the end of C7 production in 2019.

Some notes on rarity: regarding the aforementioned N03 big tank option, a true Z06 “tanker” was a radio-delete car, built with blackwalls and, of course, the big-tank option; "X" nozzles in the fuel-injection unit today indicate an original version. Only 50 of the 1963 Z06/N03 split-window coupes are known to exist today. And as concerns the white/black combination Corvette as shown in the photo, only three Z06 models are known to exist with that color scheme.



Photos courtesy *Hot Rod* magazine, Motor Trend Group

Peeking Through the Windshield at Things to Come: The 2023 Z06
Chevrolet has allowed *Car and Driver*, *Hagerty*, *Road and Track*, and other such organizations to test-drive its latest iteration of the Z06, all of which gave rave reviews to this model, with the latter putting it succinctly: “The 670-hp track-focused Corvette feels more special than cars that cost three times as much. This is the real deal.” *Car and Driver* states: “The heart of the new Z06, of course, is the all-new LT6, a 670-hp 5.5-liter V-8 code-named Gemini during development in honor of the astronauts from the era, many of whom drove Corvettes. With a flat-plane crankshaft, double overhead cams, four valves per cylinder, and an 8500-rpm redline, it’s unlike any engine that has ever been in a Corvette.” And Hagerty notes that: “Base MSRP was \$125,850, but \$34,965 worth of options, including carbon-ceramic brakes (\$8495); the painted carbon aero package (also

\$8495); and the 70th Anniversary special edition package (\$5995) topped this car out at \$162,210. That isn't just a lot of money for a Corvette—it's a lot of money, period. Yet at the same time, for the car you get it's a screaming deal. Incredible engine. Character galore. The most capable Corvette ever sets a new benchmark for the American supercar.”

Per *Car and Driver*, this newest model will debut on October 26th, but it has been appearing in all sorts of venues. Indeed, the 2023 ZO6 stole the show at the September 2022 Detroit Auto Show; President Joe Biden even hopped into the driver seat of a bright orange version – sporting a new carbon fiber body and mid-engine layout with an all-new 10-speed automatic transmission.



Photo courtesy Vette-vues.com

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