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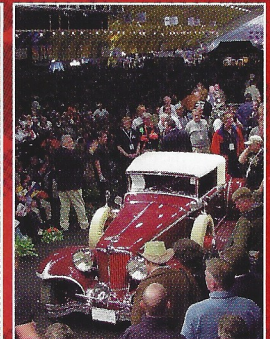
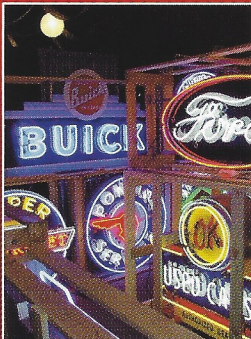
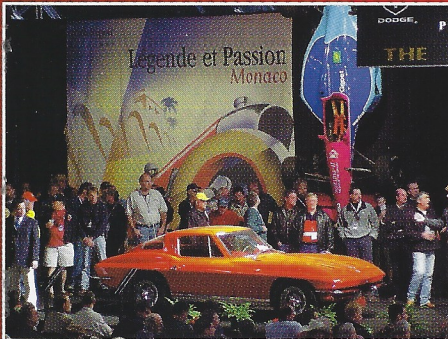
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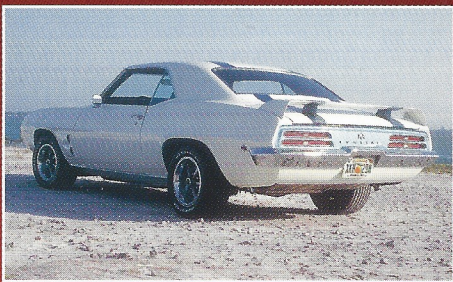
35 YEARS of CAMARO



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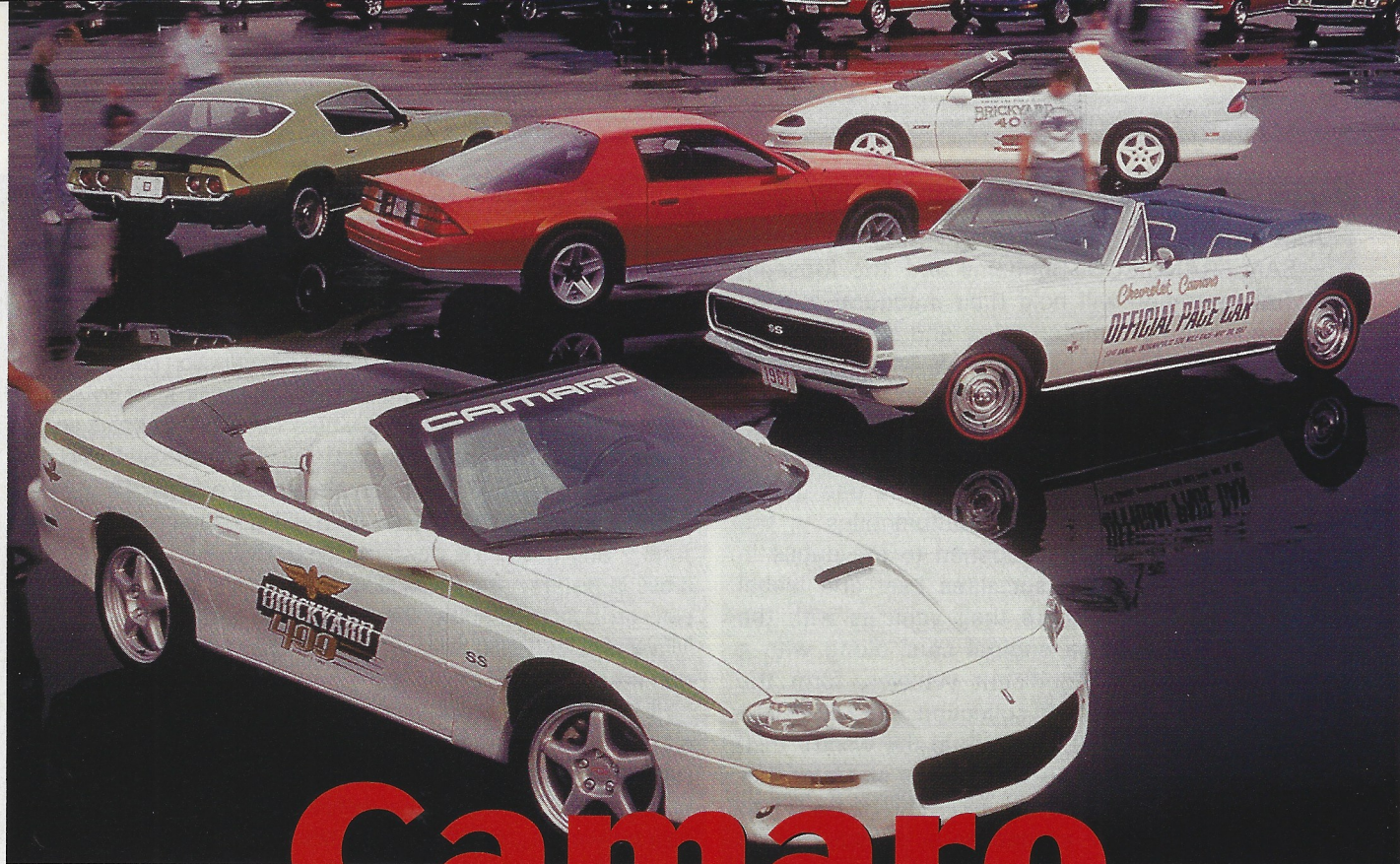


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Camaro

35 Years Of Performance And Sex Appeal

by Gary Witzenburg • Photography by Dennis Adler and Chevrolet

Summer 1964. General Motors design vice president William L. "Bill" Mitchell is in a meeting with a group of young engineers. "When will GM have an answer for the Mustang?" he is asked.

Ford's surprisingly successful Mustang had been launched to great fanfare that April and by August was rocketing through its first 100,000 sales. In most measurable ways, it was not a great car, but it looked good, performed well in V8 form and, based on the compact Falcon, was cheap enough that nearly anyone who really wanted one could afford one.

"We have an answer," Mitchell retorts. "It's called the Corvair. Wait'll you see the new one!"

Sure enough, Chevy's 1965 rear-engine Corvair emerged vastly improved in both looks and function that fall, and it would sell fairly well, especially in sporty Monza trim. But it would not be enough. Mitchell probably knew that even as he said it, so did most of his audience and it wasn't long before GM realized it would have to compete in this new pony car class.

When the corporate light finally turned green that August, work began in earnest on what would become the Chevrolet Camaro. The mandate was clear: it would have to outgun the Mustang in every dimension and be longer, lower, wider, roomier, faster, smoother, and better handling. It would have to be based on the upcoming

redesign of Chevrolet's compact Chevy II Nova, using as many off-the-shelf components as possible to keep the cost down. Oh, yes, and it would have to be ready for production in just 24 months for a fall 1966 introduction.

First Generation: 1967-69

Following two frantic years of design and development, the '67 Camaro coupe and convertible launched on time to mixed reviews. Some critics called it a latecomer Mustang copy. Some made fun of its soft, non-aggressive name, which Chevy explained meant "comrade" or "pal" in French (In fact, they might have called it Panther or Cheetah had auto safety advocates not criticized aggressive animal names at the time.). While its curvaceous,

The Tale Of The Other Pony Car



(Left) Added to boost the Camaro's performance in 1967 was Chevy's 325-horsepower, 396 V8 in new SS-396 models. The high-performance cars were a success. (Dennis Adler from the Tom Reddington Collection)

wind tunnel-tuned styling was well received, especially in hidden headlamp Rally Sport (RS) and Super Sport (SS) trim, the base six-cylinder car was visually hobbled by ridiculously skinny wheels and tires to achieve its low (\$2,466) starting price. Luckily, few buyers ordered it that way.

Both coupe and convertible could be ordered with RS equipment, which included special trim and a blacked-out grille with hidden headlamps. An SS-350 package featured a 295-horsepower, 350cid small-block V8, heavy-duty suspension and unique bumble bee striping around the nose. Magazine tests focused mostly on the SS-350, reporting 0-60mph in the mid-7-second range, quarter-mile times around 16 seconds, and a top speed of 118-120mph. Most magazines liked the styling and praised both ride and handling, except for the rear axle's tendency to hop during pop-the-clutch drag racing starts. This first Camaro boasted many product advantages over rival Mustang, including a stiffer (sub frame) front structure, wider tracks, more safety features, and even



(Below) The Chevy Corvair Monza was no Mustang fighter. Thus the 1967 Camaro was to be GM's quick (24-month gestation) solution to the Ford challenge. It arrived in the heyday of the pony car era and sprung to life in the limelight of the 51st Indianapolis 500 as the pace car. (photo courtesy Chevrolet)

better paint. On the other hand, Mustang offered three body styles (coupe, convertible, and fastback) to Camaro's two, plus more powerful 390 GT versions vs. Camaro's SS-350.

Before the year was out, however, two exciting new engines were in: a high-revving 302 V8 (underrated at 290 horsepower) limited production, road race-tuned Z28 aimed at Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) Trans Am series competition, and Chevy's 325-horsepower, 396 V8 in new SS-396 models. Only 602 1967 Z28s were produced. Also, according

to Chevrolet records, a small (but unspecified) number of 375-horsepower 396s were delivered in '67 Camaros by special order. With two different sixes and six V8s, Camaro could now compete with anything in the fast growing pony car class, including Plymouth's new Barracuda, Mercury's new Cougar (essentially a softer, plusher Mustang), and even GM's later-arriving Pontiac Firebird.

Given the Mustang's 2½-year head start and increasingly strong competition, Camaro's '67 model sales were more than respectable: 201,134 to Mustang's



In 1968, model year sales improved to 217,700 (to Mustang's 299,061), and Penske/Donohue won the Trans Am series with a dominating 10 wins in a Sunoco Camaro. In 1969, the Camaro was chosen for a second time to lead the starting grid around the Indy 500 racetrack.



(Left) A rare 1968 Camaro Z28 convertible. More than rare. In 1968 Chevrolet built exactly one Camaro Z28 convertible for Chevrolet Division general manager Pete Estes, who had helped move the Camaro from concept to production in just under two years.

(Below) The 302 V8 was a potent engine and gave the Z28 exceptional performance in its price and model class. It also gave the Mustang a run for its money on street and strip.

442,686, a solid second in class in its debut year. An SS-350 paced the Indianapolis 500 that year, and—despite GM's ongoing ban on factory participation—Camaro's Z28, campaigned by Roger Penske with driver Mark Donohue and other talented independents, scored three wins and finished third in points in the SCCA Trans Am series. The road to number one would be long and hard, but Chevy's sexy new Camaro was well on its way.

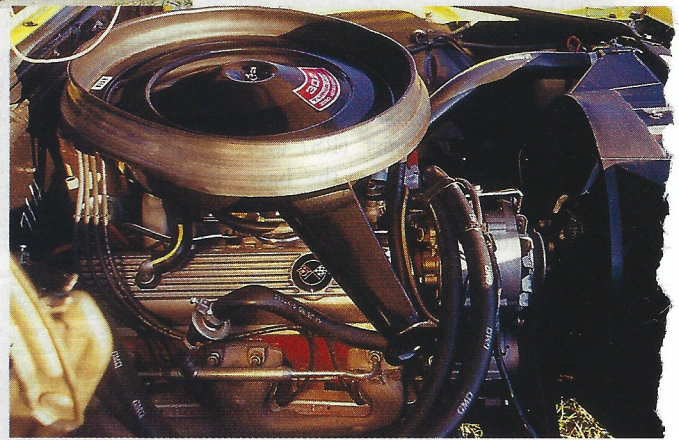
Cosmetic changes, including side marker lamps and a redesigned nose stripe, accompanied evolutionary engineering improvements for 1968. *Car and Driver* tested a '68 Z28 at 0-60mph in 5.3 seconds, to 107mph in 13.8 seconds, and a 132mph top end. Model year sales improved to 217,700 (to Mustang's 299,061), and Penske/Donohue won the Trans Am series with a dominating 10 wins in a Sunoco Camaro.

The 1969 model year brought a bolder new look and more refinement, new instruments and seats, an optional damage resistant body color front bumper, a regular gas 250-horsepower, 350 V8 engine, optional three-speed Turbo

HydraMatic transmission, and a Hurst shifter for the four-speed manual. A total of 69 ZL-1 Camaros, essentially de-striped Z28s powered by Chevy's aluminum 427cid drag racing engine, were built and are prized collector cars today. A Z28 paced that year's Indy 500, and Penske/Donohue won the Trans Am title again. But in an increasingly crowded pony car market, sales slipped downward to 193,986, about 100,000 fewer than Mustang.

Second Generation: 1970-81

The all-new '70 (some say '70½) Camaro was delayed due to a series of problems, but well worth the wait when it finally arrived in February. Tired of playing catch-up, Chevy set out to make it the best ever Camaro, a true four-seat sports car and the most beautiful Chevrolet ever designed. The only body style was a semi-fastback coupe with a



choice of two front ends. The standard face had a full-width bumper, while the striking Rally Sport had just two slim bumperettes flanking a protruding grille opening with round parking lamps inboard of the larger headlamps. Though unprotected by a bumper, the RS grille was surrounded by damage-resistant urethane. In back, four round taillights restored the Chevrolet family resemblance. The look was part Jaguar, part Ferrari, and all gorgeous. The RS option could be ordered with SS-350, SS-396, or Z28 equipment. The '70 Z28 boasted a new high-per-



(Left and page 17 top) By 1969, the Z28, powered by Chevy's 302 V8, was the hot ticket item. The model year brought a bolder new look and more refinement, new instruments, and seats. A Z28 paced that year's Indy 500, and Penske/Donohue won the Trans Am title again. But in an increasingly crowded pony car market, sales slipped downward to 193,986, about 100,000 fewer than Mustang. (Yellow Z28 owned by Tom Baughman, burgundy Z28 by Joe Russell. Photos by Dennis Adler)

(Below) Bill Mitchell liked Ferraris, and it was evident in the styling of the Chevrolet Division's all-new 1970 Camaro. With a bold, open grille, and racier bodylines, the second generation Mustang fighter came out swinging. "Car and Driver" called it "The first of a new generation of American GT cars—low, taut and sleek of flank...a blend of agility, comfort and silence beyond anything the world has ever seen in a GT car of this price...exceptional automobiles. Its shape is smoother than any Detroit effort we can think of."



formance 360-horsepower, 350cid LT-1 V8 plus special suspension, larger wheels and tires, hood and deck lid striping, and a rear spoiler.

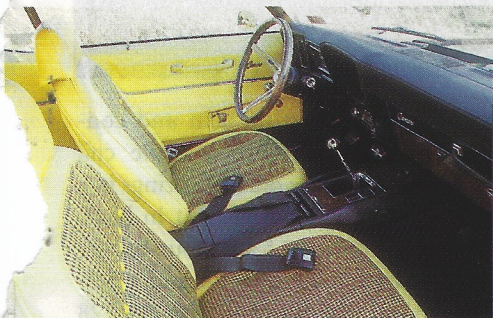
all-around use we've ever driven."

Just a partial list of the engineering, comfort, and convenience improvements would include: roomier, much improved seats, interior, cockpit ventilation and acoustics, stronger front sub frame, improved brakes, wider

treads, suspension and geometry front and rear, standard front disc brakes, E78x14 bias-belted tires, optional variable-ratio power steering, and even a "30 percent softer ride." A 300-horsepower, 350 came standard with the SS package, a 350-horsepower, 396 optional, and a few 375-horse 396s again became available on a limited basis.

Show room success came swiftly, and by April Camaro zoomed past Mustang in monthly sales. However, due to its late introduction to market, and because the whole sport compact class had begun losing favor with buyers, 1970 model year results were

unspectacular at 148,301, still second to Mustang's 170,003. On the Trans Am circuit, with Chevy's budget severely cut due to recession, Penske/Donohue defecting to AMC, and all four Detroit factories involved, the Camaro effort scored just two wins and third in points.



The interior of this 1969 Z-28 is Daytona yellow. Nominal rear seat room was more of a sales feature than a useful one. The 1969 models had a restyled instrument panel and dashboard. (Tom Baughman collection.)

Road & Track, not normally kind to domestic products, said, "We'll have to say it's the best American car we've ever driven, and more importantly it's one of the most satisfying cars for



Styling was king in the 1970s, especially with performance on hiatus, so paint schemes like those used on this 1976 Camaro Rally Sport helped keep the car in contention. Ford had gone a little over the top with the Mustang II in 1974, a Pinto-based pony car with too much emphasis on pony. Camaro was running almost neck-and-neck with Mustang by '76.



(Left) "Our engineers are excited by what they were able to accomplish with the 1982 Camaro," said then-Chevrolet chief engineer Paul King. The new front suspension used a MacPherson strut in place of the previous upper control arm and conventional shock absorber, while coil springs replaced the old leaf springs in a new torque arm arrangement in back. For the first time, a 2.5-liter four-banger was standard, a 2.8-liter V6, and a 5.0-liter (305 cid) V8 optional, with the Z28 getting its own Cross-Fire version of the V8 rated at 165 horsepower. The following year brought a new 190-horsepower L69 5.0-liter V8 and a five-speed manual for the Z28. (Dennis Adler)

(Below) The T-Top option added a new allure to the Camaro in 1978.

Car and Driver tested a '70 Z28 at 5.8 seconds from 0-60, 14.2 seconds in the quarter-mile, and a 118mph top end.

Camaro changed little through the early '70s except to accommodate new safety and emissions standards. A luxury LT version was introduced for '73, new fascias with beefed-up bumpers accompanied federal bumper rules in '74, and the Z28 was unfortunately dropped in the wake of 1973's fuel crisis. Following a low of just 70,809 in '72, sales recovered and climbed steadily to 163,653 in '76, nearly matching the (downsized for '74) Mustang's 178,541.

As the sporty car market and Camaro demand recovered, Chevy decided to re-launch the Z28 in mid-'77. At its February introduction, then-Chevrolet general manager Bob Lund said, "It may well prove to be the best-handling production vehicle ever built." Powered by a 350cid V8 rated (under the conservative SAE rating system introduced along with catalytic converters, unleaded gas, and heavy emission controls in 1971) at 170 horsepower, it featured special steering and suspension tuning and GR70-15 radial tires on 15x7-inch wheels. "The Camaro Z28 is intended for the macho enthusiast," Lund added. "It is a driver's car." Camaro finally beat Mustang in the marketplace that year with sales of 198,755 to 161,654.



New body color bumpers freshened the look for '78, a luxury Berlinetta model replaced the LT for '79, and a more fuel-efficient V6 replaced the straight six for 1980. Sales peaked at 247,437 in 1978 and 233,802 in '79, but fell again to 131,066 for 1980 after a second fuel crisis.

Third Generation: 1982-92

Camaro Gen III arrived with great fanfare for 1982. In Z28 form, it graced the covers of nearly every auto magazine, paced that year's Indy 500 and was named *Motor Trend's* Car of the Year. "Our engineers are excited by what they were able to accomplish with the 1982 Camaro," said Chevrolet chief engineer Paul King. The new front suspension used a MacPherson strut in place of the

previous upper control arm and conventional shock absorber, while coil springs replaced the old leaf springs in a new torque arm arrangement in back. For the first time, a 2.5-liter four-banger was standard, a 2.8-liter V6 and a 5.0-liter (305cid) V8 optional, with the Z28 getting its own Cross-Fire version of the V8 rated at 165 horsepower.

The following year brought a new 190-horsepower L69 5.0-liter V8 and a five-speed manual transmission for the Z28. The Berlinetta instrument panel went space age digital in '84, while an exciting new IROC option for the Z28—commemorating the International Race of Champions racing series, which featured some of the world's best drivers competing in identically pre-



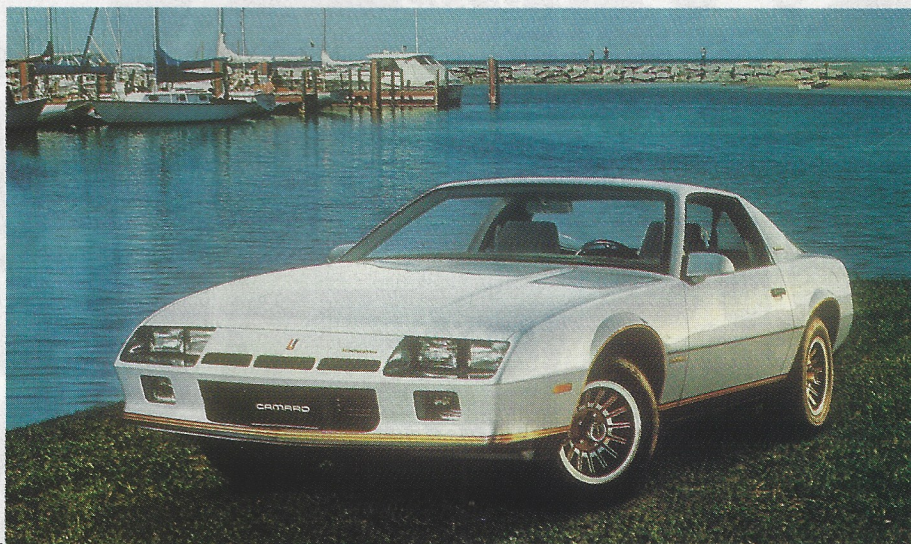
Camaro's third spin around the Brickyard came in 1982 when the sporty new Chevy was chosen to pace the 66th Indy 500.

pared Camaros throughout the 1980s—arrived for 1985. It featured the L-69 carbureted V8 with five-speed manual and a new 215-horsepower, tuned port injection (TPI) version with four-speed automatic.

Sixteen-inch Goodyear Gatorback unidirectional tires and more widespread use of tuned port electronic fuel injection made news for '86, and the convertible returned after an 18-year hiatus for 1987. That year also marked the re-emergence of the 5.7-liter (350cid) V8 for the IROC-Z, while the five-speed manual became available with the TPI 5.0-liter engine. *Motor Trend* called the '87 IROC-Z convertible "one of the most desirable cars of this decade."

The RS nameplate came back for 1989 on a Z28 version of the standard V6 Camaro, and a driver's side airbag and PASS-Key security system enhanced safety and security for 1990.

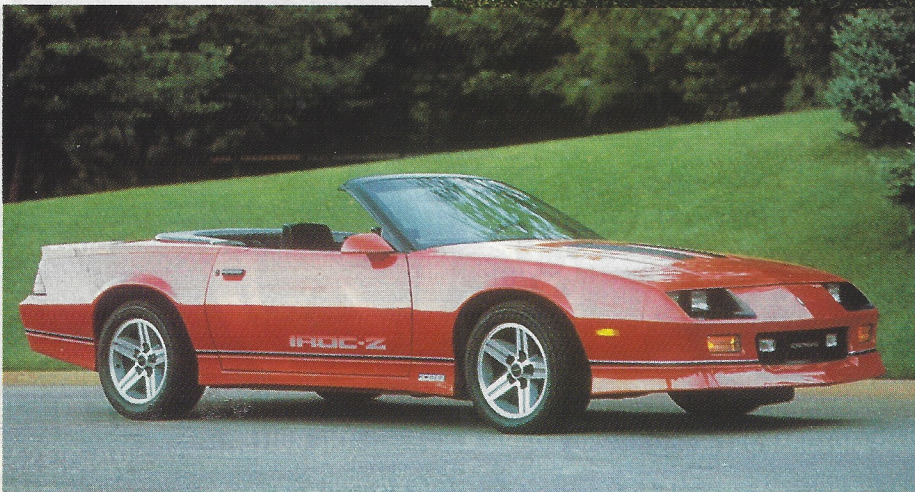
Celebrating Camaro's 25th anniversary (3.7 million Camaros built since 1967), Chevy came up with a Heritage Appearance package for 1992 that included a '60s-style hood, deck stripes, body color grille and wheels, along with significant build quality and body integrity improvements.



Fourth Generation: 1993-2002

All new and completely redesigned for 1993, Camaro Gen IV debuted into a market that had seen Camaro sales slip from over 200,000 in 1984 to fewer than 50,000 in 1991, rebound to nearly 200,000 in 1985 and shrink again to about 55,000 in 1991. Nevertheless, Chevy was optimistic that such a vastly improved car would lead to much improved sales, even as its youthful target market was moving in increasing numbers into trucks.

It debuted in standard coupe and Z28 versions, longer, lower, and wider than its predecessor, but retained the 101.1-inch wheelbase. A new 160-horsepower, 4.3-liter V6 was standard with four-speed automatic or five-speed manual; a 275-horsepower version of Corvette's 5.7-liter LT-1 V8, with a choice of four-speed automatic or six-speed manual, powered the Z28. Suspension was a new short/long arm (SLA) design in front and much-



(Above) The Italian theme was perhaps gone from Camaro styling by 1982 but names were still in vogue and the 1982 coupe was named the Berlinetta.

(Left) The 1987 IROC-Z helped rekindle the Camaro's performance car image. The convertible returned after an 18-year hiatus and 1987 also marked the re-emergence of the 5.7-liter (350cid) V8 in the IROC-Z, while the five-speed manual became available with the TPI 5.0-liter engine. "Motor Trend" called the '87 IROC-Z convertible "one of the most desirable cars of this decade."

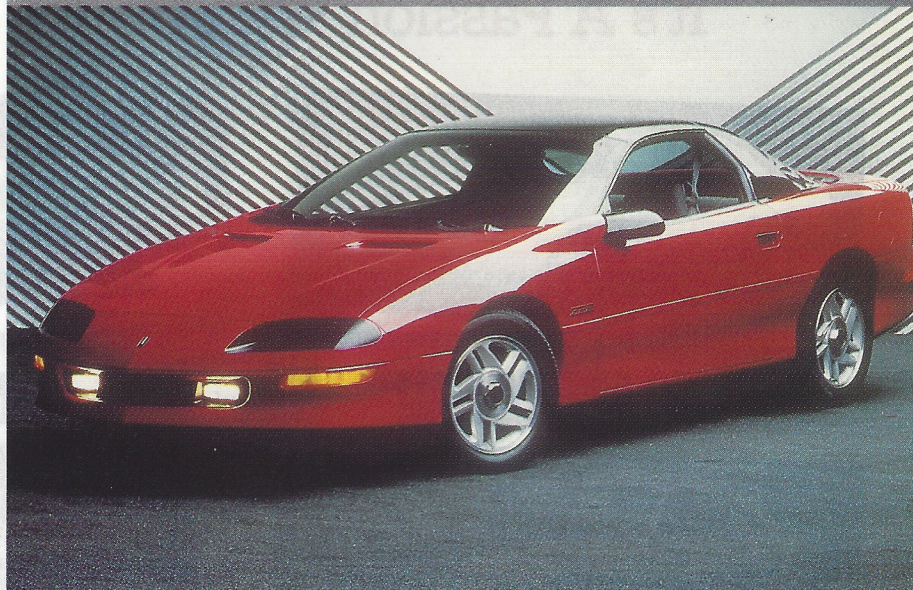
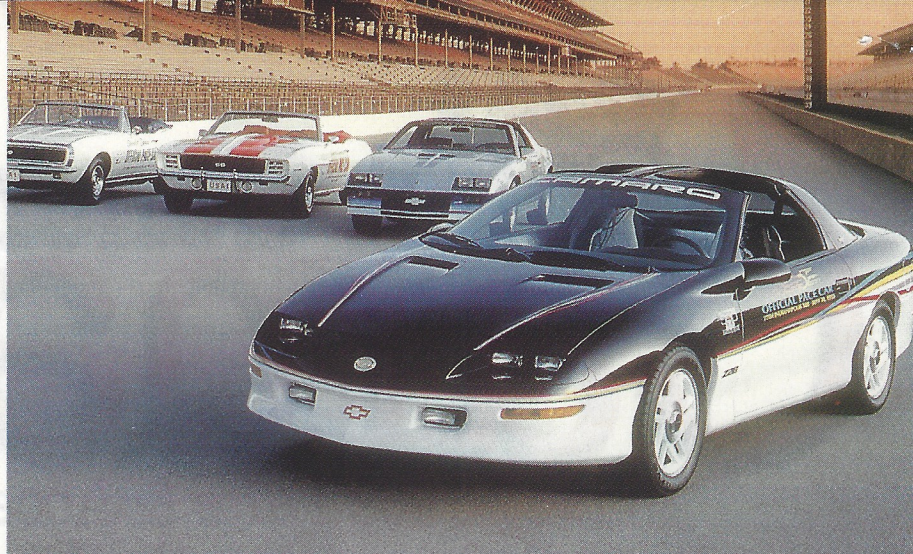
The 1993 models introduced an all-new and very curvaceous body style, which was selected as the fourth Camaro to pace the Indianapolis 500.

improved multi-link (two trailing arms, track bar and torque arm) axle in back. New Goodyear Eagle all-season tires on 16-inch wheels and power rack-and-pinion steering (replacing the previous recirculating ball) provided better responsiveness, feel, and feedback on both models. Brakes were power front disc/rear drum on the standard coupe and four-wheel discs on Z28. A Z28 paced the Indy 500 for the fourth time.

Changes have been evolutionary through the decade since: addition of a convertible and sequential port injection on the LT1 for '94; optional Acceleration Slip Regulation (ASR) traction control for '95; a 3800 fuel-injected V6 and new RS appearance package for '96; and a 30th anniversary Z28 package (Hugger Orange stripes on Arctic White) reminiscent of the 1969 Indy pace car for '97. For '98 and beyond, Camaro got a new-look hood and front fascia, a Sport Appearance Package replacing the former RS, and an SS Performance/Appearance Package for Z28. Four-wheel disc brakes, ABS and ASR systems were new and/or improved, and the Z28 engine was a 305-horsepower version of the new for '97 Corvette's LS-1 V8. By 2000, this engine pumped out 310 horsepower in the standard Z28 and 325 in the Z28 SS.

Sporty coupe sales continued to slip industry-wide as US truck and SUV markets boomed. Despite truly amazing Corvette-like performance and handling, Camaro was again being severely beaten in sales by rival Mustang, partly because (unlike Mustang) it had grown too big, heavy, expensive and aggressive to appeal to non-performance oriented buyers. Fewer than 50,000 Camaros were delivered each year from 1998-'00, and with just over 34,000 sold in 2001, it became clear to nearly everyone at GM that Camaro (and sister ship Firebird) would have to be mercifully—and very reluctantly—put to rest.

According to GM vice president of vehicle brand marketing John Middlebrook (a real car guy and



History will note that the last Camaros were the best styled and best performing of the entire four generations.

Camaro enthusiast who once ran the Chevrolet Division), the combination of significantly reduced demand in the sporty coupe segment—down 53 percent from 1990 to 2000—and substantial excess manufacturing capacity made this decision “unavoidable.” In other words, in today’s increasingly competitive market, GM, on a positive roll these days but still struggling to increase market share and profitability, needs fewer plants and fewer uncompetitive cars. “The Chevrolet Camaro and Pontiac Firebird have truly become an integral part of American culture over the years,” he said in the cancellation announcement, then added, “We appreciate the strong emotions that our customers have for these cars, and we’re pleased to celebrate them with a 35th Anniversary Edition Camaro and a Collector Edition Firebird Trans Am.”

Could GM have saved its aging pony cars by redesigning them yet again, and sooner? Maybe. But new product design, engineering, and development are incredibly expensive. And with the pony car segment continuing to shrink, it would have diverted critically needed investment dollars from higher-volume, higher-profit products the company desperately needed to survive.

Will GM revive the Camaro name on an exciting new product one day? No one (even at GM) knows for sure. But I would not bet against it. The press release announcing the difficult decision to cut these much-loved cars after 35 exciting years begins with the headline: “Camaro/Firebird on Hiatus After 2002 Model Year.”

Read the author's review of the 2002 35th Anniversary Camaro online at www.carcollector.com