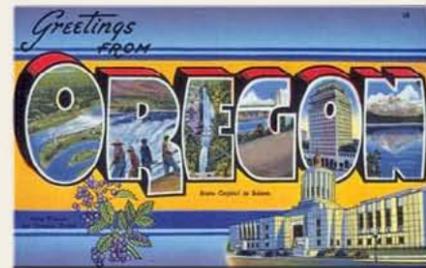


Celebrating America's newest car museum in America's newest future collectible car

WE TOUR THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST IN CHEVROLET'S RED-HOT CAMARO SS CONVERTIBLE AS LEMAY—AMERICA'S CAR MUSEUM OPENS ITS DOORS FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH A BIG SPLASH

BY JOE SAGE



Sometimes life hands you an irresistible convergence. We had had the LeMay Museum's first big event, the Hard Hat & High Heels gala, on our radar for months. We looked forward to seeing the roof sealed and the lights on at America's Car Museum, having most recently gotten a peek at progress while driving through Tacoma over 4th of July weekend. As the date loomed, we learned we would be in Maine that same week, for a new vehicle launch. The idea of flying from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon, was even harder to resist. Through careful scheduling, we were able to book the two trips back to back, though we ended up in Phoenix overnight on the westward leg, a chance to transfer images, files and paperwork between trips, and of course to warm up and dry out between the coast of Maine and the Pacific Northwest, what with the Valley still in triple digits.

BIG PROGRESS AT LEMAY—AMERICA'S CAR MUSEUM

It's every contractor's dream (or every contractor's customer's dream) to be on time and under budget. In fact, it's usually a running joke. But in this case, they have come through in a big way. We joined the crew chiefs of JTM Construction, the general contractor, at our dinner table during the Hard Hat & High Heels gala—the first event to take place on the Museum's nine-acre campus—and they were rightly proud of their achievement. All was in place for the gala, and all is on track for completion in time for the spring 2012 Grand Opening event.

Encouraged to dress in "construction chic," attendees had costumes ranging from nothing at all (well, suits or gowns), to safety vests, hard hats and boots, to—well, imagine the Oscars or a royal wedding, but with all that hat creativity applied to protective construction headgear, and you start to get the picture.

The official "guest of honor" for the event was the Museum's 1927 LaSalle 303 Roadster, though the evening was actually emceed by television personality Rob Weller of *Entertainment Tonight* fame, and Museum President and CEO David Madeira gave the keynote speech. "The reaction has been tremendous and gratify-



The metal roof on LeMay—America's Car Museum is almost complete as we visit in late September (facing page and above right). The top went up and down many times on our 2012 Camaro 2SS convertible, as showers and blue skies took turns. Above top, we take the Camaro to Anderson Island, accessible by county ferry.

ing for our team, which has been working for years to get to this point," says Madeira. "We still have a lot of hard work to do in the next nine months, but this was an important milestone because it signifies 'we're open for business—now!'" Although the grand opening is next year, the Museum is ready to host meetings, conventions, parties and other events. Madeira noted there were events already scheduled from this fall into 2014.

Madeira also announced that the Museum would soon have its Certificate of Occupancy from the City of Tacoma. As JTM finishes the final phase of building construction, focus will shift to the installation of the museum's interior elements and exhibitry, and to moving in the cars. ACM gave the sold-out crowd of members, benefactors and board members what was for most of them a first look inside the four-level, 165,000-square-foot facility. By opening day, it will be filled with 500 cars and a wide range of exhibits and facilities. (For a lot more detail, see our May/June issue.)

The Hard Hat & High Heels event included a reception, dinner, silent and live auctions, plus tours inside the facility, which showcased some of ACM's 500-plus automobiles, including the 1927 LaSalle and the most recent acquisition, a 1965 Lotus 35 Formula 1 race car donated to the museum by ACM board member and Tacoma native John Dimmer and his wife Marilyn.

The Hard Hat & High Heels event was part of ACM's \$12 million "Race to the Finish" campaign, a 2-year

drive to raise funds supporting collection preparation, exhibit development, educational programming, student internships, library acquisitions and archive development. More than 650 partygoers attended the fundraiser. In addition to ticket sales, the auction of some 130 items raised over \$550,000 for the Museum.

THE 2012 CHEVROLET CAMARO 2SS CONVERTIBLE

Through the luck of the draw (and from a different press pool), we had a brand new Camaro SS convertible for this trip. Larry Edsall had the same car a few months earlier, which he reported on after a classic northern Arizona Route 66 drive (see the July/August issue). Well, it wasn't exactly the same car—his was in fact a 2011 while ours was a 2012—but any variables between the two are negligible, as they were both 2SS six-speed manuals. (There is a horsepower boost for 2012 on the SS automatic.) The main differences were [a] that his trip was in the dry high desert while ours was mostly at sea level in the wet Pacific Northwest, and [b] while he was able to pack wisely with the car at hand, we packed for a multi-faceted air trip without consideration to the trunk we were about to encounter. Luggage and the convertible top were inseparably entwined.

Edsall noted the pros and cons of this at the time. "Let's get the least impressive things about the 2011

HARD HAT & HIGH HEELS

We first met the gang from LeMay—America's Car Museum last January during Arizona's collector auctions. The project was so compelling, we flew up there several times to tour it and check progress (see the May/June issue), from fresh concrete, to the first roof arches, to the installation of the roof sheetmetal. The grand opening is not until spring 2012, but it was time to show off progress to the movers and shakers of Tacoma and the members who have made the new museum possible. The Hard Hat & High Heels gala in September was part formal affair and a large part costume funfest. Funds were raised for the museum through ticket sales and auctions. Though not yet set in cement, we even found our own commemorative brick. Order your own brick, or become a member, at lemaymuseum.org.



KEEP RIGHT >>

NEW CAMARO BOOK

It took GM a couple of years to react to the tremendous success of the first Ford Mustang, but when they did, they did it in style with the Chevrolet Camaro—and the pony car battle began. Author Darwin Holmstrom and photographer David Newhardt capture Camaro history from that beginning right up to the dramatic fifth generation. Their 348-page hardcover book with 280 full color photos, *Camaro: Five Generations of Performance*, documents the story of the race to capture the emerging youth market in the 1960s and Chevy's efforts to out-muscle the Mustang. Historic photos from GM illustrate how the designs and concepts were created, along with the advertising. The book covers all the Camaro pace cars and even aftermarket modifications of Callaway. The 9"x 10.3" book is on sale at bookstores or from the publisher, Motorbooks, a Division of Quayside Publishing Group (\$29.99). For more information or to order, visit www.motorbooks.com. ■



NEW: MOST POWER EVER

Chevy engineers have finalized numbers for the 2012 Camaro ZL1 at 580 hp and 556 lb-ft of torque, making it the most-powerful production Camaro ever. Ensuring the supercharged 6.2-liter ZL1 will handle the power are advanced powertrain and chassis technologies, including exclusive Performance Traction Management with five modes. Suspension is third-generation Magnetic Ride Control, which can be set for Tour, Sport or Track. The ZL1 will be offered with a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission. The Tremec manual features 30 percent more torque capacity than that in the Camaro SS. Similarly, the Hydra-Matic 6L90 automatic has been strengthened to handle the power, plus has three drive modes: an economical Drive setting, an aggressive Sport mode and a Manual setting with total manual control for maximum performance and no automatic shifts. ■



The Long Beach Peninsula coast is officially a Washington state highway—you can drive on it. This looks wet to us, but it has been a dry year, so the sand is largely impassable other than to big low-torque trucks. Luggage logistics are limited: pack wisely. Southwestern WA has a surprising variety of good Mexican restaurants.

Chevrolet Camaro convertible out of the way quickly," he wrote. "The top needs about 20 seconds to power itself up or down, which may seem an eternity in this day and age. Nonetheless, don't overlook the fact that, at long last, you can buy a Camaro with a TOP THAT POWERS ITSELF UP AND DOWN." Well, there is that. Larry continues, "Let's see, what else? Well, the trunk isn't huge, and when the top goes down it takes some of the available space. But once again, don't overlook the fact that THE TOP POWERS ITSELF DOWN so you can enjoy not only the open road but also the open air."

Bingo. We had to put a larger-than-usual roller suitcase in the back seat. We might have benefited from a system to belt that in, but without any traumatic experiences from flying luggage, and when the Pacific Northwest rain let up (the overall majority of the time), we could indeed forget about that while driving with the top down. Nice. When we stopped for lunch or overnight, though, we had to jockey back and forth among the back seat, the convertible top controls inside, and the aforementioned trunk, until luggage was securely stowed for security in our absence. There is more than one possible scenario for all this, though the overall situation applies to things other than luggage, as well.

ON THE ROAD IN THE CAMARO SS CONVERTIBLE

So here we were in not one but two other states, and passing through any number of small towns and medi-

um-size cities, in a bright Inferno Orange 426-horsepower convertible. We had heard stories, but we did not get arrested. Cruise control and a well-executed head-up display helped.

We did make a few notes. The most recurrent topic was the luggage and convertible top conflict. When you buy your Camaro SS convertible, make sure to grab a couple of flexible duffles, if you don't have them already. That will solve everything.

Arizona's beautiful, smooth highways may be the explanation, but while Larry had found that "the cockpit is amazingly quiet and unwindblown when the top is down," we noted lots of road, tire and wind noise, though we also noted an improvement on a newer stretch of asphalt. Tires are always a variable, and we noted that this set's hum could be exhausting on a long trip, even with the top up (more insulation would help).

But that's a characteristic of performance tires, and performance is the name of this car's game. Another characteristic of the tires was a bit of darting and wandering at high speed. Stay alert.

When we drove the new Camaro coupe last year, we confirmed what's apparent from the outside, that visibility is limited and the cabin can feel mildly claustrophobic. Is this cured in the droptop? To a degree, yes, though the very small windshield and very big A-pillars

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PNW TRAVEL NOTES

On most trips to the LeMay Museum, we fly to Seattle and Tacoma is our southernmost point. For our most recent prior trip, we flew to Seattle but drove southwest to the Washington coast and also northeast to the North Cascades, making Tacoma the center point. For this trip, we flew to Portland, Oregon (one day after leaving Portland, Maine). We drove west, grabbed dinner in Astoria OR, then crossed over the Columbia River and drove to Long Beach on the southwest Washington coast. This time, Tacoma was our northernmost point. In Tacoma, we finally visited the Washington State History Museum and the Museum of Glass, which, along with the Tacoma Art Museum, form the Museum Corridor LeMay joins, and took the Pierce County Ferry to Anderson Island. Our return flight was also out of Portland. ■



The 2012 Camaro 2SS convertible on Anderson Island. As fate would have it, our Camaro hooked up with a hardtop overnight back in Tacoma. The coupe was up from Oregon, as were we in this case, though our Camaro had California plates, so popular (not) up that way. Deep forests provide some topdown shade.

still leave you hunkered down and peering out through that front slit at a traffic light.

Nitpicks. Overall, the photos tell the story: it's a Camaro SS convertible—what's not to like?

THE WIDE-RANGING CAMARO LINEUP

The Camaro lineup includes 1LS, 2LS, 1LT, 2LT, 1SS and 2SS models (with a ZL1 on the way; see sidebar). The LS and LT models have a 323-hp 3.6L V6, with base prices ranging from \$23,200 to \$28,350 for the coupe. The SS models are powered by a 426-hp 6.2L V8, with base prices of \$31,850 and \$35,450 for the 1SS and 2SS, respectively, and again for the coupe. That's about 32 percent more horsepower for 25 to 37 percent more cost; whether the SS wins the bang-for-the-buck compare depends upon the exact compare.

Your own comparison may well also factor in fuel economy. The V6 is rated at 17/28 mpg city/highway (20 combined) with a six-speed manual transmission, or 19/30 (22) with a six-speed automatic. The V8 in the SS is rated at 16/24 mpg city/highway (19 combined) with a manual transmission or 15/24 (18) with an automatic. Those numbers are close enough overall to be negated, or even overlap, depending how much lead you have in your foot. Interestingly, the V8 rates higher mileage with a stick, which to us is a win-win. Whether the V6 buyer will be after the manual shift, or maximum fuel economy, or both, that decision is a little harder to

make, as the V6 with automatic is clearly the mileage champ. On the other hand, if your main goals are power and manual control, the decision is easy, if budget allows: go with the SS.

The other combined emotional-and-budget decision involves the convertible top: whereas a V6 coupe starts at \$23,200 for the 1LS, the base convertible is a 1LT starting at \$30,100 (the base for a 1LT coupe is \$25,200). Apples and oranges. If budget rules, the 1LS coupe wins. If it's a ragtop-coupe decision, then 1LT-to-1LT is a closer game. If you're also comparing the SS models in convertible form, their base prices are \$37,900 and \$40,600 (1SS/2SS).

An overall price range from about \$23k to \$41k offers something for everybody, on the one hand (part of the original pony car formula from the '60s), while offering some headscratching calculations to anyone starting the process with a blank slate.

Our Camaro SS convertible in the Northwest was loaded to the gills, with four columns of features included in the base price. Add an interior accent package for \$500 (the kind of thing that would cost thousands on a European car) and an RS package for \$1350 (HID headlamps with LED rings, 20-inch specialty wheels) and Inferno Orange Metallic paint (\$325), plus \$900 destination charge, and this one is out the door for \$43,675. For that—at least until the ZL1 arrives—you will find yourself at the pinnacle of the Camaro lineup. ■

