

Bad Boy

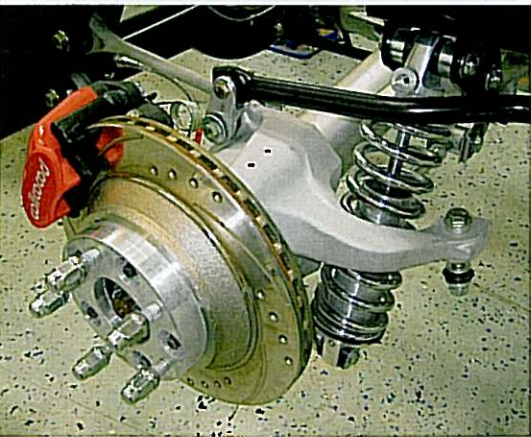
This Corvette owner knew he wanted a C2, he just didn't know that he wanted one with C4 suspension and a blown C5 engine—until he saw it being built.

| BY HAROLD PACE | PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR |





Above: The '65 coupe as Carr Campbell found it in 2004. Below, top to bottom: The replacement frame mounts C4-based suspension; the C5 Z06 crate engine was treated to a supercharger and a host of other mods, cranking its output up to 521 horsepower at wheels; Wilwood brake calipers clamp Baer rotors.



When Devin Droemer was a child, a friend's mother had a Sting Ray coupe. Some of his fondest memories are of riding to school stuffed in the luggage area of the coolest car in the drop-off lane. Since then he has owned a nice assortment of Corvettes, but he never got that Sting Ray out of his mind. Thanks to Carr Campbell and the crew at Carr's Corvettes and Customs (CCC) in Plano, Texas, Droemer now has the car he always wanted.

In 2004, Campbell found a 1965 coupe on eBay and snapped it up for himself. It had only 41,000 miles on the clock and was extremely original. Although it was pristine on the outside, things were not so rosy under the fiberglass. It had been kept in Pennsylvania and suffered badly from salted roads and from being stored for years in a dirt-floored barn. The chassis was a rusty mess, and the car's specs weren't that spectacular either: It had a base 250-horsepower 327-cubic-inch V8, a 3-speed manual transmission and no options. However, Campbell was looking for a donor car for a restomod project, not a restoration candidate. "I wouldn't resto-mod a restorable car with an intact drivetrain," he says, "and a rusty Corvette with no options wouldn't be cost-effective to restore."

Campbell drove the C2 around for a while, all the time scheming to upgrade it to state-of-the-art form. Soon after he and the crew at CCC started the transformation, Droemer, one of Campbell's best friends, dropped by the shop and fell in love with the car. "He decided he had to have it, and how could I refuse?" asks Campbell with a smile.

In inventorying what would remain and what would go, CCC put the rusty old chassis on the latter list; it was replaced with a Street Shop C2 frame sporting 1996 C4 suspension front and rear. QA1 coil-over shocks and Hyperco 250-pound springs were fitted, along with a Dana 44 differential carrying 3.45 gears. Since big power was in the offing, CCC bumped the brakes up to Baer cross-drilled and slotted two-piece rotors (13 inches front, 12 inches rear) with Wilwood calipers. A Wilwood dual-reservoir master cylinder was installed to provide a firm pedal. Power rack-and-pinion steering was fitted, as well. For the wheel/tire choice, CCC went with 18-inch C6 Z06 chrome rims (8.5 inch front, 9.5 inch rear) shod with Kumho Ecsta Sport rubber (245/40ZR18 front, 275/40ZR18 rear).

When it came to the powerplant, CCC started with a 2004-spec LS6 crate engine from GM Performance. Out of the box, this 5.7-liter V8 is rated at 405 horsepower. However, Campbell was looking for a lot more output so he added a Magnuson supercharger. Since Magnuson doesn't make a blower kit for the

LS6 engine, CCC started with a kit intended for a late-model Pontiac GTO and fabricated everything to make it work, including a custom air-to-water intercooler, drive-by-wire throttle body and pedal assembly. Needless to say, there was a lot of cutting, welding and fabrication required to get the blower, intercooler system and associated plumbing to fit under the hood. But all the hard work paid off handsomely at the dyno: The engine pumped out 521 horsepower and 520 pounds-feet of torque at the rear wheels.

The Magnacharger MP112 blower forces a lot of air into the small-block V8. To speed up the flow of spent gases, CCC Extrude-Honed and ported the factory LS6 exhaust manifolds; it then gave them a ceramic coating. The manifolds dump into custom 3-inch diameter stainless-steel chambered side pipes joined by fabricated stainless-steel intermediate pipes. Stock C2 side-pipe covers help retain a period look, but do nothing to deaden the engine's mighty roar.

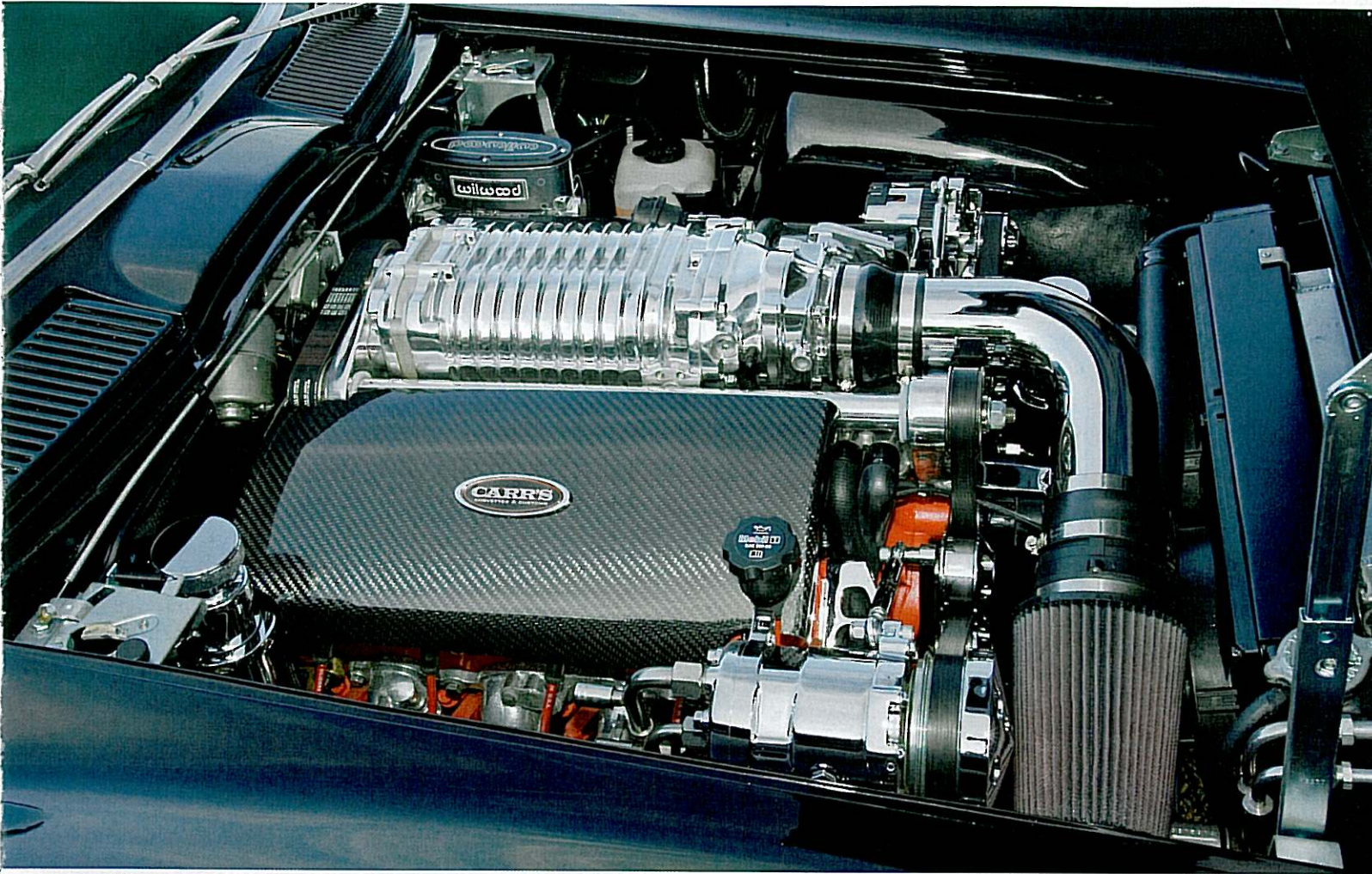
"The first time we started it," recalls Campbell, "Devin's five-year-old son, Berin, and wife, Kathy, were standing right there. Berin ran out of the shop and hid in their family car!" When he was finally coaxed back in, all Berin could say was, "That is a *bad* boy!"

Although a 3-speed manual was the standard Corvette transmission through 1969, few buyers wanted them and they are rarely found today—but his fact doesn't make them any more desirable. CCC replaced the 3-speed in the '65 with a GM 4L70E 4-speed automatic transmission, suitably rebuilt and modified for high-output duty by Phoenix Transmission in Weatherford, Texas. It is controlled via a CCC-modified ShiftWorks lever.

Except for the reproduction big-block hood from Corvette Image, the '65's body was kept completely original. Seeing as this is no National Corvette Restorers Society car, the panel fit and gaps were manicured to show standards. Trade Secret Auto Care in Plano did the prep and paint work. The exterior color is not Tuxedo Black, but at least it is a GM hue: 2003 Cadillac black. The headlights were treated to an HID conversion but the taillights are stock.

Once inside, you are quickly assured this is no standard '65. ProCar Elite Lumbar leather seats are comfy and provide much better side support than the originals. A soft synthetic suede material was used for the headliner, A- and B-pillar trim, halo molding and

Right, clockwise from top: With its carbon-fiber valve covers and modern mechanicals, there's nothing retro about this engine bay; the big-block hood is the only non-stock body part; interior is a mix of new and old.





The vintage side-pipe covers contrast with the tall, 18-inch C6 Z06 wheels, creating the visual tension that restomods are all about. The black paint is a 2003 Cadillac hue.

door panels. The carpet is black custom-made cut-pile. The dash pads are Al Knoch repros, mounting stock gauges that were visually restored and converted to electronic operation with red backlighting. A Flaming River leather-wrapped “D-Wheel” is mounted on a painted steel Ididit tilt column. The seatbelts are reproductions of the original units.

To keep the cabin quiet, DynaMat and DynaLiner sound-deadening material were installed. To keep it cool on hot Texas summer days, a Classic Auto Air “Perfect-Fit” air-conditioning system was modified to work around the supercharger packaging. To bring the stereo up to modern-day standards, the original ’65 AM/FM radio was converted to digital functionality with iPod and CD inputs. The custom-designed audio system features a hidden 8-speaker system with an 8-inch subwoofer. CCC custom-made the speaker and subwoofer enclosures.

I took the black C2 for a spin on a winding backroad to see just how much was resto and how much was mod. The engine fires right up and idles with a distinctive lope, much like a hot Corvette would have sounded in the 1960s. Droemer wanted the car to be edgy and loud, and it certainly gets plenty of attention, even before it comes into view. Everyone we passed turned to see what was making the racket, and when they saw the classic lines even bicyclists gave us the thumbs-up.

The C2 drives like a more powerful C4 Corvette, which makes sense with the C4 running gear underneath. This means firm suspension, crisp handling and a sports-car stiff ride on rough surfaces, but also much more direct steering. I was worried that the frame would not be rigid enough, but was pleasantly surprised to find the car free of body rattles and shakes. The unassisted

brakes are effective at bringing the speed down, but require a lot of leg muscles to operate; I would prefer power brakes for street use, and Campbell says that’s what he normally installs.

The engine thunders like a vintage big-block, but has more tire-squealing power than even the old 427 L89. It can idle in traffic without oiling the plugs and Droemer says it gets around 20 mpg on the highway (more than double my old L89). In addition, the superb air-conditioning system kept us cool in 100-degree-plus Texas heat.

Campbell and Droemer are both very happy with Black Ray, as they have named this C2 restomod. It was shown at the Dallas Autorama, where it won its first trophies and made even more fans. The moral of the story is to keep your eyes out for barn finds. Even if they aren’t restorable, they can still be killer Corvettes once again. ○