

# Shifting Gears

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## [Taming Texas in a Chevy Camaro](#)

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**By Roger Witherspoon**

I had stopped for gas in the middle of nowhere – which is just about any place in the arid, dusty, 150-mile stretch of the west Texas Panhandle between Lubbock and the New Mexico border where the monotonous view of scrub brush is only interrupted by slowly cranking oil wells. I did not plan on staying long.

This is a region noted for being inhospitable to strangers in general and Blacks in particular, and where the top elected officials publicly warn residents to be prepared to fight off United Nations troops sent in by President Obama to usher in a socialist takeover of America. Nature doesn't help, either. While there are plenty of shaded, roadside "picnic areas" where a tired motorist can catch a nap, many of these have skull and crossbones signs warning of fatally toxic sulfur fumes from leaking gas lines. Which means your nap may be your last, so it's best to keep moving.

So it was disconcerting to come out of the station's mini mart and see the parking spot next to my car occupied by a heavy duty pickup truck with a rifle and a shotgun on the gun rack across the rear window. Three men in weathered, Stetson hats who were standing, arms folded, next to the driver's door stopped talking as I approached. Then, one stepped towards me and said, "Man, that's a really sweet car! Can we see it?"

How could I resist?



They ran their hands along the smooth lines of the fire engine red, 2013 Chevy Camaro SS convertible, and positively gushed as they looked under the hood at the 6.2-liter, aluminum V-8 engine capable of cranking out 427 horsepower and 420 pound-feet of torque. What they really liked was the fact that the Camaro, on its 20-inch, painted aluminum wheels, could dash from 0 – 60 miles per hour in just 4.7 seconds, pass the quarter mile mark in 12.9 seconds with the speedometer at 113, and top out at 155 MPH. And that is just your average, \$45,000 Camaro.

Chevy has a heftier model, the 580 horsepower Camaro ZL-1 which goes from 0 – 60 in 3.9 seconds (an area normally reserved for Corvette and Porsche), hits the quarter mile in 12.3 seconds and tops out at 188 miles per hour. And in Texas, one could actually get a chance to try that and worry more about hitting an armadillo than drawing the attention of the State Police.

With the push of a button I put down the canvas top and the trio, hats included, sat in the car and passed me their cell phones to take pictures. Then they wished me God speed. That is not an idle wish in west Texas, where the 75 mile an hour speed limit is considered a recommended floor rather than a legal ceiling.

The audience nodded appreciatively as the Camaro started with a loud rumble and a steady vibration as the V-8 engine rhythmically rocked the car. When parked, the sports coup most resembles an angry cat and, once started, it seems anxious to leap.

A hologram of the speedometer appeared as if by magic, seemingly hovering over the hood between the bulging air scoop and the left wheel. The floating, Heads Up display would make it unnecessary to take my eyes off the wide Texas roadway to monitor my speed or change the music.

With a wave, I floored the accelerator and the cowboys quickly disappeared in the rear view mirror. A nice feature of west Texas highways is that they are wide, flat, and the curves are steeply banked. I leveled off when the hologram showed the speed at 140, and the sound of the wind was drowned out by Usher belting “*Yeah!*” from the nine, large, 245-watt speakers. The 20-inch wheels ate up the hardtop, and the automatic stability controls kept the Camaro

level on the wide, banked highway curves.



The newest version of the Camaro, with an updated interior and electronics, is a clear descendant of the 1960s version of the Pony Car General Motors created to compete with the Ford Mustang. It has the same wide stance and curved silhouette that captured attention in that tumultuous era. That is not surprising since Ed Welburn, GM's vice president and design chief, still drives his '69 yellow Camaro with the twin black racing stripes on the hood. If the new Camaro is a bit wider than the original, well, so are today's drivers.

Inside, there is an emphasis on comfort. The seats are double-stitched, two-toned leather, and are wide, thickly padded, and soft. The front seats can be heated, a feature appreciated by younger drivers in cold climates and older drivers most of the time. The rear seats are more for show than use, though there is leg room if everyone in the car is well under six feet. Passengers taller than that will have serious leg cramps. The rear seats do fold flat, however, which enlarges the ample trunk space.

The décor in the Camaro is sport plastic – the molding on the dash and doors matches the exterior of the car and the seats. In this case, the trim was red and the black seats matched



the black stripe on the hood.

For entertainment, the Camaro is aimed at a younger generation. The designers apparently feel CDs and DVDs are yesterday's technology, as there is no place to use them. If, however you have a movie on your iPod, smartphone, or USB flash drive, then plug it in and watch it on the seven-inch color screen. Or, you can switch between HD, satellite radio, and the other technologies.

The new Camaro is a mix of the old and new. In the '60s I was interested in speed, and any amenities besides an AM radio were a bonus I could take or leave. A half century later I still want speed – but want to be comfortable, prefer a navigation system so I don't get lost, and

like the thought of traction control and air bags when the speedometer is in triple digits.

What is consistent about the Camaro is it's a head turner to look at, and a pleasant way to fly on the open road.



### **2013 Chevrolet Camaro SS**

**MSRP:** **\$44,960**

**EPA Mileage:** **15 MPG City** **24 MPG Highway**

**As Tested Mileage:** **16.8 MPG Highway**

### **Performance / Safety:**

**0 – 60 MPH** **4.7 Seconds**

**1/4 Mile:** **12.9 Seconds at 113 MPH**

**Top Speed:** **155 MPH**

6.2-Liter, cast aluminum engine producing 426 horsepower and 420 pound/feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission; double ball-joint, multi-link strut front suspension; 4.5-link independent rear suspension; 4-wheel disc, Brembo performance brakes with ventilated rotors and anti-lock brake system; 20-inch painted aluminum wheels; Halogen head lamps;

fog lights; traction and stability controls; front, side, and head curtain airbags.

**Interior / Comfort:**

AM/FM/XM satellite radio; 245-watt, Boston Acoustics premium sound system with 9 speakers; iPod, USB and MP3 connections; Bluetooth phone and audio; 7-inch color information screen; backup camera; tilt & telescoping, leather wrapped steering wheel with fingertip cruise, audio and Bluetooth controls; leather, powered and heated front seats; Heads Up display; folding rear seats.