



'GLASS GRENADE

What else could you call the explosively exciting '72 LT1 Corvette?

By Steve Green ■ Sometimes road testing is not all that it is cracked up to be. Frequently we get cars that possess amorphous personalities which are neither really good nor really bad. Fortunately, the Corvette compensates for all the so-so cars that we've seen. In fact, it was a car that we postponed returning as long as possible because we enjoyed it thoroughly. The Corvette is a vehicle that is much more than the sum of its parts. It is a way of life.

The first thing that strikes one about the 'Vette is its styling. Excluding a somewhat garish front grille, the Corvette is extremely good-looking. Several years ago, when the Stingray was first introduced, Chevrolet's Patron Saint of Corvette Performance, Zora Arkus-Duntov, explained at an SAE

meeting how the Stingray's design had been influenced by wind-tunnel testing. He must have been telling the truth, as the 'Vette seems oblivious to cross winds regardless of speed.

Upon entering the cockpit, you are greeted by well-positioned gauges, a good driving position and marginally comfortable seats. The thin-line aircraft-styled seats are almost well-contoured enough for comfort, but they are hard and lack both lower back and lateral support. Unfortunately, better seats would require more interior space, and these isn't any to be had.

The interior is fitted with subtle luxuries that really do a number on your senses of sight, touch and sound. It is well-finished and attractive, the optional leather seats are very plush, and the AM/FM stereo radio lavishly fills the cockpit with highest fidelity.

The passenger restraint system is one of the best we've encountered. The seat belt is the common ratcheting type, which extends like a window shade and then locks in place when you stop pulling it out. The shoulder belt is an inertia reel-type which permits free movement.

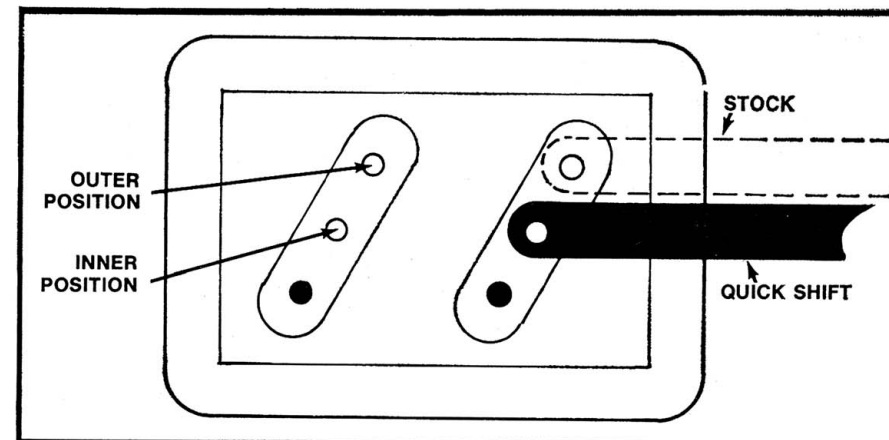
The Corvette's mechanical make-up has been designed and refined by Chevy engineers who themselves drive the car. They have succeeded in producing a vehicle which goes, stops and corners on a par with some of the best production sports cars in the world. The '72 'Vette engine availability is limited to the standard V8, a 200-hp 350-incher; the LT1, which is a mechanical-lifter high-performance 350 rated at 255 hp;

and a 454-inch Rat motor rated at 270 hp, which is not available in California in 1972, but may be back in 1973. Chevy also offers a limited-quantity-availability, "not-for-street-use," ZR1 350-inch engine. Good luck.

Our test car was LT1-equipped with a close-ratio (2.20:1 first) four-speed. Characteristic of current small-block Chevys, the combination was a little soggy off the line, even with the 4.11:1 gearing. But once the tach reached three grand . . . wow! The cam is relatively radical for a street car, which makes this an enthusiast's engine. Even so, the engine ran well, with only an occasional cough below 2000 rpm when it was warm. Don't expect to average more than 11 miles per gallon with this power train combo.

The transmission shifted great. The clutch never chattered or slipped. The shifter was fine as soon as we changed the position of the rods on the transmission control arms (a 20-minute job) to give a shorter throw.

The real charisma of the Corvette comes from driving the car. The mechanical components of the four-wheel independent suspension which link the driver with the road are blended so subtly that only enjoyment comes through. Wanna be a road racer? Fine. The car is beautifully neutral through the corners, with throttle-induced oversteer readily available. It is absolutely predictable. Wanna drag? Fine. No trace of axle hop. It will even cut 13.9 in pure stock condition. Wanna cruise the drive-ins? Fine. It will poke along in stop-and-go traffic with indifference.



This drawing shows the two positions for the shift rod on the stock 'Vette linkage. Moving the rod from the top hole to the lower hole is an easy task, requiring a minor adjustment, and permits much faster shifts.

Every car made should have brakes as effective as the 'Vette's.

Although the initial price is steep, the quality is pretty good, except for the typical Corvette fiberglass paint combination which always manages to make the car look like it was painted for \$29.95. However, the real cost of the Corvette is the insurance.

If you own, or plan to purchase, a 'Vette, most insurance agents don't want to know you. The first three agents we selected at random out of the phone book didn't even want to talk to us. "Sorry, we don't insure Corvettes." Several others would not quote us figures over the phone or demanded exact information about the driver. Finally, we spoke with a couple of helpful agents who explained the situation to us. They do not like to insure Cor-

vettes because of their high susceptibility to theft. (The '72 does have a built-in alarm). Also, fiberglass repairs are unusually expensive. Finally, they feel that the 'Vette tends to promote displays of careless driving.

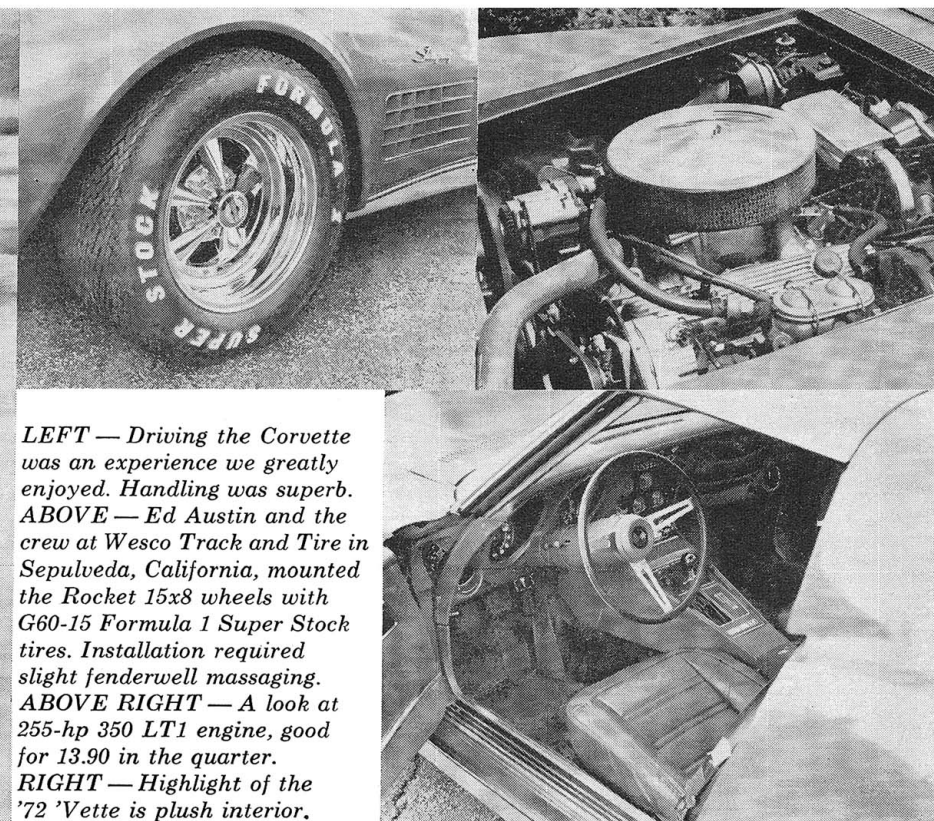
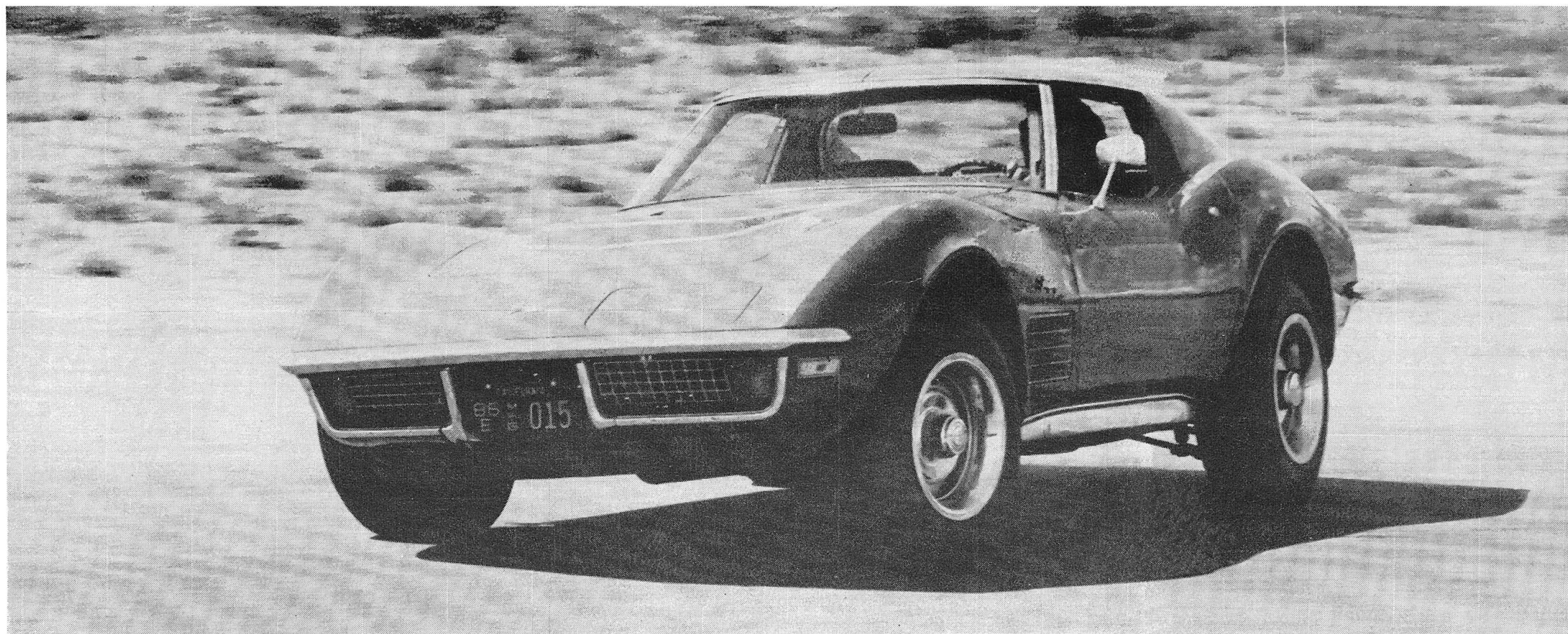
The agents consider such factors as where you live (a few blocks can make a difference in L.A.), what kind of job you have, how old you are, your marital status, and your driving record. We picked a theoretical driver who was single, under 24 years old, and had no moving violations. The annual bill for liability insurance came to "about \$550." If the driver were over 25, the cost would drop to \$350. If the driver had one minor moving violation, the cost would go up about 20 percent. There are so many variables involved that it is difficult to give exact figures,

since they depend on where you live, etc. If you don't have a clean record, there are reported cases of insurance costing in excess of \$1000 per year.

The cost of buying and maintaining a Corvette is high, but it is worth it to a lot of people. The Chevy folks still sell all the Corvettes they can produce. After having thoroughly enjoyed the car during our road testing, we can understand why.

1972 CORVETTE COUPE

VEHICLE . . . 1972 Corvette Coupe
PRICE . . . Base, \$5472.40; as tested, \$6724.40
ENGINE . . . 350-cu.-in. OHV V8, 255 hp at 5600 rpm, 289 lb./ft. torque at 4000 rpm, aluminum high-rise intake manifold, forged steel crank, 9.00:1 compression ratio. Bore: 4.00 in., stroke: 3.48
CARBURETION . . . Single Holley four-barrel, No. 399263; primary venturi: 1.69-in. dia.; secondary venturi: 1.69-in. dia.
VALVE TRAIN . . . Mechanical lifters, intake opens 42° BTC, intake closes 94° ATC, exhaust opens 112° BBC, exhaust closes 53° ATC, overlap 96°. Intake valve size: 2.02-in. dia.; exhaust valve size: 1.60-in. dia.
DRIVE TRAIN . . . Single dry-disc semi-centrifugal clutch, 11.0-in.-dia., 4-speed all synchro transmission. Ratios: 1st, 2.20:1; 2nd, 1.64:1; 3rd, 1.27:1; 4th, 1.0:1; rev., 2.26:1. Rear axle ratio: 4.11:1. Posi-traction
BRAKES . . . 4-wheel disc; hydraulic calipers
WHEELS & TIRES . . . 15x8 steel. Goodyear Speedway Wide Tread F70 x 15
SUSPENSION . . . Front: Independent unequal-length control arms; coil springs, 250 lb./in. rate; .75-inch-diameter stabilizer bar. Rear: Full independent with fixed differential, transverse multi-leaf spring, lateral struts, universally jointed axle shafts
Steering . . . Saginaw power-assisted; 16:1 ratio
PERFORMANCE . . . Quarter-mile (best): 13.92 sec., 104.01 mph. Lateral acceleration: .84 G max.
DIMENSIONS . . . Wheelbase: 98.0 in.; front track: 58.7 in.; rear track: 59.4 in.; overall height: 47.8 in.; overall width: 69.0 in.; overall length: 182.5 in.; test weight: 3605 lb.; shipping weight: 3420 lb.; body/frame construction: separate; fuel tank capacity: 18 gal.



LEFT — Driving the Corvette was an experience we greatly enjoyed. Handling was superb. ABOVE — Ed Austin and the crew at Wesco Track and Tire in Sepulveda, California, mounted the Rocket 15x8 wheels with G60-15 Formula 1 Super Stock tires. Installation required slight fenderwell massaging. ABOVE RIGHT — A look at 255-hp 350 LT1 engine, good for 13.90 in the quarter. RIGHT — Highlight of the '72 'Vette is plush interior.