

## 2006 Chevrolet Corvette ZO6 Just Flat Amazing

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For: The Wheel

OK – this is a daunting challenge...most of you are very aware of the 2006 Corvette ZO6 by now – maybe have already read one or more articles. What in the world can we add to what has already been said? No problemo...senor – we have plenty to say, and hopefully a personal insight into the enthusiast’s perspective on this pre-eminent enthusiast car. We initially spent much gray matter on the title of the piece...ideas like, “The New ZO6, the Arnold Schwarzenegger of sports cars...” nope, that is rife with political incorrectness or just plain controversial, or “The New ZO6, the King of the Road (KR)” – nope, that will tick off the Ford folks...or “The New ZO6, bringing a Howitzer to the duck hunt” – won’t work – will upset the animal rights folks...Ok, play it straight David – “The new ZO6, an amazing, intimidating, and downright incredible sports car.”

We have seen several new ZO6’s show up at Hooked On Driving events in the recent months. First, I’d like to thank those drivers for hiding the potential that they were dealing with every time they hit the track. To say the least, restraint and judgment are the most important “skills” needed to drive this car briskly. Let’s review what Chevrolet hath wrought:



Most relevant statistics:

**Weight** of this two-seat hatchback coupe: 3132 lbs

**Wheelbase:** (up from the C5): 105”

**Overall length:** (down from the C5): 175”

**Construction:** Aluminum frame, magnesium engine cradle and roof assembly, fiberglass body

Carbon fiber front fenders wheel housings and floorboards

**Brakes:** Disc – 14/13” cross-drilled rotors front/rear with 6 pistons front, 4 pistons rear

**Suspension:** Four wheel independent, Unequal length forged aluminum A arms, composite transverse spring in rear

**Wheels:** 18” X 9.5” front, 19” X 12” rear – aluminum

**Tires:** 275/35 X 18 front, 325/30 X 19 rear (yikes)

**Engine:** LS7: All aluminum, overhead valve, pushrod V8, 7 liter (ah..the magical 427 ci) 505 HP, 470 ft lbs of torque (adequate)

**Oil distribution:** dry sump (serious race car technology)

**Transmission:** Rock crusher, short throw 6 speed manual with 3.42 final drive

**Gas mileage:** (yes, this car gets decent mileage!!) 16 city 26 highway – OK let’s get GM a lifetime achievement award for these numbers – the fastest car they’ve ever mass produced gets 26 miles per gallon!! Simply amazing!!

No – these are not the specs for the Racer’s Dentist GT America Howe Chassis race car, no – they’re not from a Daytona Prototype, or the Le Mans C6R GT1 Race car – they’re from a good old Corvette having been enthusiastically taken to its outer limits, followed by the placement of a license plate on the back of this otherwise race-worthy car.

Throughout the literature and spec sheets on the ZO6, there are references to “keeping the car on track” or comments like, “The power to weight ratio of the ZO6 is better than the Viper or Ferrari 430 due to its aluminum frame, weighing a mere 278 lbs but providing superior chassis stiffness.” Folks, the ZO6 is not a dolled up big block Vette with hood scoops, this is a world class, and in most cases, world beating sports car of the highest order.

Driving the ZO6 is an incredible experience for any driver, and downright dangerous for anyone who doesn’t know what they’re doing. Climb in, fire up the 427, look out over the long prow with the fender bulges – I’ll have to admit to being old enough to remember a beat up 1969 big block Vette I owned many years ago. Yes, with all the refinement and performance of this car, you will still feel like it could be a 1969 with a T-Top above you, if you have the good fortune to have experienced this in “the day.” But very soon, the comparisons to ’69 will start to fade. There is a sense of taughtness to this car – not only the stiff chassis that Chevy brags of, but simply a feel of quality – that things are really screwed together, that is far superior to even the predecessor C5 version of the Vette. There were no creaks, and the improvement of the ride that came with moving the wheels further out to the corners, while reducing the bulk overhang is welcomed. One no longer has to understand a sense of pointing the bow of a ship (long nose) in advance of needing to actually have the car turned. A confession here – what we’re saying is that we never really loved the super-long nose and its sense of driving from the back of the car that came with previous Corvettes. Chevy has made a big statement, and compromise with the Corvette purists, to find a balance here. Yes, this car has a long nose, but no – it’s not so prominent that it takes away from the feeling of intimacy with the car. One of the first welcome features appears before the driver leaves the parking lot: the variable-ratio steering. Light as a feather in tight spots and low

speeds, you can actually feel it tense a bit as you pick up the pace and start actually driving the car. By the time you're at speed, the steering is firm, crisp, and gives an excellent feel of the road below without getting heavy. Nice job Chevy. Another marvel is the light clutch feel for a 470 ft lbs-of-torque engine. Ford – please study what Chevy did here – the ZO6 clutch is a LOT lighter than even the 300 horse Mustang GT. Touché Chevy! OK – I know – we obsess on seats...and we simply do NOT understand the Corvette seats and never have. With the upper section of the seat still almost as flexible as the C5 seat, this is a HUGE issue with us enthusiasts. The Mitsubishi Evo seat is better, the Subaru Sti seat is better, the Nissan 350Z seat is better. Come on Chevy, if the more mature Corvette owners are insisting on a sporty seat with plenty of “flexibility” to accommodate varying sizes, ok – put that seat in the standard Corvette. But for goodness sake, in this awesome, super-fast two seater, there should at least be an option for a proper sport seat! Sorry – but that is the one thing that is a huge negative here, and it is huge. We think some owners will have to say – OK, I'll drop a couple grand on Recaros and drive the hot rod from the Chevy dealer to the car toy store to do the installation. Please forgive - tirade over. The next experience in the drive is the gear shift and transmission – another Chevy engineering home run. With a very modest final drive, the car seems geared correctly and it's a joy to “stir the drink” with the short throw shifter. All in all – your first impressions of the ZO6 will be a well-founded sense that this car is exceedingly drive-able as a commuter car, grocery getter or even soccer practice pick up appliance.

But if that's what you're using this lethal weapon for you should have your head examined. At worst, it's a chick/guy magnet. At best, it is to say the least, when driven well, the car that could finally get you put in jail for more than 4 hours. The ZO6 is brutally fast. We mentioned the gearing being right. Well, truth be told – we really don't know this for sure, as we did not have a chance to drive it on the Autobahn, which is the ONLY place you could really determine this. Our experience was: Whenever and wherever we jumped on the power of the LS7, we could only hold on through one rev range before we were in jeopardy of getting arrested, flying off a freeway ramp, driving into a tree along the road, or any number of woes that occur when one drives too fast for conditions. To say the least, any time we got on the power hard, we subsequently had to get on the brakes hard and in a hurry. What happens with the LS7 is that there is very nice power starting as low as 2500 RPM's. You'll be lulled into a sense of, “Now this is really fun,” but then, at 4500 RPM's, your head will be splatted into the headrest and you had better have everything lined up or you're going for a ride. The acceleration felt to me, stronger than that of the GTA car with a Tony Odo racing 350ci engine that we won the Over class at the 4 hour Enduro a few years ago. Its at this point that I propose that only people that have had substantial advanced driver training on a race track be allowed to turn off the Active Handling system on the ZO6. Combining engine management with ABS brakes, this system kicked on several times and was not the aggressive intruder that its predecessor had in the C5. This system is mandatory to keep drivers and passengers pointed down the road. Only on track would we suggest any hard driving of this car without the system on. Yes, this sounds like we're wussing out – so be it. Half throttle on a freeway ramp and the ZO6 came around on me (showing a modest .95 lateral G's on the head's up display G meter), only to settle nicely into the direction I had intended, all

without fanfare or a feeling of loss. Handling? Oh yeah...she turns, she'll do a sweet turn-in, and throttle oversteer out all day. Enough to challenge and reward the best drivers. Ride? Certainly the taught ride is called for in a car with this mandate and pedigree. But we must admit that the ride is on the soft end of harsh. Enough to be a bit disconcerting for a long freeway haul. We'd love to see the selective ride option offered on the ZO6 that might give us a softer damper setting for non-track driving.

Our conclusion? Wow, did Chevrolet make a supercar. No doubt about it – throw away what you think of past Corvettes, this is an amazing, superfast, super fun car to drive that has only minor compromises to live with day-to-day. But here is where you may get a shock. Maybe this car is too fast for the general public. I fear that the insurance companies, NHTSA, and whoever else out there that can infringe on our rights, will notice this car. And not in a good way. Maybe this is the ultimate compliment – a car that's just too fast and too good. As a guy who runs a performance driving program, this car is going to be good for business. But the next time I see a C6 ZO6 show up at the track to run with us, they'll get a bit of extra attention from us. This is one heck of a grown up toy that can provide much fun, hoots and hollers, but could bite you if you lost your focus just a bit. Well done Chevrolet – now lets say that enough is enough....