

MERCEDES-BENZ 190 Smallness wins a Silver Star

CAR and DRIVER

MARCH 1983 • \$1.50

CORVETTE!



FIRST TEST:
Ford's Tempo/Topaz—Bye-bye boxy look

SPECIAL REPORT
CAR and DRIVER
ROAD TEST

Corvette!

Wherein America takes on all comers.

• You have waited long enough. So let's get it over with right now: the new Corvette is a truly stout automobile. It is all that the fevered acolytes so desperately wanted their fiberglass fossil to be—a true-born, world-class sports car loaded with technical sophistication.

Lest such a claim be dismissed as more hyperbolic reverie about the blowzy old doyenne of the boulevards, consider the following:

Item: The roadholding on this new machine is so advanced that we recorded the highest skidpad lateral accelera-

tion—0.90 g—ever observed with a conventional automobile by this staff. That figure practically trivializes the previous high-water marks, in the 0.82-g range, generated by such exotics as the Porsche 928 and assorted Ferraris.

Item: It is hands-down the fastest



CORVETTE

American automobile, capable of 140-mph top speeds, 0-to-60 times under seven seconds, and 15.2-second quarter-mile forays at 90 mph. In fact, these figures qualify the Corvette as one of the half-dozen fastest production automobiles in the entire world!

Item: Its braking, thanks to an advanced Girlock four-wheel-disc system, makes the car stop as if it had been dropped into a sand bank. Our 70-to-0-mph brake test produced a stop in a mere 173 feet—seven feet shorter than the best 1982 distance of 180 feet, recorded by a Porsche 928, and not far off the all-time record of 165 feet, set by a Porsche 930 Turbo!

"I'll take all comers. You bring what you want," is the way Fred Schaafsma puts it, and he ought to know. He is part of the tiny cadre of Chevrolet engineers who, while huddled in a temporary patchwork of trailer offices at GM's proving grounds in Milford, Michigan, brought the new car into being. A native of the Netherlands, Schaafsma (real first name: Freerk) is fiercely loyal to the car he helped develop and is proud of its unique combination of qualities: its traditionally lusty big-inch V-8, its fully independent, forged-aluminum suspension with plastic leaf springs, its optional four-speed manual transmission with automatic overdrive in the top three gears, its plastic-over-steel-frame construction. "I was born and raised in Europe, and I know that a car doesn't necessarily have to be like a European machine in order to be good," he says. He and his cohorts openly admit, however, that the Porsche 928 was the "data point" on which a great deal of the Corvette development centered. "When we compared our car against the Porsche, I can tell you there were a lot of good feelings at Chevrolet."

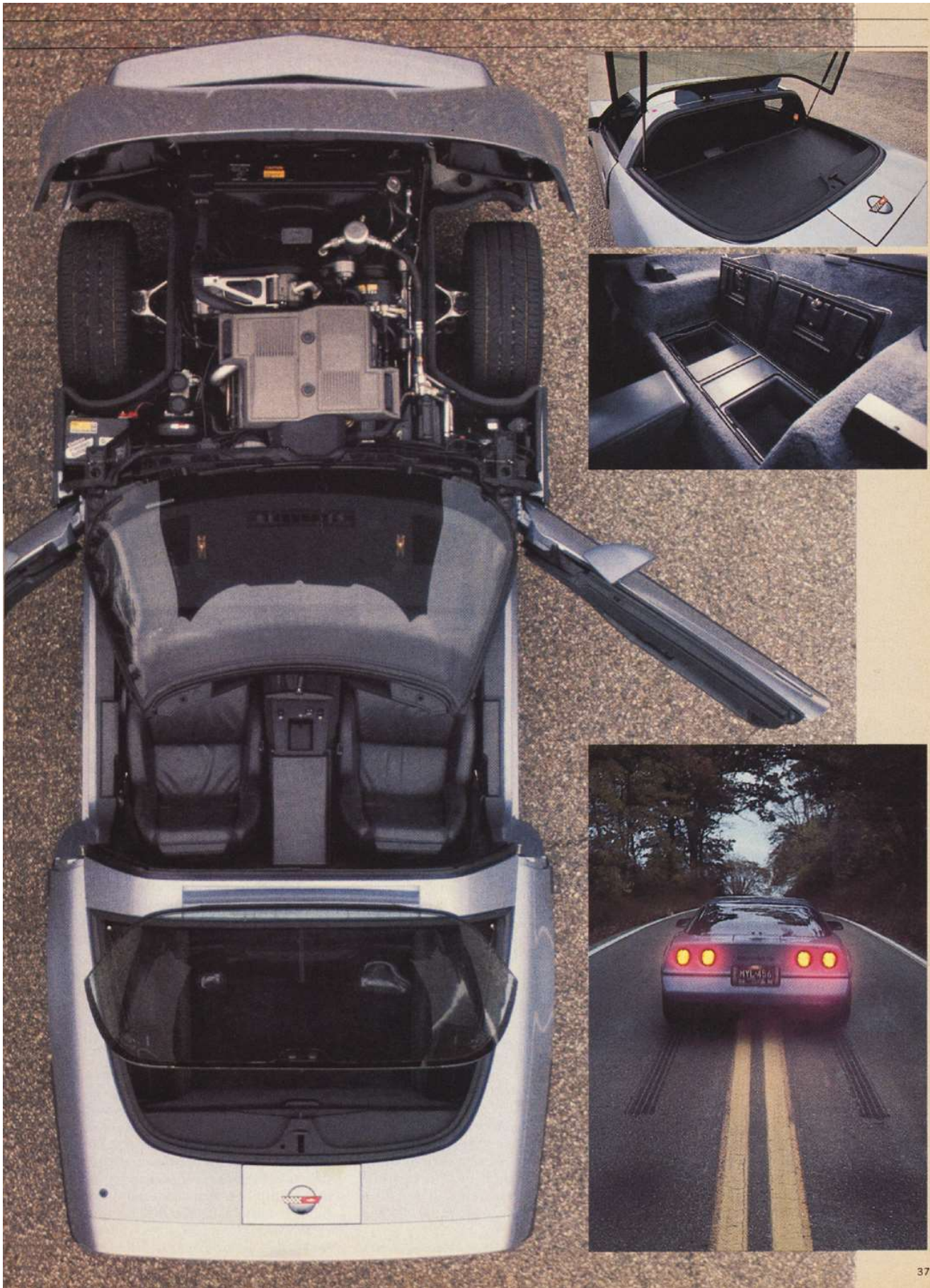
For those who expected the 1984 Corvette (yes, '84—it will be marketed as such for eighteen months) to be a cross between a Lamborghini Countach and an F-16, there will be disappointment. The shape is clean and forthright, devoid of the phallic silliness that distinguished its predecessor during its protracted career. It comes in a single body style, that of a classic two-seat sports car with a removable, one-piece roof panel and a hatchback. It is 8.5 inches shorter overall than the old car, and its wheelbase, at 96 inches, is two inches shorter. But the new car is beamier by an equivalent amount, which translates into additional interior space, including 6.5 inches extra shoulder room.

A first encounter tends to leave one faintly unfulfilled, as if the long-awaited confrontation should have been more dramatic. But that notion fades as the honesty of the effort becomes evident. This is a dead-serious sports car. It de-

fers to the bizarre only with its video-game instrument panel, which features all manner of multicolored, liquid-crystal bar graphs and digital displays in metric and English. "We were having a little fun with the instrument panel," admits Dave McLellan, the widely respected chief engineer on the Corvette project. "There are a lot of things about the car that go beyond basic needs, and in this sense the Corvette competes with things like fast powerboats and ultralight airplanes. Like them, the Corvette goes beyond serious transportation. This is a *sports car*, and we wanted it for one simple mission—to go fast."

That it does. Tucked into the optional, high-bolstered sport seat with its power backrest, lumbar, and bolster adjustments (the power activation is as light as and even simpler than a manual counterpart), one is poised for a ride on the outer limits of earth-based travel.







Both visibility and control ergonomics are improved, and if one was pressed for a complaint, it would center on the rather clunky linkage of the four-speed manual transmission (all initial models will be four-speed automatics).

One feels more a part of this machine, thanks to the radically improved suspension and more precise steering. Gone is the old bob-and-weave of the rear end, which often gave the impression that the left and right tires were of different diameters. Gone is the wobbly steering that made the old cars behave like Irish setters on a high-speed scent. Gone is the uncomfortable feeling that you are at the wheel of a rolling cult object rooted in the ethos and technology of another automotive era.

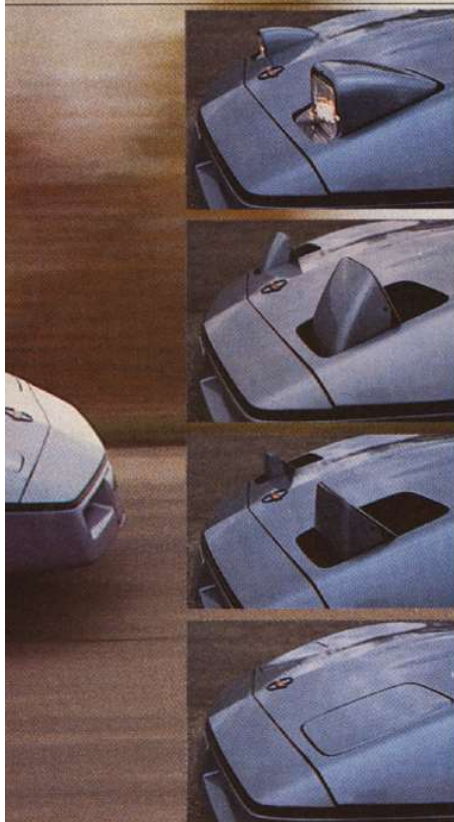
Until the arrival of final understeer, which comes at lateral accelerations unknown to the average driver, the Corvette is race-car responsive. The exotic suspension, upgraded with a sensational Z51 performance handling package (special Goodyear P255/50VR-16 tires with an F1-style "Gatorback" rain-tire tread mounted on 8.5-inch front and 9.5-inch rear aluminum wheels, plus quicker steering, tighter shocks, and heavier-duty bushings, sway bars, and springs), creates handling that can make a quiche-eater look like a serious user of beef jerky and draft beer. The car revels in long, controlled slides. It *begs* to be steered with the throttle. It forgives ham-fisted operation like no other car on the road, and when driven seriously

it will hook up under hard cornering to a point where one begins to wonder if Gordon Murray and Colin Chapman attached sliding skirts and ground-effects tunnels. As Schaafsma says, "You bring what you want."

Perhaps the single most impressive styling component of the machine lies under the full-width, forward-opening hood. There, in naked splendor, is more sculptured alloy than has been displayed on any other production car since the Porsche 928 and the original Jaguar XK-E. It is a stunning sight, especially when one's eyes first meet the forged-aluminum control arms and the engine, trimmed in magnesium castings and black enamel. Nothing is out of place. It is an aesthetic triumph.

All right, then. Is this the perfect Corvette? The answer is close, but no cigar. Some complaints are minor, such as the loss of four gallons of fuel capacity; the major problem is the familiar matter of weight. The Corvette is still heavy, and at 3300 pounds carries no advantage over the old flying dildo. There is argument about its exact poundage, with the Chevy guys dismissing complaints as nit-picking. "Sure, I'd like it to be lighter," says Schaafsma, "and I can take off 100 pounds in a minute. But if a guy can only pick at it because it's 150 pounds heavy, I'll take that."

A broader complaint may arise from those disappointed souls who have been



weaned on the notion of the new Corvette as a mid-engined automobile, the Yankee answer to the Ferrari Boxer and the Lotus Esprit. To be sure, the 'True Believers' appetites were whetted by endless spy shots of "secret" mid-engined prototypes in the 1970s, but by 1978 it had been decided: the new car would be a classic, V-8-powered, front-engined two-seater. "By then we had rejected the mid-engined V-6 concept," says McLellan. "It was simply not a Corvette." Noting the penalties in passenger and luggage space inherent to mid-engine design, McLellan asks, rhetorically, "Where are the successful mid-engined cars?"

Which leads us to the knottiest problem. The car will be *expensive*—perhaps as high as \$28,000 in full regalia. Will this drive the traditional middle-income Corvette buyer out of the market? Will he be replaced in sufficient numbers by wealthy Porsche and BMW loyalists? With a new plant in Bowling Green, Kentucky, geared to build as many as 60,000 Corvettes a year, will the GM moguls be angry and depressed if first-year sales don't meet the target of 25,000 cars? Will the Corvette be a critical success and a commercial failure because of corporate overoptimism? Only time and further examination of this machine will reveal the answer. This much we already know: there is a price for glory, and it is high. —Brock Yates

Vehicle type: front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger, 2-door targa

Price as tested: \$28,000 (estimated)

Options on test car: Turbo Hydra-matic transmission, performance handling package, Delco-GM/Bose sound system, automatic speed control, sport seats, power driver's seat, power door locks, rear-window defogger.

Sound system: Delco-GM/Bose AM/FM-stereo radio/cassette, 4 speaker-amplifier modules, 50 watts per channel

ENGINE

Type V-8, iron block and heads
Bore x stroke 4.00 x 3.48 in, 101.6 x 88.4mm
Displacement 350 cu in, 5733cc
Compression ratio 9.0:1
Fuel system 2x1-bbl Rochester throttle-body fuel injection
Emissions controls 3-way catalytic converter, feedback fuel-air-ratio control, EGR, auxiliary air pump
Valve gear pushrods, overhead valves, hydraulic lifters
Power (SAE net) 205 bhp @ 4300 rpm
Torque (SAE net) 290 lbs-ft @ 2800 rpm
Redline 5200 rpm

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission 4-speed automatic with lockup torque converter

Final-drive ratio	Ratio	Mph/1000 rpm	Max. test speed
I	3.06	7.8	41 mph (5200 rpm)
II	1.63	14.6	76 mph (5200 rpm)
III	1.00	23.9	124 mph (5200 rpm)
IV	0.70	34.1	138 mph (4050 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase 96.0 in
Track, F/R 59.6/60.4 in
Length 176.5 in

Width 71.0 in
Height 46.9 in
Curb weight 3300 lbs
Weight distribution, F/R 51.1/48.9%
Fuel capacity 20.0 gal

CHASSIS/BODY

Type full-length frame integral with body-cage structure
Body material fiberglass-reinforced plastic

INTERIOR

SAE volume, front seat 49 cu ft
trunk space 18 cu ft
Front seats bucket
Recliner type infinitely adjustable, power-assisted
General comfort poor fair good **excellent**
Fore-and-aft support poor fair good **excellent**
Lateral support poor fair good **excellent**

SUSPENSION

F: ind, unequal-length control arms, fiberglass-reinforced-plastic leaf spring, anti-sway bar
R: ind; fixed-length half-shaft, 2 lateral links, and 2 trailing links per side; fiberglass-reinforced-plastic leaf spring; anti-sway bar

STEERING

Type rack-and-pinion, power-assisted
Turns lock-to-lock 2.0
Turning circle curb-to-curb 40.1 ft

BRAKES

F: 11.5 x 0.8-in vented disc
R: 11.5 x 0.8-in vented disc
Power assist vacuum

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size F: 8.5 x 16 in; R: 9.5 x 16 in
Wheel type cast aluminum
Tires Goodyear Eagle VR50, P255/50VR-16
Test inflation pressures, F/R 35/35 psi

CAR AND DRIVER TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

	Seconds
Zero to 30 mph	2.3
40 mph	3.5
50 mph	4.9
60 mph	6.7
70 mph	8.8
80 mph	11.8
90 mph	15.2
100 mph	20.0
110 mph	27.2
Top-gear passing time, 30-50 mph	3.5
50-70 mph	5.2
Standing 1/4-mile	15.2 sec @ 90 mph
Top speed	138 mph

BRAKING

70-0 mph @ impending lockup 173 ft
Modulation poor fair good **excellent**

Fade none moderate heavy
Front-rear balance poor fair good

HANDLING

Roadholding, 200-ft-dia skidpad 0.90 g
Understeer minimal moderate excessive

FUEL ECONOMY

EPA city driving 16 mpg
EPA highway driving 28 mpg
EPA combined driving 20 mpg

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL

Idle 56 dBA
Full-throttle acceleration 82 dBA
70-mph cruising 77 dBA
70-mph coasting 74 dBA

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