



WITH 482 HORSES ON TAP, CALLAWAY'S C12 DEMANDS A DELICATE TOUCH IN THE WET. OUR SKIDPAD SESSION IN TORRENTIAL CONDITIONS PRODUCED SEVERAL SPINS. BUT GET THE FEEL, AND THE OUTSTANDING CHASSIS REWARDS YOU WITH EASILY CONTROLLED, PREDICTABLE SLIDES. GOOD STUFF.



THE RULE BREAKER

ONLY A FOOL WOULD DRIVE A SUPERCAR EVERY DAY, RIGHT? DON'T TELL REEVES CALLAWAY

BY MAC MORRISON WITH PHOTOS BY JIM FETS

MANY A SPEED FREAK WORSHIPS Reeves Callaway as a sort of high-performance messiah, and with good reason: For more than 25 years, Callaway Cars has extracted warp-speed performance from various production-based automobiles. In that time, the Old Lyme, Connecticut-based engineering firm has garnered a reputation for producing some of the world's quickest cars, including the 880-hp, 1988 SledgeHammer. That particular destroyer of driver's license records, a derivative of Callaway's twin-turbo Corvette, recorded nearly 255 mph on the radar gun.

So, it's somewhat alarming to hear Callaway's take on the automotive genre that, for many of us, sparked our obsession with high-performance automobiles.

"I don't know whether it's my age," says Callaway, 54, "but I'm over the supercar." Er, what?

"Most 'supercars' have what I call the 'five-minute characteristic,'" he continues.

"They're eye-opening to drive, but only for about five minutes, because you quickly want to go back to something that doesn't require so much attention from the driver."

It's a fair point, but in the rarified atmosphere traversed by Enzo Ferraris, Lamborghini Murciélagos and McLaren F1s, shouldn't a high degree of driver competence—and concentration—be a prerequisite to ownership?

Callaway doesn't think so.

"I don't want a car to give me any bullshit," he says, laughing. "No matter what it is, the thing has to operate as a real car. Every day. It has to start, stop, steer and stay in one piece with no questions asked."

Enter the C12. Based on the C5 Corvette, Callaway's flagship aims to achieve all that the company holds sacrosanct. Originally conceived for international sports car competition as well as road use, the C12 looks the part: ultra-low,

ultra-wide and ultra-mean, with aerodynamic scoops and vents screaming "Le Mans racer." The road car is nearly identical in appearance to the C12R race car that scored the GT class pole at Le Mans in 2001, before retiring from the race due to driver error. The look is at once aggressive and refined, yet recognizably Corvette. But don't tell the Callaway boys that.

"The C12 is its own unique entity," insists Michael Zoner, managing director of Callaway Cars and one of the C12 development engineers. "Only basic componentry is shared with the Corvette."

Shared bits include frame rails, chassis, and basic engine and transmission layout. The rest is all Callaway.

Each C12 begins as a complete Corvette, which is fully disassembled at Callaway's shop. All body panels are replaced with a skin made of carbon fiber, Kevlar and S-glass fiberglass, designed and produced by Callaway Competition in



Leingarten, Germany. Only the windshield, side and rear windows are retained, although a carbon fiber C-pillar addition wraps around the sides of the rear glass. The effect is a much more aerodynamic and cohesive-appearing driver-surround. Very GT racer.

While the C12's appearance betrays its Corvette roots, the key to the car's individuality—as with all Callaways—resides beneath the lightweight skin. Callaway replaces each suspension member with longer, stamped steel units of its own design, although the Corvette's transverse leaf springs are retained. These work in conjunction with Callaway's sport-tuned, coil-over, gas shocks. Wheel offset and suspension geometry are performance-optimized and, like the wishbones, driveshafts are replaced with longer Callaway components. Stand behind the C12 and the results are obvious: Track is a full six inches wider than the Corvette, front and rear.

Hardly a go-kart for the street, but rather intimidating for anyone lucky enough to catch a glimpse of C12 in their mirror.

Propelling our test car down the road is a modified version of Chevrolet's already outstanding 5.7-liter, 405-hp LS6 pushrod V8. Starting with this Z06 engine, Callaway ups displacement to 6.2 liters and installs a forged steel crankshaft, connecting rods and higher-compression pistons, as well as larger valves.

"There are four things of equal importance to us regarding powertrains," Zoner says. "Power, which is the easy part; reliability and durability; driveability and emissions compliance."

When the C12 debuted at Geneva in 1998, it featured a modified Chevrolet LS1 V8 producing 440 hp at 6300 rpm and 425 lb-ft at 5200 rpm. That engine, based on Corvette's standard unit, is automatically included on the C12. Our test car's more powerful Z06-based engine adds

\$18,650 to the \$167,400 base price. Additional options bring the total to \$247,150. Pricy, but it delivers big time.

Heads are CNC-ported and a more aggressive cam is installed, while the fuel map, ignition and timing are modified. Component tolerances are reduced to the absolute minimum and the engine is fully blueprinted to ensure reliability. The finished article is another Callaway masterpiece, the LS6 producing 482 hp at 6100 rpm and 466 lb-ft at 5200 rpm, with 90 percent of torque available from 3200 rpm.

Numbers like these always sound good on paper, but if you can't put the power to the black stuff, then that's all they are: numbers. Callaway found Chevrolet's six-speed manual well equipped to cope with the added gusto, although a lighter flywheel and more durable, stronger-clamping, single-disc clutch and pressure plate replace the Corvette's. Perhaps best of all, Callaway eliminates the most annoying

Find out what
Richard Wang learned
about state-of-the-art
engineering.

Visit jaguar.com/xkr2003



A new adventure. A new nemesis. A new 2003 XKR. See how Jaguar keeps it shaken, not stirred, at jaguar.com/xkr2003.

DIE ANOTHER DAY
11.22

James Bond Materials © 1962 – 2002 United Artists Corporation and Danjaq, LLC. 007 Gun Logo © 1962 United Artists Corporation and Danjaq, LLC. 007 Gun Logo, JAMES BOND and all other James Bond related trademarks™ Danjaq, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

CAPED CRUSADERS ■

Corvette transmission feature: Say goodbye to the computer-mandated one-four upshift when pulling away at less than sporting speed.

Callaway let us loose in the C12 at BeaveRun Motorsports Complex outside of Pittsburgh, a 1.53-mile road course consisting of slow, medium and high-speed corners and two substantial straights. A great test of a car's handling and engine characteristics. Even after listening to Callaway and Zoner go on about the C12's driveability and ease of use, we expected to discover a beast with a small performance window that was poised to bite us at the first sign of a mistake.

We were wrong. The C12 is easily one of the most neutral-handling cars on the plan-

for the 6300-rpm redline, if only to hear the V8's rumble morph into a roaring scream as the tach spins past 5000. The engine note is that of a Z06 Corvette buzzed up on a double espresso with triple sugar. Throttle action is smooth and linear and, combined with the excellent suspension setup, allows you to adjust the car's attitude without the need for steering input. Should you get crossed-up and over your head, the C12's Alcon brakes will haul you down to a crawl quicker than you can say "uh-oh"; on our first few laps, we found ourselves braking too early for several corners, such is their stopping prowess.

As mind-numbing as the C12 proved itself on the track, maybe the most impres-



2002 CALLAWAY C12 COUPE

ON SALE: Now **PRICE:** \$247,150
POWERTRAIN: 6.2-liter, 482-hp, 466-lb-ft V8;
rwd, six-speed manual **CURB WEIGHT:** 3295
pounds **0 TO 60 MPH:** 4.0 seconds (mfr.)

et. Through every corner, the instant turn-in and the chassis' composure, even when we tried to provoke something foul, left us wide-eyed with bewilderment. Body roll is negligible, the grip level otherworldly, in no small part due to 295/30R-19 Pirelli P Zero Rossos developed specifically for the C12. You'd need lots of driving talent and track time to get anywhere near the limit, and we certainly didn't, but understeer and oversteer are non-factors in this car. We're left to wonder why Callaway doesn't have a widespread chassis-tuning reputation to match that of its engines. This thing hunts down apexes like the Crocodile Hunter tracks game, minus the histrionics.

And what about that engine? Absolutely spectacular. Flex your right foot and the custom seats form to your body as the C12 plots a course for Dimension X. The large amount of torque available in any gear means the car is a joy to drive at high or low speed, although we recommend going

sive experience was the drive home. On the highway, noise is limited to that expected from such aggressive tires, and the C12 feels just as good at 45 mph in sixth gear in the city as it does pushed to the limit. Aside from the extra width and slightly stiffer suspension setup, we felt as though we were driving a standard Corvette: utterly comfortable and, no lie, a car we could go to the grocery store in. Every day.

"There's a lesson there," says Callaway. "You don't have to make a car so extreme that it isn't driveable every day. In fact, I think what you really want is a car that isn't extreme—a car you can get into and not worry about, park anywhere and drive like stink."

Spend any amount of time talking with Callaway or his engineering team and you find this viewpoint firmly entrenched in the company philosophy. Performance is the lifeblood of Callaway Cars. The expression "performance at all costs" is anathema, though. He dislikes the term, but Reeves Callaway's C12 may be the most super car. ■