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DRIVEN: CORVETTE STINGRAY

Handling Corvette's Stingray C7 for a week has left us with one very clear conclusion

Jan Tegler
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"Confession", it is said, "is good for the soul." We submit that the new seventh-generation of Chevrolet's iconic sports car - known as the C7 - is also good for the soul.

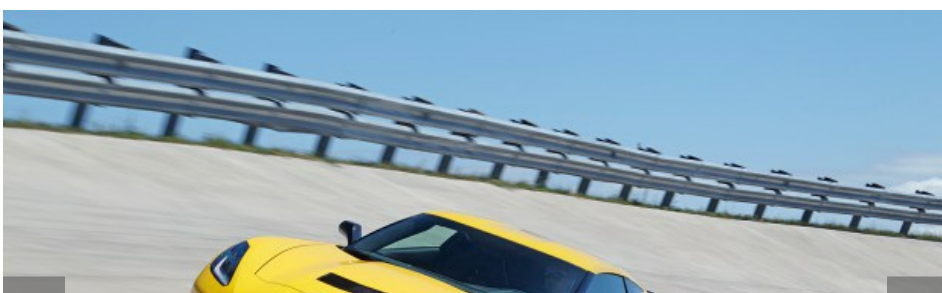
And we have a confession to make.

A bright red 2003 C5 Corvette Z06 sits in our own garage. That's right, your reviewer is a Corvette owner. Be that as it may, we've done our best to remain implacably objective. So it should cause no rolling of eyes or frowning of brow when we tell you up front that this is the best Corvette ever. Period.

It's likely you've already heard similar sentiments. You can believe them. And while the C7 doesn't feel wholly unfamiliar to that red predecessor in our garage, it is vastly better in just about every way. Even in base trim - as the tester we drove for a week in early May was - the new Vette is world class, capable of challenging the planet's best sports cars.

6.2 litre V8 generating 450 horsepower

Just about the only thing carried over from the closely related C5 and C6-generation Corvettes is the classic front-engine, rear-wheel-drive configuration common to all Vettes since the car's introduction in 1953. The new LT1 V8 under the hood - the base engine - shares only its 6.2 litre displacement and pushrod architecture with the unit that preceded it.



INSIDER KNOWLEDGE



Only if we understand the past can we move forward to analyse the present and, as the last stage, look into the future.

Alexander Mankowsky - Mercedes-Benz trend scout

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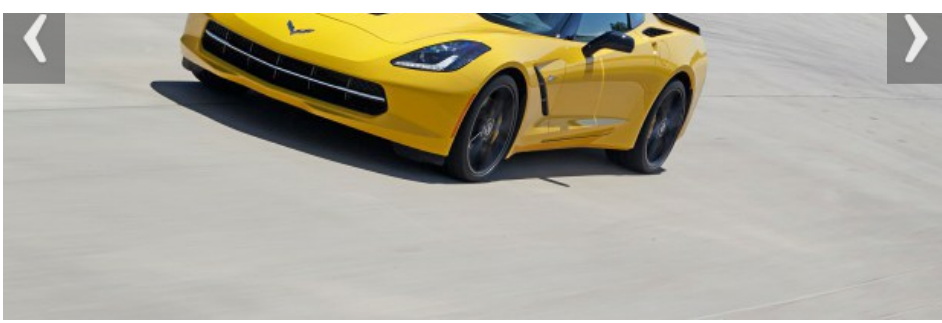
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Now endowed with direct injection and optimised combustion, even the most modest C7 powerplant produces 450 horsepower and 610 Nm of torque, delivering sprints to 100 km/h at the four-second mark. Opt for the very reasonably priced Z51 performance package with track-focused goodies and optional magnetic-ride control suspension with performance traction management and you have a track-day champ.

Let us reemphasise that this all available with the base model. The new Z06 variant of the C7 will have “at least 625 horsepower and 861 Nm of torque” says GM. Incorporating a slew of technology from the current, multiple-Le Mans-winning Corvette Racing Program, we can’t wait to get our hands on one. But much of that technology is here on the basic Stingray. That’s why it’s so good.

Feels lighter and drives smaller

The C7’s new aluminium chassis is 60 percent stiffer than the C6’s frame. Paired with standard Michelin Pilot Super Sport radials, an electronically controlled limited-slip differential and five-mode engine management/damper setting controller (Weather, Eco, Touring, Sport, Track), the stock Stingray easily generates cornering grip that surpasses that produced by Porsche’s Cayman and 911.

Braking is on par with the Porsches and we actually like the feel of the Corvette’s better-weighted steering more than the lighter helms of the sports cars from Stuttgart. Speaking of weight, the C7 is actually heavier than its predecessor but feels lighter and drives smaller.

The interior - from the supportive (finally!) and very comfortable new buckets to the driver-focused cockpit design - far exceeds any found in a Corvette previously. Technology features prominently with a large central touch-screen display offering all the connectivity and entertainment features one expects of a luxury car.



A reconfigurable central instrument information display offers settings for every taste and comprehensive vehicle performance monitoring. It requires a good deal of study and not a little fiddling to configure the displays and instrument presentation as you prefer, but it’s worth the work.

Drop the clutch and release a torque grenade

Select the open setting for the C7’s multi-mode exhaust and you’re treated to thunderous

sound no matter which driving mode is chosen. The surfaces of dash, doors and console are much improved with nearly everything one touches feeling high quality. Bottom-line, it's the most comfortable Corvette you've ever driven.

It's also the friendliest Vette ever. Our C5 requires considerable experience and manhandling to get the most from. The C7 is easier, inspiring confidence with far less wrestling required - the new seven-speed manual gearbox is handier with available rev-matching for downshifts. The overall balance is improved, visibility from the cabin is better, brake modulation is just right.

Dial up 3700 rpm on the tach in first gear, drop the clutch and release a torque grenade. Hurtle forward toward a corner on your favourite winding road and dive deep into it. Clip the apex and fire off again.

The C7 Corvette Stingray is good for the soul.

See more on the Corvette webpages



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