

The ZR-1

The heralded ZR-1 performance three years earlier released late in the cycle, was held off of "insufficient engines caused by development."



1990-1995

special package, hinted at and expected to be 1989 production until 1990 because availability of additional

1990

Anticipation became realization -- the "King of the Hill" had arrived.

In the mid-80's, General Motors and its Corvette Division approached Group Lotus in Great Britain with the idea of developing the world's fastest production car. From that collaboration came the LT5 engine, an aluminum-block V-8 with the same bore as the standard (L98) 350ci displacement unit, but with 375 horsepower. To accomplish this power boost, the new block featured four overhead camshafts and 32 valves. The LT5s were built by Mercury Marine in Oklahoma and assembled into the ZR-1 vehicle at Bowling Green.

A unique computerized engine control module provided "bi-modal" characteristics. This dual personality was a logical outgrowth of the appeal of the twin-turbo Callaway conversions. The ZR-1 could be used for routine street driving or convert to a race car with speed and handling available on demand. The computer system directed fuel mixtures through an upgraded injection system that allowed for low-, half- and full-throttle modes and kicked the engine up to 350hp. And, a key-operated "valet" switch locked out the upper speed ranges, limiting power to a normal 250 horses to prevent inexperienced hands from taking advantage of the car's outstanding power.

Available only in coupe configuration, the ZR-1 was distinguishable from other Corvette coupes by its wider tail section, its now convex rear fascia and four "square" taillights. 3,049 ZR-1s were turned out.

The "King of the Hill" did not come cheap, however. The price of the basic coupe was \$31,979, but with the addition of the ZR-1's special performance package listed at \$27,016, the car was not meant for the faint-hearted or bargain-conscious. It's reported that some dealers asked and were paid \$100,000 for the then ultimate in American sports cars.

Evidence of its power was a 4.9 second 0-60 sprint and a quarter-mile turned in 13.4 seconds. Top speed was nearly 180mph.

1991

The 1991 ZR-1 maintained its own unique personality with improved doors and newly designed 11-inch wide rear wheels. Among the options were heavy duty suspension components so the ride could be adjusted from firm to very firm, rather than from soft to firm found in earlier systems.

2,044 ZR-1s were built at a sticker price add-on of \$31,683.

1992

Few changes graced the 1992 ZR-1. ZR-1 emblems were added above the side fender vents and the twin exhaust tips were changed to aggressive rectangular caverns.

502 ZR-1s were built at a sticker price add-on of \$31,683.

1993

The ZR-1 engine the LT5, received a power boost from 375 to 405 horses. Modifications to the cylinder heads and valvetrain; platinum-tipped spark plugs, and the exclusive use of synthetic oil were among the upgrades that brought this about. In addition, an electrical, linear exhaust gas re-circulation system improved emissions control.

448 ZR-1s were built at a sticker price add-on of \$31,258.

1994

Popularity of the ZR-1 was on a decline. Industry sources inferred that several factors may have contributed to the waning appeal of the "King of the Hill." Price was one --the ZR-1 option virtually doubled the price of the basic Corvette. Moreover, the unique styling of the 1990's rear exterior lost some of its exclusivity when extended to all 1991 models and beyond. In addition, the introduction of the improved, small block LT1 engine gave Corvette enthusiasts the muscle they sought, but in the lower-costing basic models.

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1995

Management limited 1995's total ZR-1 production to another 448 units and the last special performance "King of the Hill" coupe rolled off the Bowling Green line in late April. Over its six-year life span, 6,939 ZR-1s were built.

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