

Driving the '82 Vette

Unrequited love 1980s' style?

By Daniel Charles Ross

We ought to get one thing out front right away: Not everyone loves this car anymore.

That's particularly difficult for me to write. When I was just a kid (and how many times have you heard this before?), I looked up to the Corvette as the Car of the Future, as the Sports Car of Promise—of my dreams, certainly.

Those were the days when the bone-stock Corvette coupe cost an astounding, oh, \$4,800 or so. And then—*can you believe it!*?—when I got the silly high school notion that I might afford one before too long, Corvettes had risen to *five and a half thousand dollars*. Was there no end?

Apparently there was not. The 1982 Collector Edition Hatchback Coupe, with various additions to the sports coupe base car boosting the base price of \$18,290 by \$4,248, bottoms out at \$22,538.

Bottoms out is appropriate because this is the final edition of those graceful, sensuous lines that, in mostly the same form, have been with the Vette enthusiast since 1968. Much of the shape will be recognizable in the redesigned 1983 Corvette, especially in the nose section, but *those lines*, unlike "I love you," "Your check's in the mail" and other classics, will never be repeated.

It's unlikely that any but the serious Corvette devotee is going to care very much. Oh hell, no matter what the Joe in the street tells you over Guinness in the Irish Pub, all car lovers have a soft spot for the car. For its shape. For the memories we have because we owned one—or the memories we have because we did *not* own one. But the Corvette is no longer the king of the street, and Woodward Avenue, Sunset Strip and Mulholland Drive now shudder to the beat of a different drummer.

That is, of course, the drumming of other performance cars. While Corvette wasn't looking—or more accurately, while it pared its weight even while adding pounds of luxury appointments, power you-name-it, and trick decal jobs—cars like the Datsun 280 ZX Turbo, and soon, the Porsche 944, have snuck up and handcuffed it to its featherbed.

It isn't only the foreign competition that makes the Corvette less competitive for the performance car buyer's buck. According to most

motor journal reports, the Mustang GT with its high-output 5.0-liter V-8 will whip the Corvette between the magical numbers of zero and 60.

But it isn't just a run through the traps that is the sum of a performance car these days, is it? While the Vette for 1982 boasts the drivetrain of next year's eagerly anticipated model (and in fact performs better than the 1981 predecessor), whither goest the "quantum leaps" from here?

The 1982 Corvette suspension consists of independent front and rear components, SLA with coil springs, shock absorbers and stabilizer bar fore and a transverse leaf spring, lateral struts, shocks and stabilizer bar aft. And, of course, the famous/infamous Corvette U-joint axle shafts.

All decent parts from a General Motors division that cannot hide previous Corvette engineering glories behind the weight-saving miracle of the fiber single-leaf rear spring, the piece a buyer gets instead of the eight-leaf steel part that now comes only with the gymkhana suspension option. The Corvette can still be directed via the accelerator, push for wider turns, lift for tighter (in hairpins, push hard and then lift immediately for the desired result)—and it still bobs over uneven pavement like a Polynesian fire walker who can't concentrate.

Steering input is quick enough to still get the nose pointed in the right direction at combat speed, but input the other way—to the driver—lacks the no-nonsense feel the non-power-assisted Corvette had. Is it more than coincidence that I notice more women in Corvettes these days than I used to?

Under its hood the '82 Corvette is still sporting its tested and true 350-CID 5.0-liter V-8, now with "cross-fire" throttle-body injection atop an L-83 designation. Horsepower figures of 200 at 4,200 RPM and 285 lbs. ft. of torque coming on at 2,800 RPM mean the 3,342-pound car can still run off and leave a great number of lesser vain creatures. We managed a regular mid- to high-seven second times from zero-to-60 with less than a full load of fuel aboard. With the tank topped off mid-eights were the result.

Anyone climbing into the new Corvette's opulent cockpit will find that luxury-sports car is the more

accurate tag for this car. In the Collector Edition, full leather seats in trick "vanishing grey" panels face a leather-wrapped steering wheel, with AM/FM/stereo cassette/CB make getting the news or the music or radar reports equally simple. Power assists are everywhere—driver's seat, both windows, door locks, steering, brakes and left and right side mirrors, too. The radio is electronically programmable. The backlight opens on gas-assisted struts.

It's a nice package, actually. If most people have seen the Corvette at one time or another, fewer have seen Collector Editions. The exterior features special emblems that proclaim the \$4,248 expenditure, and *Corvette News* even markets a line of cufflinks, tie tacks and other stuff

*In America, we're told,
anything is possible . . .
becoming a president, a
millionaire . . . even
owning a Corvette.*

with the collector badge displayed prominently.

But now that the Corvette is no longer the golden boys' car (when they may be buying Porsches), not the car that young guys *all* want when they grow up, what is its fate? Can it survive based upon buyers who are getting increasingly older—if for no other reason than because the established buyer, the one who's got the big money, may be the only customer?

Changes are going to be made, but perhaps the most surely certain of all change is that the price for the 1983 Corvette will be higher than it is for the '82 car.

The new skinning is going to be the first major object of notice (*AutoWeek*, Nov. 16, 1981). A new Doug Nash five-speed gearbox will supplement the 700-R4 four-speed automatic changer offered as the sole choice this year. Weight won't be shaved by much, still topping 3,000 pounds, but wheelbase drops from 98 inches to 96.

Inside the decor will benefit by the addition of electronic gauges and power options likely to please even the traditionalists, because the technoid interior is fitting after being prepared by the new exterior.

According to reports from some Chevrolet sources, the 1983 Corvette

is due to receive good-looking new "directional" wheels that can only be used right side-on-right side, left side-on-left side. How do we know that? Because we know about the tires.

Goodyear is developing new rubber—"directional"—to mount Corvette's new shoes. The 255VR16 Goodyears will require the same left or right side mounting to the new wheels as the wheels will require to the car itself. The tires are said to have a tread pattern similar in design to the old "gator-back" Formula One rain tires which radiate water out to the sides from center grooves.

This development, of course, is to optimize handling with the new Corvette's redesigned suspension. And how do the new Goodyears work with the Bob Riley-inspired suspension? Reportedly, skid pad figures for the new Corvette atop its specially designed feet are at 0.9g. The brand-new Trans Am managed a 0.83g in its attempt.

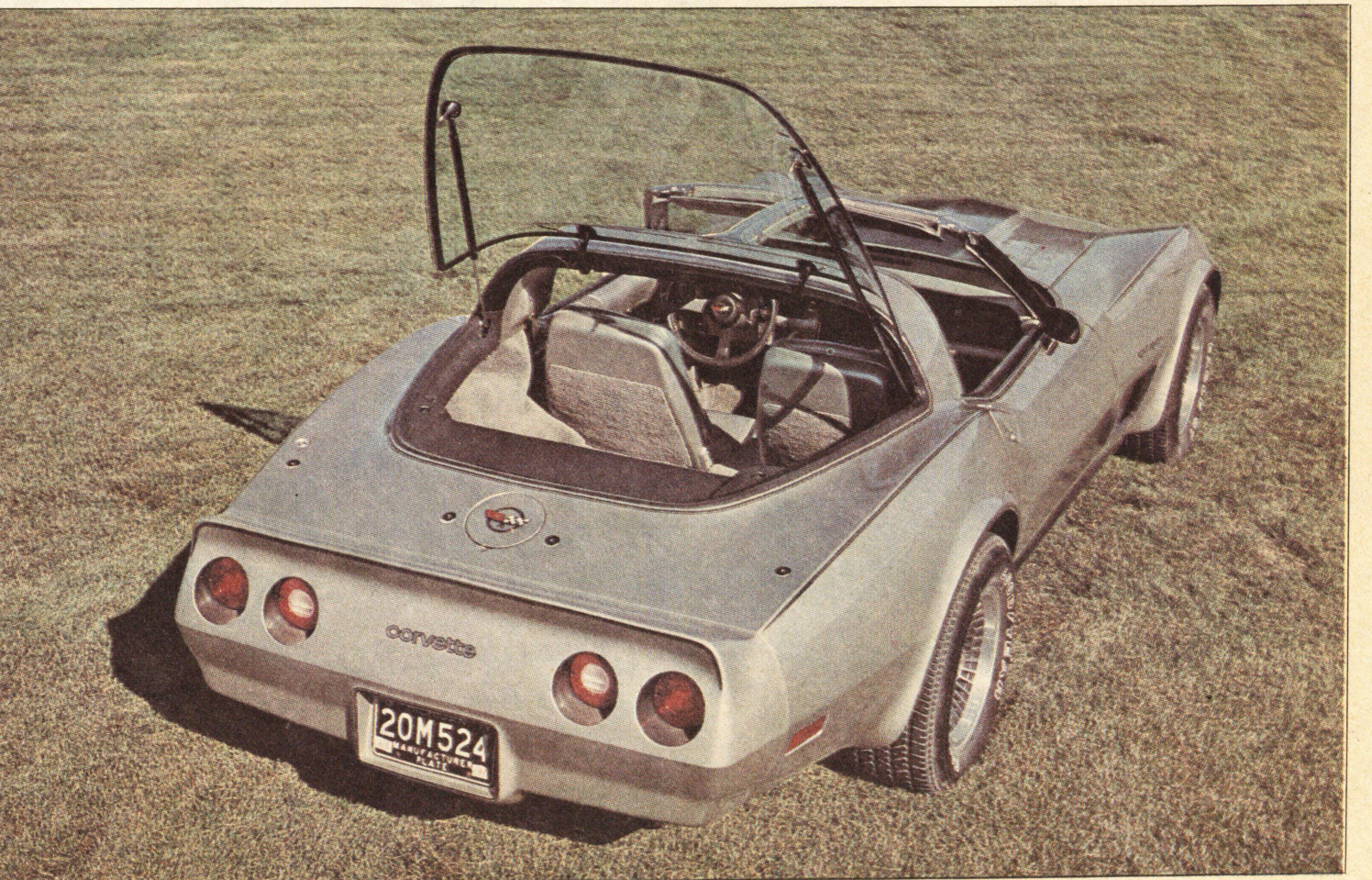
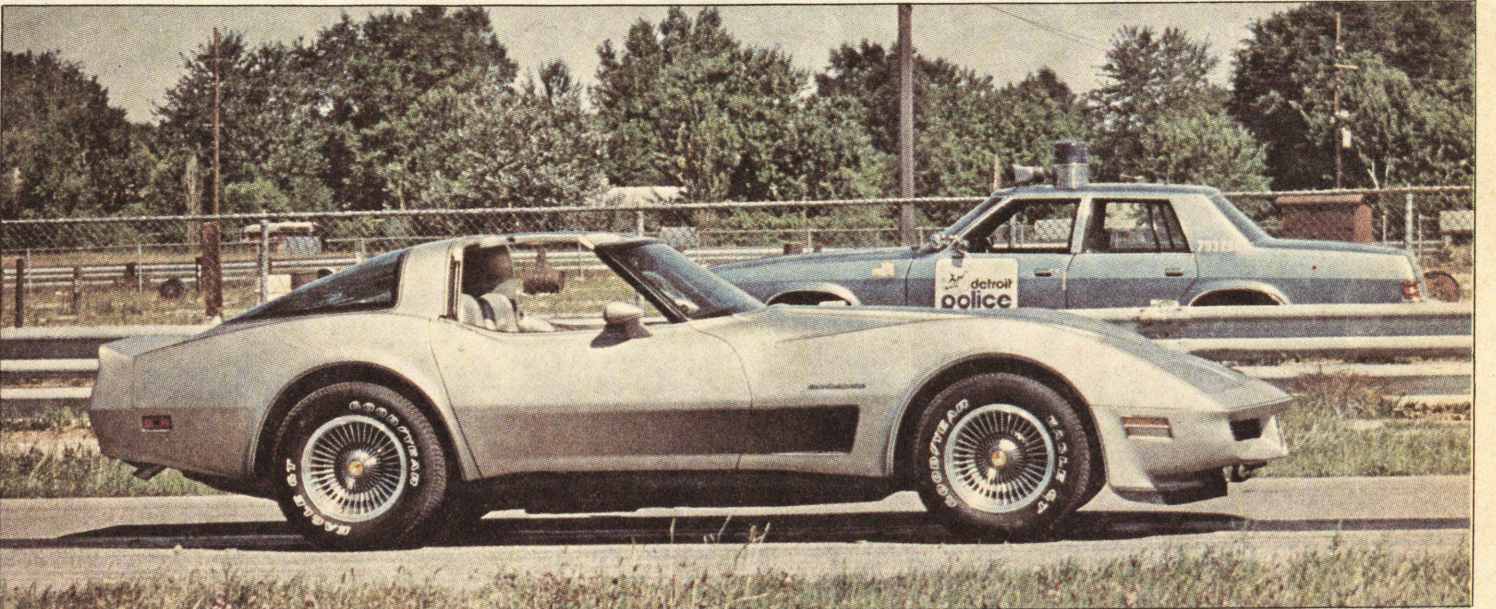
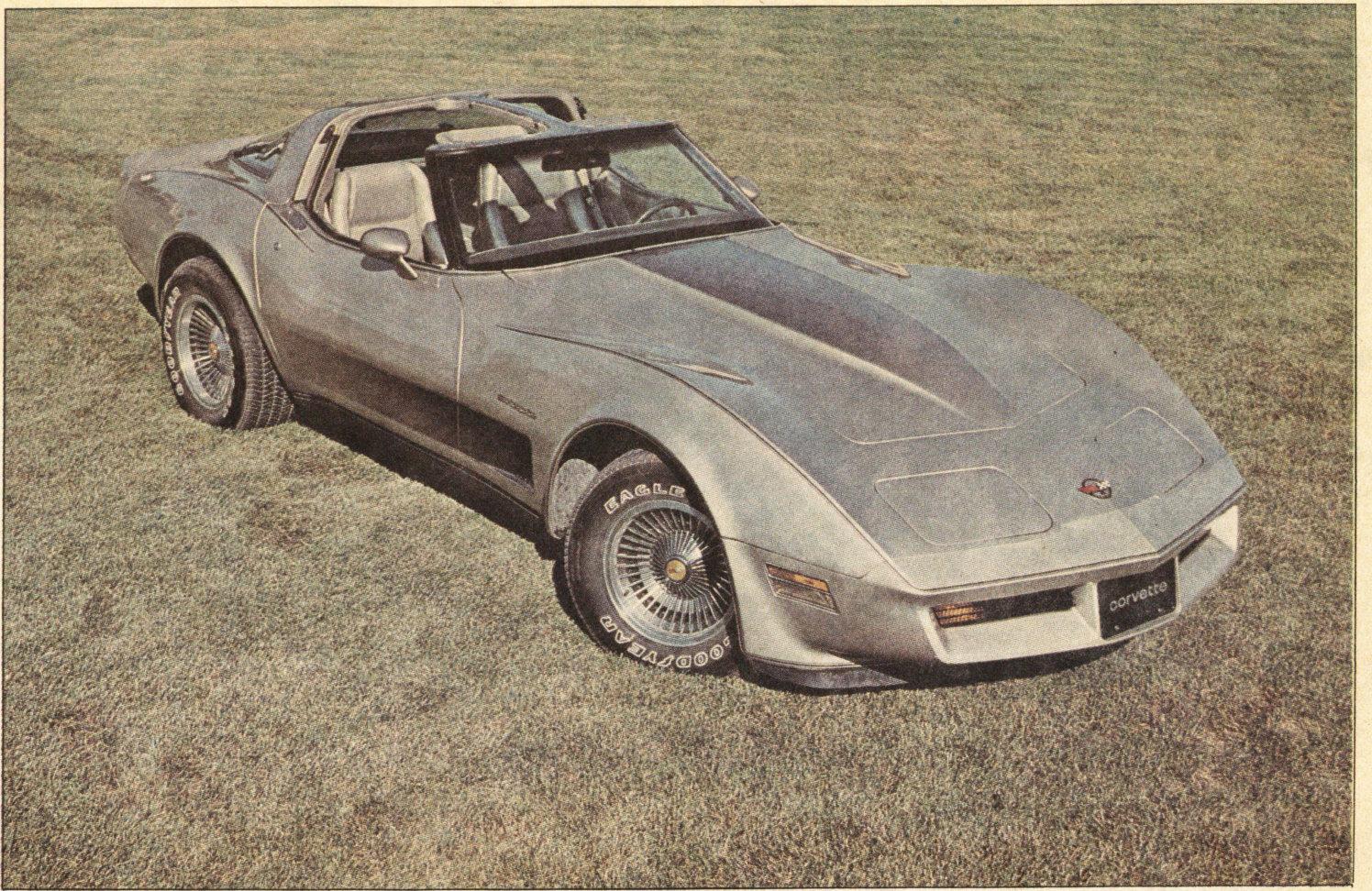
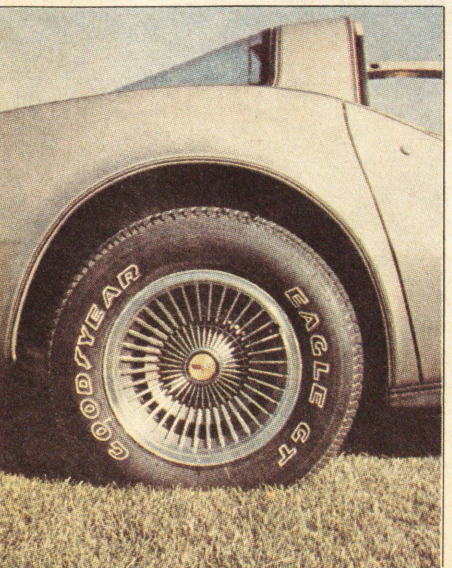
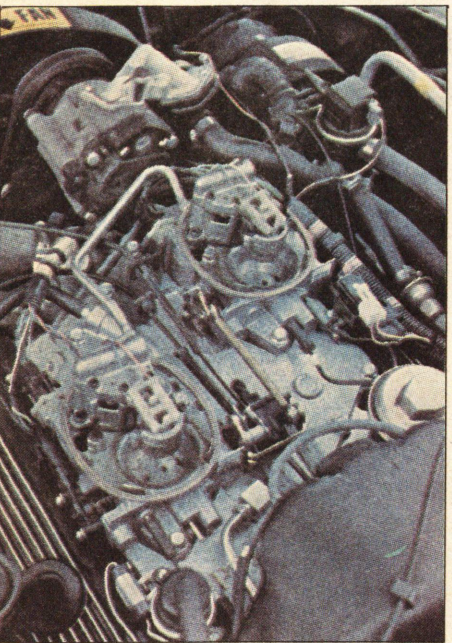
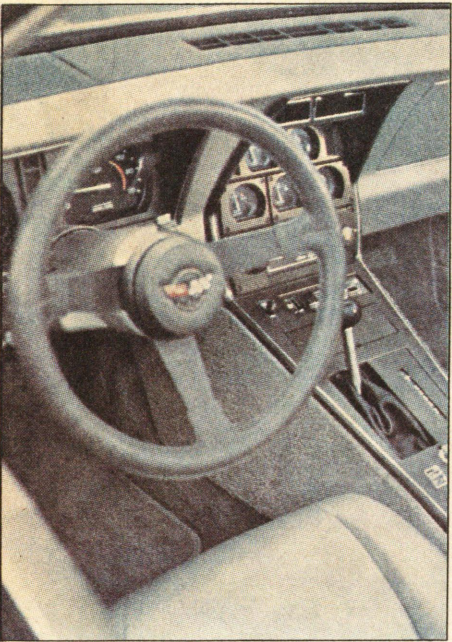
All this is very exciting for even the normal enthusiast, but information like this is supposed to be memorized by Corvette maniacs. The 1983 Corvette may indeed be the ticket for Chevy to get folks back into the showroom for a look, but if only the well-off can purchase one, well, that's a pretty unfortunate trick to play on a starving man, one who longs for a car that he cannot afford just like those young guys did back in the '60s when the 1966 Corvette roadster snarled past.

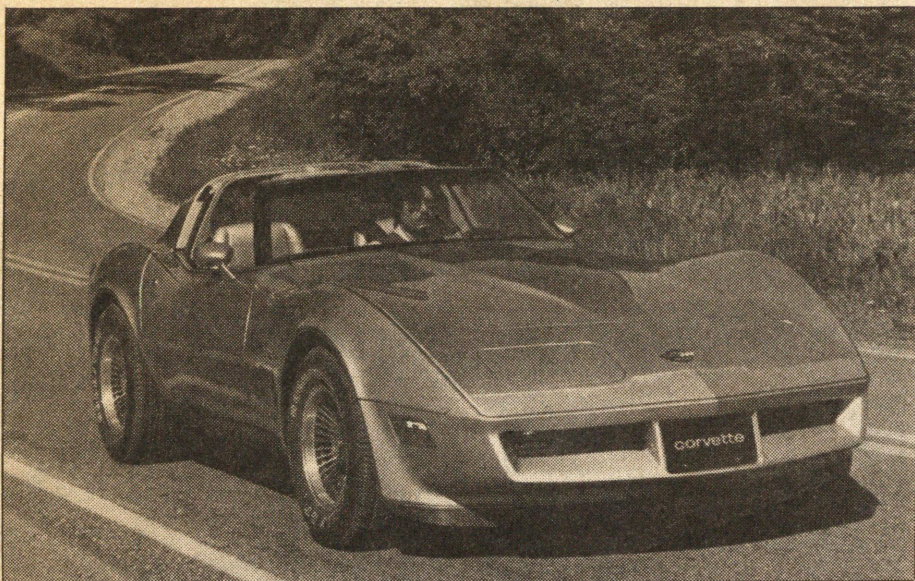
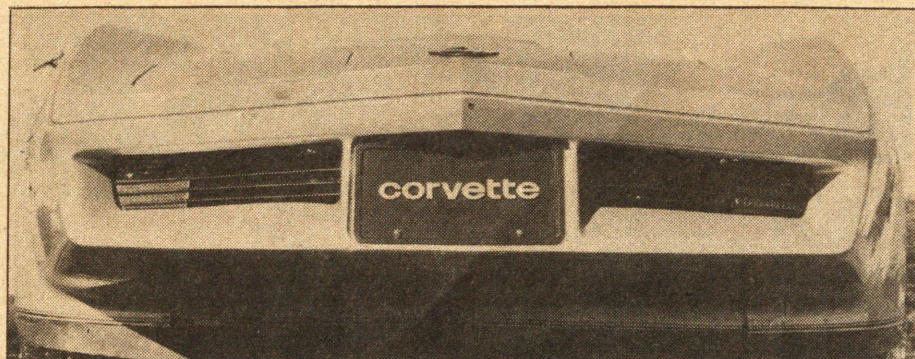
That isn't fair. We're adults now, and though it's probably just as much our fault as anyone else's that inflation has made our car-buying budgets tiny ones, that does nothing to diminish the fact that the new Corvette will remain out of reach for a lot of people who otherwise would buy one.

I heard that Ferrari owner sneer a "so what?" Outside of Thomas Magnum—who doesn't make the payments on Robin Masters' Ferrari—few Ferrari owners are in lower tax brackets. The significance of this is that while exclusivity can be reinforced by a high purchase price, exclusivity is not the end-all of demand.

In America, we've often been told, anything is possible. One can grow up to be a millionaire (though one's hopes ought to be higher to account for inflation . . .), or president—or one can grow up to own a Corvette, the so-called star-spangled sports car. Decades of Chevy ads attribut-

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D.C. Ross photos

1982 Corvette

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ing cures for almost everything between bad hair and acne have made the notion of potential Corvette

1982 CHEVROLET CORVETTE HATCHBACK COUPE

Base price: \$18,290
Price as tested: \$22,538
(including options listed):
(Collector Edition, \$4,248).

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase (in.): 98
Length (in.): 185.3
Width (in.): 69
Height (in.): 48.1
Track, F/R (in.): 58.7/59.5
Curb weight (lbs.): 3,342

ACCOMMODATIONS:

Head room (in.): 36.2
Shoulder room (in.): 47.5
Hip room (in.): 49.9
Leg room (in.): 42.1
Cargo volume (cu. ft.): 8.4
Fuel capacity (gal.): 24

POWERTRAIN:

Layout: front engine/rear drive
Engine type: V-8
Displacement (cu. in./liters): 350/5.7
Compression ratio: 9.0:1
Horsepower @ RPM: 200 @ 4,200
Torque @ RPM: 285 @ 2,800
Fuel delivery: throttle-body fuel injection (TBI)

Redline: 5,200
0-60 (secs.): 7.8

Transmission type: four-speed automatic
Gear ratios:

I 3.06:1
II 1.63:1
III 1.00:1
IV 0.70:1
Final drive ratio: 2.72:1

CHASSIS:

Front suspension: ind. with SLA with coil springs, shock absorbers and stabilizer bar

Rear suspension: ind. with transverse leaf spring, lateral struts, U-jointed axle shafts, shocks and stabilizer bar

Steering type: power-assisted recirculating ball

Overall ratio: 17.6:1
Turns, lock-to-lock: 2.58
Turning circle (ft.): 40.4

Brake system: power-assisted four-wheel discs

Wheels: 15x8 cast aluminum

Tires: P255/60R15 Goodyear Eagle GT

EPA fuel economy: 15 MPG city/26 MPG hwy.

Fuel economy as tested: 14 MPG

ownership become a virtual birth-right.

Birthrights die hard. Millionaires are made—and broken—daily. Truly anyone can be president, we've seen. And now the Corvette is to be put out of reach even further than it is already.

No, we haven't seen the advance sticker prices. But when George Levy predicted the new Corvette could retail for comfortably more than \$20,000, the die was cast; when the barely gussied-up 1982 Vette already tips the moneychanger's scales to over \$20,000, even the optimistic might hope the price doesn't reach 25.

We titled the 1982 Corvette introduction story the "last gasp of the old guard" with good reason. While that story could tell about the major technical changes and triumphs of the graphic designer's art, we are left to mourn the passing, to carry the story to a weebegone conclusion that none of us really cares to reach.

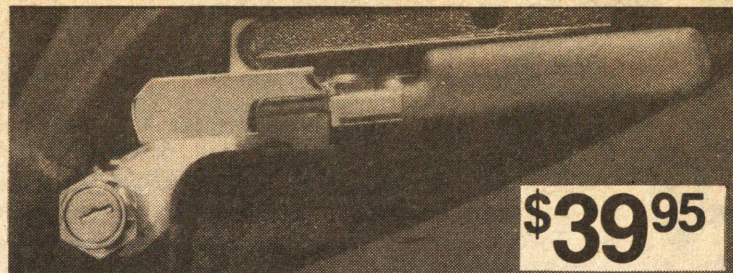
Remember how you felt when you first realized that Middle Eastern oil interests were the cause for jacking up gasoline prices? If you were like many individuals, you felt angry at the role others were playing in your life, resentful that your driving habits had to be altered seemingly due to the mere whim of foreigners with no feeling for the impact they were having on you, and fewer worries about it.

That's how we feel now. The Corvette is just another expensive toy, being molded to new shapes and directions by people who may have lost feeling for buyers who truly want the car but can't afford the price of a house to purchase one.

Porsche had the right idea when it decided to replace the 924 Turbo, selling in the low 20s, with a better performing, better looking car that is intended to sell for perhaps \$5,000 less.

We wish the Corvette group could come up with the same idea.

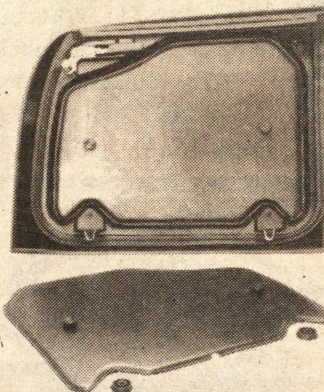
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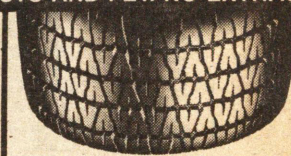
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P245/50VR15 241



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