



MISSING COMBINATION

Chevrolet hasn't offered a high-output, automatic-equipped Corvette convertible in decades, but that didn't stop this C6 owner from having one built.

| BY HAROLD PACE | PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR |

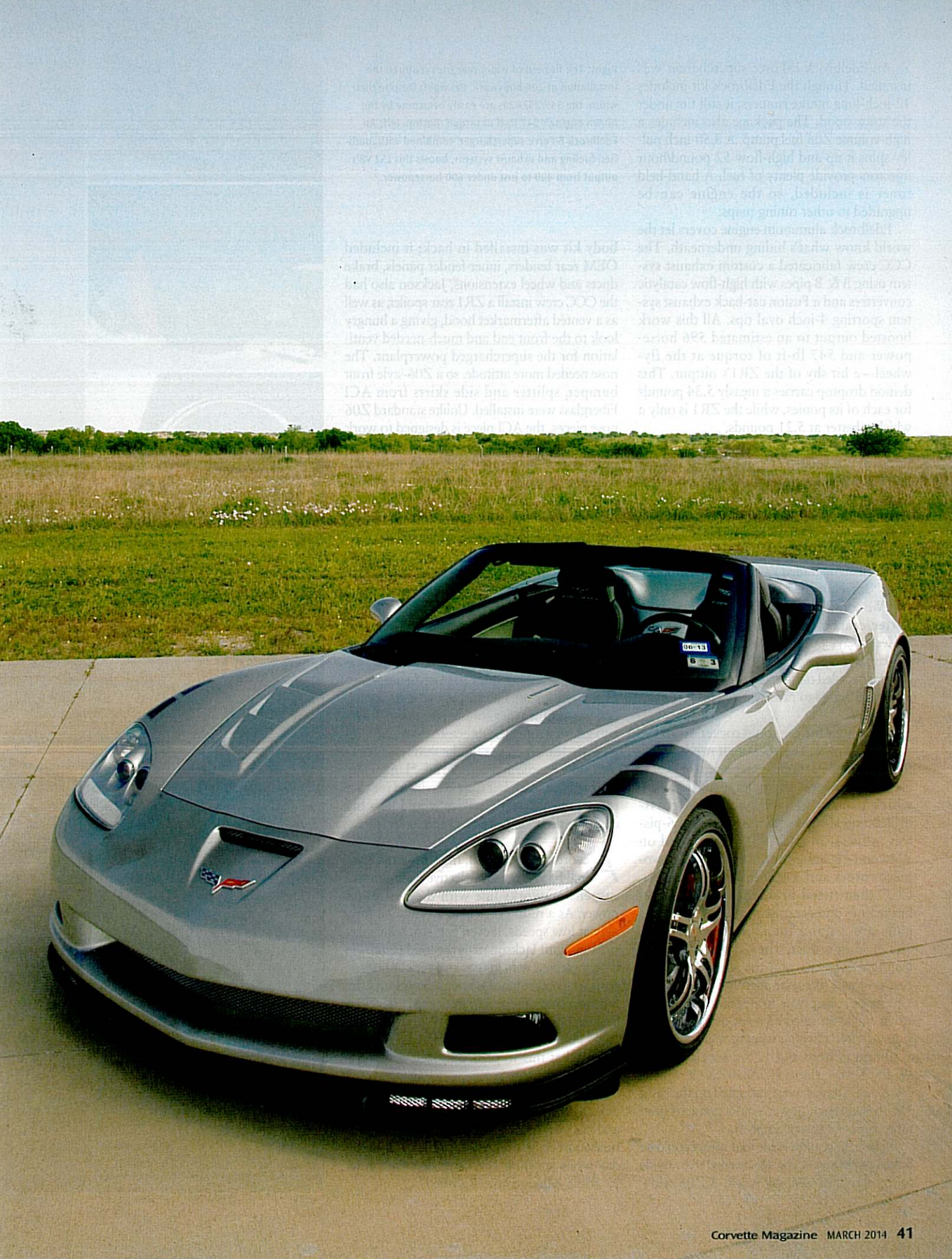
Back in the late '60s, Corvette buyers could pair optional, high-output engines with an automatic transmission. If you wanted your '68 Corvette to have a 430-horsepower, 427-cubic-inch V8 and a Turbo Hydra-Matic slushbox, no problem. Those days are long since gone. The C4 ZR1 was a manual-shift-only affair, as were the C5 and C6 Z06s; the same was true of the 638-hp ZR1. With the 2013 427 Convertible, Chevy offered its first high-output convertible since 1974—to the delight of many droptop aficionados—but it could only be had with a stick. Today, if you want a big-horsepower automatic Corvette, you have to build it yourself, which is exactly what the owner of this '07 convertible did.

Texan John Jackson had owned three Corvettes, a Porsche and a BMW before he and his wife, Renee, bought this C6 in 2011. "I saw it beside the road at a local dealership, and the top was down, so I had to stop," says Jackson, a funeral director in Tyler, Texas. He has a weakness for convertibles and prefers automatic transmissions, so the silver ragtop was an ideal choice.

A feud with the owner of a local gym he once attended inspired Jackson to start an

upgrade program on his new toy. The gym owner had recently purchased a ZR1 and made disparaging comments of Jackson's base-engined model; its stock 6.0-liter LS2's 400-horsepower output was not enough for bragging rights. Jackson began thinking of ways to improve his C6's performance, as well as its appearance. "I started buying books immediately and looking for upgrade ideas," he says. After Jackson worked up a list of things he wanted to change, he sought out a shop that could perform the work. It was his wife who found Carr's Corvettes and Customs (CCC) on the Internet. The Plano, Texas outfit is about an hour west of the Jacksons' East Texas residence.

The CCC team started with the engine. "If you just want to bump power up by about 60 horsepower you could add long-tube headers, a [computer] tune and a cold-air kit," explains Carr Campbell. "But for easy ZR1-like performance, the blower is the way to go. Adding a supercharger results in a car that idles better, has better road manners and more torque than a normally aspirated engine with a big cam and other modifications."



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body kit was mated in back; it included
OEM rear fenders, inner fender panels, brake
discs and wheel extensions. Jackson also had
the COC crew install a ZR1 rear spoiler as well
as a vented aluminum hood giving a burly
look to the front end and much-needed vent
for the supercharged powerplant. The
nose needed more intake so a 200-wide front
bumper splitter and side skirts from ACI
Performance were installed. Unlike standard Z06

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world know what's hiding underneath. The
COC crew fabricated a custom exhaust sys-
tem using 2.5-inch high-flow catalytic con-
verters and a Fusion rear-back exhaust sys-
tem sporting 4-inch oval tips. All this work
boosted output to an estimated 298 horse-
power and 247 lb-ft of torque at the fly-
wheel—a bit shy of the ZR1's output. The
bump drop comes a mighty 234 pounds
for each of its pistons, while the ZR1 is only a
pound shy of 251 pounds.

An Edelbrock E-Force supercharger was installed. Though the Edelbrock kit includes 12-inch-long intake runners, it still fits under the stock hood. The package also includes a high-volume Z06 fuel pump. A 3.50-inch pulley spins it up and high-flow 52 pound/hour injectors provide plenty of fuel. A hand-held tuner is included, so the engine can be upgraded to other tuning maps.

Edelbrock aluminum engine covers let the world know what's hiding underneath. The CCC crew fabricated a custom exhaust system using B & B pipes with high-flow catalytic converters and a Fusion cat-back exhaust system sporting 4-inch oval tips. All this work boosted output to an estimated 596 horsepower and 547 lb-ft of torque at the flywheel—a bit shy of the ZR1's output. This demon droptop carries a measly 5.34 pounds for each of its ponies, while the ZR1 is only a whisker better at 5.21 pounds.

Campbell noted that they could have used turbos and generated even more power, but in his experience they require a lot more packaging work, are harder to keep cool, are more expensive and produce less low-end torque than a supercharger. "The blower has the manners of a stock Corvette at low speeds, and the horsepower of an upgraded Z06 on top," Campbell adds. "It's really the best of both worlds."

"We considered swapping the engine for a hotter crate motor and then adding the blower," says Jackson. Although the thought of accelerating past a ZR1 had its appeal, he has since cooled on the idea. "Everyone I drive up beside wants to race as it is," he explains.

Now that the car could rocket down the road faster than a Z06, it needed a little help in the stopping department. CCC installed Wilwood 6R Superlite front brakes, which feature 14-inch two-piece, cross-drilled and slotted rotors and forged 6-piston calipers. In back, the shop bolted on Wilwood 4R Superlites, with 14-inch, two-piece rotors and 4-piston forged calipers. CCC then fitted braided, stainless-steel brake lines and ceramic pads. "The ceramic pads are a good idea," says Campbell. "They don't dust, they don't squeal if installed correctly and the rotors don't get rust on them like with metallic pads."

The next step was to upgrade the rolling stock. Jackson selected a set of West Coast Corvette 946 chrome wheels, measuring 9.5 x 19-inch in front and 12 x 20-inch in back. Wide Nitto tires (275/30ZR19 front, 345/25ZR20 rear) were mounted on the rims. "With that much power you're going to need more rubber," says Campbell.

Before those ultra-wide rear meats could be bolted on, however, changes needed to be made to the standard C6 bodywork. A Z06 wide-

Right: The fitment of wider rear tires required the installation of Z06 bodywork. Far right: Despite their width, the 345/25ZR20s are easily overcome by the blown engine's 547 lb-ft of torque. Bottom left: An Edelbrock E-Force supercharger, combined with modified fueling and exhaust systems, boosts this LS2 V8's output from 400 to just under 600 horsepower.

body kit was installed in back; it included OEM rear fenders, inner-fender panels, brake ducts and wheel extensions. Jackson also had the CCC crew install a ZR1 rear spoiler, as well as a vented aftermarket hood, giving a hungry look to the front end and much-needed ventilation for the supercharged powerplant. The nose needed more attitude, so a Z06-style front bumper, splitter and side skirts from ACI Fiberglass were installed. Unlike standard Z06 nose pieces, the ACI piece is designed to work with the standard (narrower) C6 front fenders. But the CCC guys weren't through with appearance mods yet; they also custom-fabricated polished stainless-steel vent grilles.

Jackson opted to retain the original Machine Silver Metallic color, which was duly sprayed over the revised bodywork by CCC painter Keith Hickman. Two C6 hash-mark decals, as available on Grand Sports, were applied on each side of the hood. Finally, the front fog lights were upgraded to HID lamps.

The standard gray interior color was not to Jackson's liking, so he had the stock seat covers replaced with custom 2013-style ones from *Leatherseats.com*. Finished in two-tone, black-and-gray leather, they feature perforated inserts and gray stitching. *Leatherseats.com* also supplied the leather covers for the shift lever, parking-brake handle and console lid. "I originally wanted new seats, but Carr convinced me that reworking the seat electrics would be a big complication," explains Jackson.

According to Jackson, the Corvette's original F55 Magnetic Selective Ride Control suspension works fine with the newfound power. As a result, the car still rides comfortably at low speeds. It even gets stock mileage, right up until Jackson nails the loud pedal. He is very pleased with his car and very impressed with its performance, though he admits the modifications didn't come cheap. "It's been more expensive than I thought," says Jackson. "I've invested over \$100,000 in it." But he knows that this was the only way to get the Corvette he wanted.

The car looks great—it was awarded a best-in-class trophy at the Dallas Autorama—and has performance comparable with a ZR1, housed in bodywork just itching for a sunny day while sporting a transmission that shifts for itself. Mission accomplished! ○



