



BY TERRY COOK

ALL UP AND DOWN the state of California you'll find "El Camino Real" signs, historical landmarks signifying the early trek of a host of missionaries. Literally translated the inscription means "the king's highway," and for this month's trial this same passage served as much of our road test course. The Car Craft El Ca-

mino ventured as far north as Bakersfield, and as far south as San Diego during the drubbing we gave it. By now you've noticed that this month's subject is a bit of a change of pace, as it's not a car, per se. But we have kept within our theme of performance-oriented road vehicles, because the CC Camino is equipped with a hefty L-34

cubic inch, 350 horsepower "Rat Motor" backed by a four-speed transmission and posiarend.

We pulled a bit of a switch as far as test teams were concerned, too, as rather than contacting one of the local car clubs for our usual bevy of blue-jean clad examiners, we looked to some of the local racers. The way we figured it, this particular test was concerned with a utility vehicle, so in addition to the standard road test gauntlet, we wanted to see how it handled some light hauling and towing a race car. Wanting to keep everything all-Chevy on this particular test, we hooked up with Tony Nancy, who is currently campaigning a strong "Rat Motored" AA/gas dragster. In addition, we turned the truck over to Joe Pisano and the guys at Venolia pistons for a workout where the CC Camino hauled everything from aluminum stock to Bronco mini-motorcycles. In short, we tried to analyze the truck as a racer's work horse, subjecting it to all-around duties.

Prior to testing the CC Camino with the assorted local racers, we gave it an extensive workout with our staff, including assignment chasing during the week and "private hours" evaluation on weekends. One of the first things we did to the truck, however, was to oust the stock Muncie four-speed linkage and re-

(continued on page 71)

El Camino workhorse also served time at Venolia Pistons, hauling the goods. Pisano and Nick Arias unload munitions of aluminum, soon to become speed goodies. Air shocks helped shoulder the load here too.

The only thing we did to make interior complete was to rip out the Muncie four-speed linkage by the roots and transplant in a Hurst shifter. Upholstery man Tony Nancy was high in praise of cab quality.



Chevrolet tossed a change of pace pitch this month in the form of their El Camino pickup, close relative to the Chevelle. The SS 396 machine was used for everything from work to play, from towing a dragster to races to brief excursions in the country. The CC Camino battled a thousand as it fielded every liner we could toss it, including a brief drag session.

CHEVROLET EL CAMINO w/L-34 OPTION ENGINE

Type	90 degree OHV V-8
Displacement	396 cubic inches
Bore	4.094 in.
Stroke	3.760 in.
Compression Ratio	10.25:1
Rated Horsepower	350 @ 5200 rpm
Torque	415 lbs/ft @ 3400 rpm
Camshaft Type	Hydraulic
Camshaft Duration	300 degrees
Intake Valves	2.065 in.
Exhaust Valves	1.720 in.
Ignition	single point Delco-Remy
Spark Plugs	AC 43N
Normal Oil Pressure	50-75 PSI @ 2000 rpm
Emission System	air injection reactor
Carburetion	single four barrel
Carburetor Make & Type	Rochester 7028217
Exhaust	dual mufflers

CHASSIS

Wheelbase	116.0 in.
Overall Length	207.2 in.
Overall Width	76.0 in.
Overall Height	54.3 in.
Transmission	Muncie four speed
1st gear ratio	2.20:1
2nd	1.64:1
3rd	1.27:1
4th	1.00:1
Clutch	dry disc centrifugal
Rear End Ratio	3.55:1
Front Suspension	independent; coil
Rear Suspension	linked; coil
Front Brakes	disc/molded asbestos
Rear Brakes	drum/sintered iron
Tires	G-70 x 14 wide treads
Turning Radius curb to curb	40.6 ft.
Gasoline Tank Capacity	20 gal.
Test weight w/full gas tank	3870 lbs.
Window Price FOB Detroit	\$3884.65

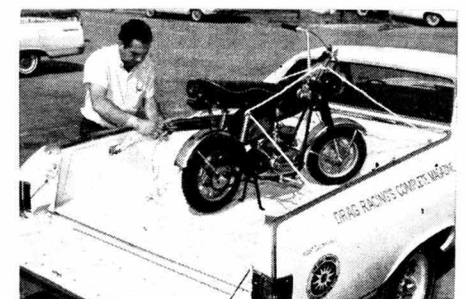
Speedometer Error:

Indicated	Actual
60	59.44
70	68.28
80	78.53
Quartermile in street trim	15.07-95.84

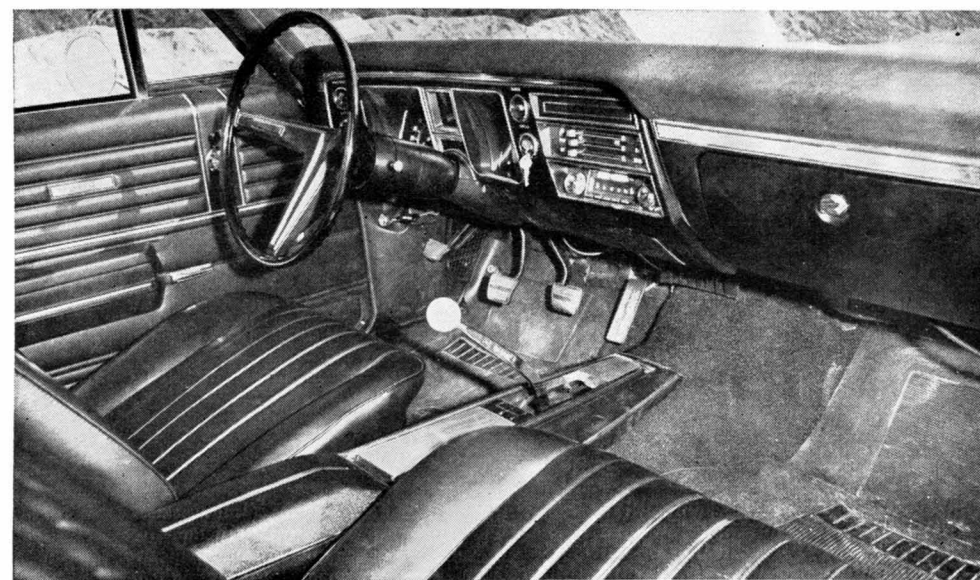
NOTE: In addition, our test vehicle was equipped with the following speed equipment: Cyclone exhaust headers, Hurst shifting linkage, and a set of Ansen T.E. "mag" wheels.



Meet the L-34 version of Chevrolet's 396 cubic inch "Rat Motor." About all we did to our 350-horse powerplant was install a set of Cyclone's fine exhaust headers.



Joe Pisano of Venolia pistons secures a Bronco "mini-brute" in the back of the CC Camino, fulfilling just another of its assorted duties. "Desert, here we come!"



ROAD TEST

(continued from page 29)

place it with a reliable Hurst unit, as the original equipment in this department is totally undesirable. The stock linkage from Muncie is reminiscent of the pre-synchromesh days that Jaguar is so noted for, where triple-clutching is required for both up and down shifting. The Hurst immediately solved all that.

While we were changing things, we buzzed over to Cyclone Automotive Products and had them install a set of their famed tubular steel headers on the truck. The way we look at it, there are two types of Chevelle owners . . . those who have headers on their cars, and those who wish they had them. In addition, since we wanted an eye-popper of a pickup, we replaced the wheels with a set of Ansen's slick T.E. "mags." The final modification was a trailer hitch, and renowned drag boat pilot Ray Caselli slid us into a honey of a hitch for towing purposes at his welding shop in North Hollywood. A quick lettering job and Voila! — the CC Camino was ready to cruise the road test course.

Perhaps the supreme test for the rig came when this writer introduced his wife to the truck, in an effort to get the woman's point of view. Her reaction was immediate acceptance, commenting, "Sure is nice inside for a truck." In addition, our own Corky MacDonald, half of CC's secretarial staff, had occasion to take the wheel on two brief sojourns, and reported that she thought the Cammino was, "Neat. I really liked it, although even granny-shiftn' at 5700 rpm churped the tires a bit on the 2-3 shift." Needless to say the "truck" battled 1000 with the girls, getting two for two in the "aye" department.

Looking to the all black interior, the only drawback we found was a vacant hole in the dashboard which is occupied by a "P-R-D-S-L" gear selector indicator on the column mounted, automatic variety of El Caminos. Instrument and control wise the washer-wiper and headlight switches seemed a bit cumbersome at times, but now we're really splitting hairs. Storage space inside the cab was readily available, as the glove and console compartments offered room for a myriad of little things, maps and gloves, etc. In addition, space behind the driver's seat was large enough to accommodate at least one large suitcase, as the spare tire was located in a covered boot aft of the shotgun bucket. The real moment of truth for the interior came when needle and thread man Tony Nancy slipped inside the cab, as he is nationally noted for his famed interior work. Here is a brief summation of his comments concerning the Camino's innards; "The vinyls they're using are darn nice, the carpeting is about par . . . but curl nylon is durable. I would prefer carpeted kick panels to this plastic, as

(continued on page 72)

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ROAD TEST

(continued from page 71)

the kick marks wouldn't show scuffs, but then again, this isn't an El Dorado. I like the way the dash is limited to a small padded area, just enough to absorb shock, yet not susceptible to sun bleaching. The buckets are quite comfortable, surprising even, and offer quite a bit of support for the small of the back which counts on a long trip. On the whole the interior is really nice."

Peeking under the hood we find the L-34 version of Chevy's now famed "Rat Motor." Prior to the truck's first tune-up we conducted a mileage check on a trek to the Bakersfield meet, taking care not to open the secondaries excessively on the all open road trip. Results of the check came out to about 12.4 mpg. We were unable to find any complaints with the 350 horse version of the 396 engine, with the possible exception of sluggish performance when the engine was cold. Here again, we're splitting hairs. The CC Camino was a ball to drive, especially on the freeways where you could turn it loose up to 65 miles per hour as you squirted out into traffic from the adjacent on-ramps. Around town, the truck turned heads on boulevards like Hollywood, Sunset . . . and Van Nuys. It was in this last locale that we had to inform a number of "five-five" Chevy (and later) owners that our drag coverage was confined to the drag strips, although they requested a little "action" via rumping their own Rat Motors.

One of the nicer aspects of the CC Camino is that it handles more like a car than a truck, perhaps due to the fact that it is built on the same chassis as the Chevelle wagon, and isn't really a full-fledged truck. The front suspension is the typical independent SLA type with coil springs, concentric shock absorbers, and a spherically jointed steering knuckle for each wheel. In the rear, fixed control arms and coils keep everything on the up and up, especially when the Delco air shocks are inflated. These handy items are standard on El Caminos, with the air filler valve located beneath the tailgate.

About the only complaint we found with the suspension was a rear wheel hopping condition which appeared at wide open throttle when letting out the clutch in low gear, and was amplified tenfold in wet weather. Admittedly, if you never open the secondaries while putting the truck in motion, the problem will most likely never present itself. When the CC Camino was subjected to a brief drag test at Irwindale Raceway, however, the wheel hopping was truly violent. Even though we inflated the air shocks to a maximum (about 90 PSI) and filled the tank with gas in an effort to keep the rear tires "glued up," seismographs at a nearby university must have recorded the vibrations emitted by



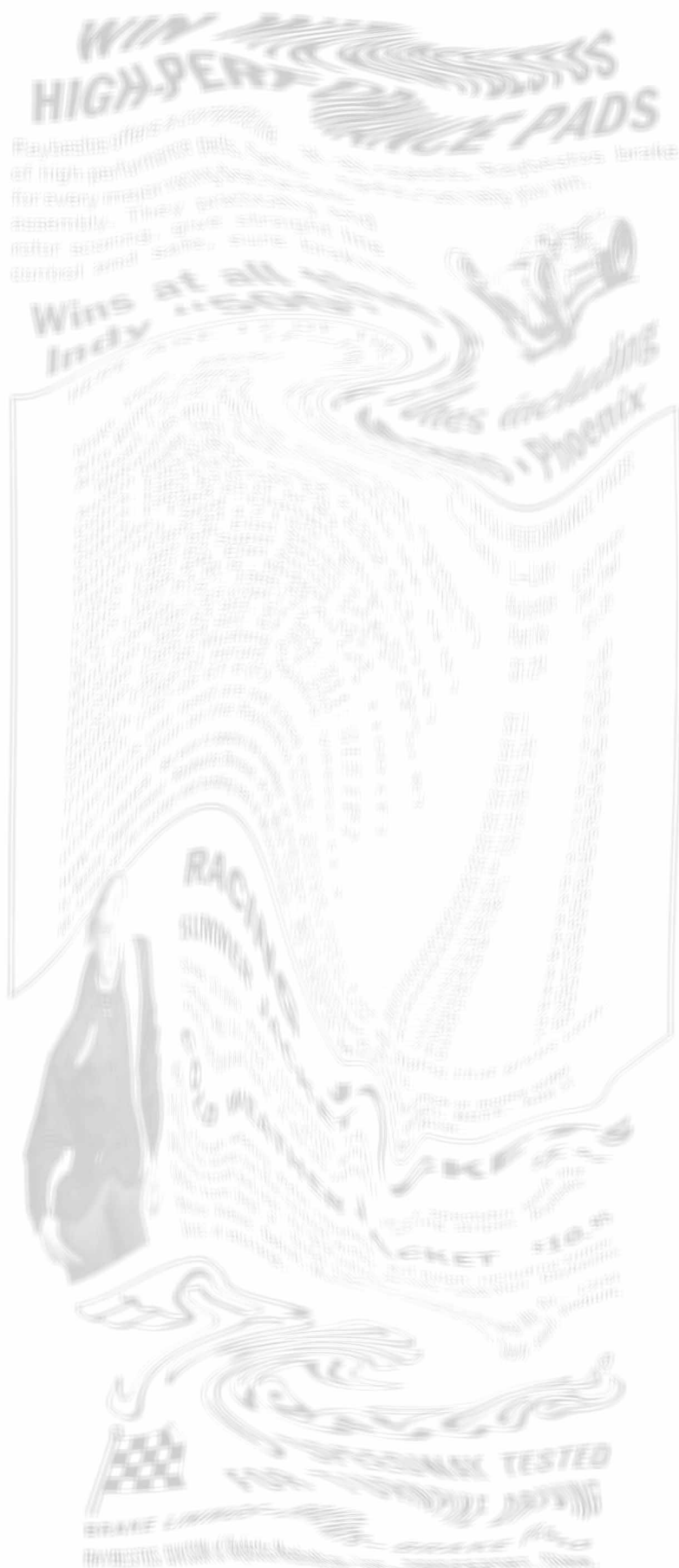
the dancing rearend at the drags.

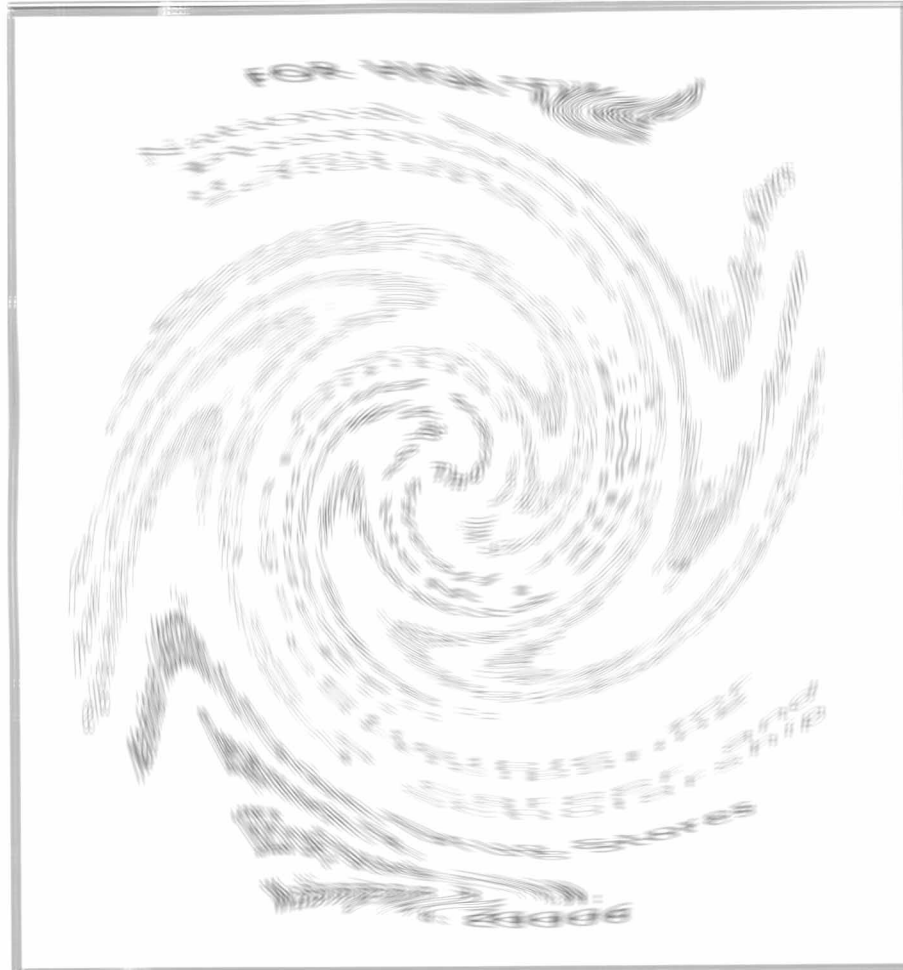
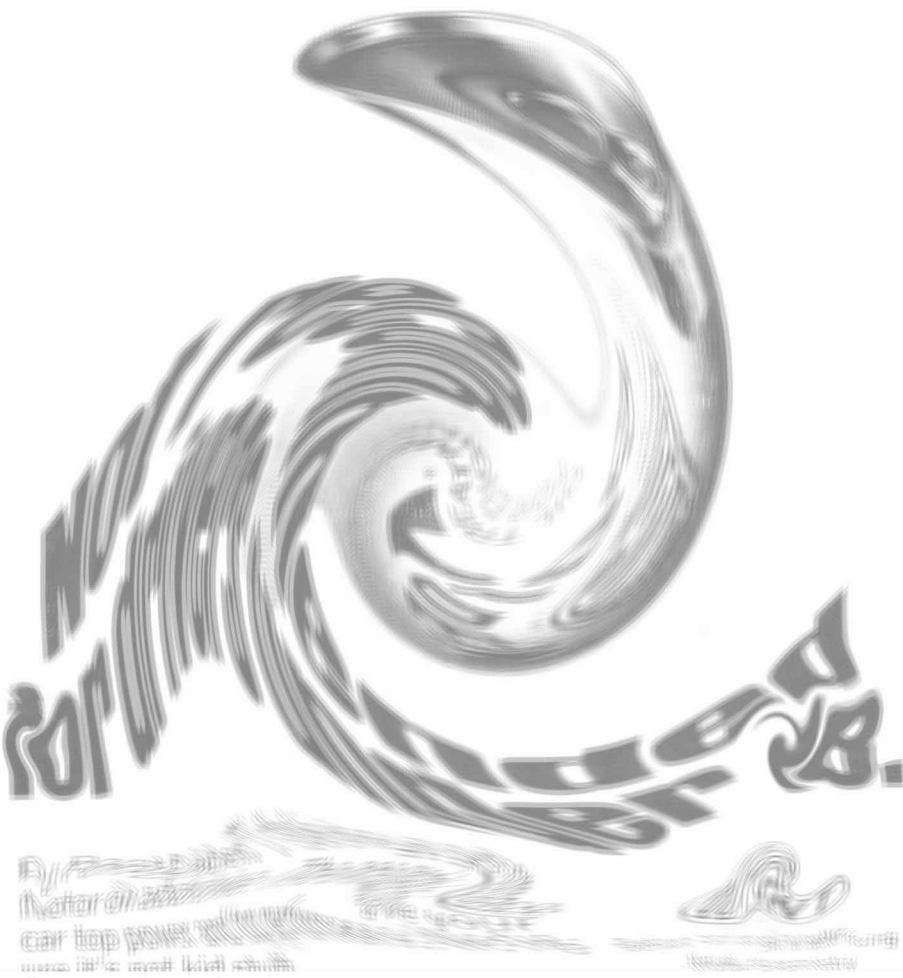
Employing a driving technique of rolling the Camino out of the gate and then squeezing the throttle to the wood in a somewhat effective attempt to reduce the ever present wheel hop, we managed to record a best of 15.07-95.84 in full street trim. We then uncorked the Cyclone headers, removed the air cleaner, and lowered the tailgate for both weight transfer and aerodynamic reasons, and recorded a far better 14.40-101.01. In light of the substantial performance improvement which occurred simply by opening the pipes, air cleaner, etc., thirteen-second time slips would be in reach if the wheel hop problem was solved. But since this was a road test rather than a drag evaluation, we didn't bother to sort out the traction situation with Air Lift bags or what have you. Incidentally, an identical L-34 El Camino under test by our brother publication, *Hot Rod Magazine*, was equipped with a Turbohydro transmission and did not experience the wheel hop syndrome. One notable side effect, inflating the air shocks, introduced a "stiff" rear suspension on the street, the stiffness increasing with the PSI. Although the CC Camino handled a bit like the Queen Mary in the esses of the Irwindale return road (with air shocks still inflated to maximum, mind you) the suspension characteristics of the vehicle were pleasant as a whole. We'll even go to extremes and say they were commendable in light of the fact that we were dealing with a pickup.

From a towing standpoint we really gave the truck an "El" of a treatment. The first thing Tony Nancy said after he started towing his rail with the CC Camino was, "Kinda slick. This thing sure has more suds (power) than my present tow car. Hey, the windows are down yet the wind isn't blowin' all around inside, messing my hair. The speedometer is easy to read, something to think about when towing through different states with their trailer speed limits, etc. Towing-wise, this thing seems to be awfully solid; it doesn't skate like my wagon (another make). It follows so good it's almost like I had my special Easy-Lift torsion hitch on, but I don't. Stability in the back end is good . . . not wishy-washy. Also, I like this shifter and trans combination. It's easy to toss a shift when towing on those grapevine mountain roads, etc. Another thing, it's good to have the power available when you need it. The brakes (power discs up front) are good. In short, it's a fine tow vehicle that you can feel relaxed, yet secure, in."

There's only one thing left to talk about on our test subject for this month, and that's the price. Here follows the sticker price list for our particular vehicle. Remember that these are window sticker prices, and in addition to order-

(continued on page 74)





ROAD TEST

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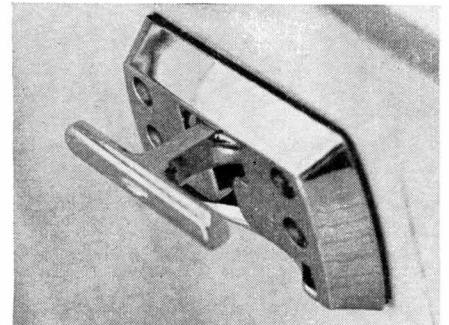
ing the Camino without certain equipment, you can also "haggle" over the price a bit with your local Chevy dealer.

Base price on SS 396 El

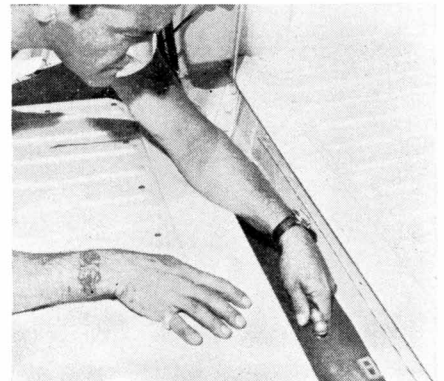
Camino	\$2949.00
L-34 350 HP engine option....	107.60
Four Speed Transmission	188.30
Power Steering	96.85
Bucket Seats.....	113.00
AM-FM Pushbutton Radio....	136.70
Center Console	51.65
Special Suspension package....	4.85
Positraction Rearend	43.05
Power Disc Brakes (front)....	102.45
Heavy Duty Battery	7.55
Heavy Duty Radiator.....	14.00
Special Instrument package ...	96.85
Front Floor Mats.....	6.50
Door Edge Guard	4.35
Front Bumper Guards	16.15
Tinted Glass	34.80
Total Price (FOB Detroit)...	\$3973.65

There it is in black and white. We would heavily recommend the \$4.85 suspension package, which includes heavy springs, sway bars, and shocks. It's a great buy. About the only thing we'd question is the instrument package, as separate tach, oil pressure and temperature gauges might be purchased separately for less money.

In closing all we have to say is that the Car Craft staff fell in love with the CC Camino, and, in short, we didn't want to give it back!



We also attached a quartet of rope tie-downs from Webco, so that motorcycles and other cumbersome burdens could be firmly lashed to the inner pickup bed.



Before towing his dragster with the CC Camino, Tony Nancy located the filler valve for the air shocks underneath the tailgate. They inflate to 90 psi maximum.