

# Shifting Gears

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## [The Corvette: Speed, Grace, and Rolling Nostalgia](#)

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**By Roger Witherspoon**

I pushed the starter button and the car shook as a roar emerged from underneath the chassis and burst in a series of rapid fire explosions out the rear, as if a string of heavy duty firecrackers were celebrating behind me.

And that was when the Corvette was sitting still.

Clearly this was a sports car better suited to the driving bass-line of Eminem's *Lose Yourself* than any dulcet jazz solos from Keiko Matsui or 'Trane. I unlatched the roof and put it on the designated tracks in the long, shallow trunk. Then slid a USB drive into the designated slot under the armrest and lined up a few hundred favorites to blare from the nine Bose speakers. I drove slowly to the entrance of an isolated stretch of Connecticut interstate highway, where it stretches for about two miles through the marsh grass flanking the Long Island Sound, and waited till the roadway was empty.

And then, I popped the clutch and floored it.

The rumble under the car turned into a roar as the Corvette shot down the highway, going through the six gears in a matter of seconds till I held the speedometer level at 140. I did not have to take my eyes off the road: the Vette has a hologram of the speedometer and key gauges – including the entertainment system – floating over the left side of the hood between the 18-inch left wheel and the center air scoop. It was hard to hear what Eminem was rapping over the throbbing of the engine and the roar of the wind – but the driving bass

line was audible enough and seemed to mesh with the pounding of the 436-horsepower V-8.

The Corvette rides low to the ground, and the adjacent scenery was little more than a blur as I approached a long curve. I dropped down to 105 and sailed through the middle of the curve and then accelerated back up to 140 as I hit the straightaway. At that point, the highway was leaving the coast and it was time to slow back to the speed limit. There isn't a lot of room on the crowded roads of the nation's northeast to really appreciate what a sports car like this can do. You need a *lot* of space and a relatively straight road to enjoy a sports car roaring at nearly 190 miles per hour *on* the highway instead of splattered all over it.

But for a few minutes, and two miles of sunbaked, Connecticut highway, there was a glimpse of the joy of the wide open, western highways and the feel of a legendary machine.



This is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of the Chevrolet Corvette ( <http://bcove.me/4ybhxiki> ), the star of multiple series of hot rod adventure books of the '50s and '60s. Corvette, the first of a storied group of American muscle cars, first hit the roads in 1953. And while the 2013 Corvette has little in common with the original – except for a long, low silhouette and a reputation for speed – at 60 years of age it is the oldest Chevrolet nameplate on a passenger car. The title of the oldest Chevy nameplate still in use is the 77-year-old, truck-based, Chevy Suburban, which was introduced in 1936 and is still rumbling along.

The deliberate effort to bring back the feel – and sound – of the Corvette of the '50s partially explains the rapid-fire explosion of sound accompanying acceleration and deceleration in the current edition.

According to Chevrolet spokesman Monte Duran, the 2013 Corvette has a “dual mode exhaust” – two sets of twin chrome tailpipes. “The interior pipes,” explained Duran “have butterfly valves. Those are closed at most speeds, and when you are cruising it sends the

exhaust through the mufflers.

“But when you stand on the accelerator, at full throttle, the Corvette has an algorithm that you are driving in a more spirited fashion, and it opens the valves. The exhaust then bypasses the mufflers and it is a straight pipe going out the back. When those valves are open you could run a golf ball straight down into the catalytic converter. We did that for people who want the noise and crackle and pop of the after-market exhaust. So it is to give you the best of both worlds.”



In addition, while the Corvette has the same basic engine as the Camaro SS, Duran added that “the Corvette is a drop-top with less sound-proof shielding. So you get more engine noise coming through the roof. That’s where the extra sound is.”

The noise actually takes some getting used to. You can listen to a soft flute solo at 100 miles per hour in a little Ford Fiesta or a sporty Camaro and appreciate the quality of sound-proofing in modern American-made cars. With the Corvette, however, you can take soft jazz and all classical music pretty much off your playlist unless, of course, you use headphones.

But one doesn’t buy a Corvette for the pretty music.

This is a speed machine, the sixth edition of a classic breed designed to get you to your destination comfortably and *fast*. In that regard, it is successful. The test car, the Grand Sport Coupe, has a fiberglass hard top which you can manually unlock and then store on clips set into the flat trunk area. That pretty much limits cargo to items which are small and relatively flat, such as a computer carrier or luggage bag. With the hard top on the trunk area – a wide, flat expanse about a foot deep – is large enough to carry a couple of suitcases, though you’d have to have Federal Express deliver any athletic gear to your vacation destination.

The 6.2-liter power plant in the Grand Sport zips from 0 – 60 miles per hour in 3.9 seconds, passes a quarter mile in 12.9 seconds at 13 miles per hour, and tops out at 188 MPH. If that isn’t enough, there is the Corvette ZR-1 with a 6.2-liter supercharged engine producing 638 horsepower and topping out at 205 MPH – a speed at which the State Police simply photograph the passing license plate and mail a license suspension notice to your home. Or the 505-horsepower Corvette Z-06, which chugs along at just 198 miles per hour.



Inside, the Corvette is intended to provide the comforts one would expect from a car with a price tag north of \$70,000. There is an easy to use navigation system controlled by voice, fingertip controls on the leather steering wheel, or the eight-inch, color touch screen. The deep, leather seats have power adjustments and lumbar controls, and can be heated. The entertainment system has satellite radio as well as iPod and USB connections, a CD player and Bluetooth phone and audio. Sound pours through nine Bose speakers strong enough to carry a heavy beat even with the roof off. And, as with all GM cars, the Corvette has OnStar, which has its own satellite phone and turn-by-turn navigation system.

The 2013 family of Corvettes are the last of this edition, which first rolled out of the Bowling Green, Ky plant a decade ago. GM's design chief, Ed Welburn, is not talking about the parameters for the next generation. The only hint that something very different is coming in 2014 is the announcement that the plant, which receives more than 50,000 visitors annually, is ending all tours September 14 until further notice. That is to prevent anyone from getting clues from the retooling which will commence shortly thereafter.

But that's for the future. For now, the 2013 'Vette shows a lot of life for a senior citizen.



## **2013 Chevrolet Corvette**

### **Grand Sport Coupe**

**MSRP:** **\$70,785**

**EPA Mileage:** **16 MPG City** **26 MPG Highway**

**Performance / Safety:**

<b>Top speed</b>	<b>188 MPH</b>
<b>0-60</b>	<b>3.9 Seconds</b>
<b>1/4 mile</b>	<b>12.3 Seconds at 117 MPH</b>

6.2-Liter, cast aluminum, V-8 engine producing 436 horsepower and 428 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed manual transmission; power Rack & Pinion steering; double wishbone front and rear suspension; 18-inch diameter, 9.5-inch wide, painted aluminum front wheels; 19-inch diameter, 1-foot wide, painted aluminum rear wheels; traction control, 4-wheel antilock brake system; run-flat tires; fog lamps, Xenon, high density headlights; heads-up holographic display; front and side impact airbags.

**Interior / Comfort:**

AM/FM/XM satellite radio; CD player; iPod and USB ports; Bluetooth phone and audio; OnStar; tilt and telescope, leather wrapped steering wheel with fingertip audio and adaptive cruise controls; power adjusted, heated, leather bucket seats; Bose sound system with 9 speakers; navigation system with 8-inch touch screen; removable roof;