

Going Topless With

The Leader of the Pack

By Roger Witherspoon

The temperature was cruising towards the 100 degree mark, the two-mile stretch of roadway through the Connecticut countryside was shimmering in the mid afternoon haze and the summer's stillness was broken only by the steady rumble from the twin exhausts of the Corvette Convertible.

Its 6.2-liter, 436-horsepower V-8 engine was purring under the sleek, curved, unmistakable shape of the Corvette, waiting for permission to leap. I shifted from six-speed automatic into manual sport mode, slid the Temptations' *Runaway Child* into the CD player, cranked up the bass on the seven-speaker Bose system, gripped the leather steering wheel with my fingertips on the chrome paddle shifts and floored the accelerator.

The rumble turned into a dull roar as the Corvette leaped forward, passing 60 miles per hour in little over four seconds. The acceleration nearly doubled my weight in an instant, pushing me back into the thickly padded leather seats as the wind smoothly slid by with a soft rush that did not interfere with the bass line pounding from Bose speakers in the doors. In 10 seconds the Corvette's speedometer smoothly moved past 100 and less than a quarter mile of sunny Connecticut countryside slid by in green blur.

The speedometer nudged 140 as the convertible approached a long, slow curve. I tapped the paddle shift, instantly sliding into fifth gear and gently tapped the brakes, slowing to 110 as the Corvette entered the curve, where its electronic traction control system and the extra-wide, 19-inch rear wheels combined to grip the hot highway surface tighter than a first round draft pick holds onto his NFL bonus check. The curve quickly receded into the rear view mirror as I tapped the paddle shift, moved back to sixth gear and marched the speedometer back to 140. All too soon, the two mile mark was reached and I returned to the posted speed limit, driving an abnormal car like any other normal vehicle.

But the 2008 Corvette, the iconic symbol of American street racing, is not just any other car. Will Cooksey, the six-foot, six-inch Black engineer who was the driving force behind the current generation of Corvettes, has said often that he wanted three things out of his pride and joy:

- It should be comfortable enough to serve as an every day sedan, or a cross country touring car.
- It should be inexpensive enough to compete with the Porsche 911 and Dodge Viper and still leave the owner with enough money to send a child to college.
- It should be the fastest production car on the road.

With the Corvette Convertible Cooksey, who runs GM's Bowling Green production plant, has been successful. Inside, the Corvette's seats are wide, power adjustable and – if the weather calls for it – heated. The leather-wrapped steering wheel tilts and telescopes, and has fingertip controls for the audio and cruise control. The Bose sound system, which delivers every distinct note despite the passing wind, serves the CD and MP3 player, as well as the AM/FM and XM satellite radio.

It does not have Bluetooth, but the Corvette does feature GM's OnStar communications system which works for telephone calls and can provide live concierges

to give you directions. That is not usually necessary, since the touch screen, satellite-driven navigation system works even in rural areas.

The Corvette comes with a price tag of about \$73,000, about \$50,000 shy of its competitors and enough for a pretty good start on a college education.

Then, of course, there is speed. The Corvette Convertible tops out at 190 miles an hour. But if that is not enough speed, there is its tougher cousin, the Corvette Z06, which has a 505 horsepower engine and pushes 200 miles per hour, which puts it well ahead of the hot rod pack.

Most of us will never get close to either speed. But while running along the open road, with the top down and bright sun lighting the way, it's nice to know you can.

2008 Corvette Convertible

MSRP:		\$73,210
EPA Mileage:	15 MPG City	25 MPG Highway

Performance/Safety:

0 – 60 MPH	4.3 Seconds
¼ Mile	12.4 Seconds at 117 MPH
Top Speed	190 MPH

6.2-Liter V-8 engine producing 436 horsepower and 428 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission with paddle shift manual mode; tour and sport settings; traction control; 4-wheel suspension; power, speed sensitive rack & pinion steering; magnetic selective ride control; dual mode exhaust; 5-spoke cast aluminum wheels; antilock brake system; 4-wheel disc brakes; 18-inch front wheels, 19-inch rear wheels; fixed xenon high-intensity discharge headlamps; keyless access with push-button start; fog and daytime running lamps; front & side impact airbags.

Interior/ Comfort:

AM/FM XM satellite radio; OnStar communications system; DVD-based, touch-screen navigation system; single CD player;MP3 connection; Bose premium 7-speaker surround sound system; heads-up display; tilt & telescope, leather steering wheel; heated leather seats; power convertible top; fingertip audio and cruise controls.