

# A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

A '63 Z06 is one of the most-coveted Corvettes of all time. Though this '64 lacks the Z06's split rear window, it has all the same go-fast goodies—and is even rarer.

BY HAROLD PACE PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR





Chevrolet has offered so many options, colors, special editions and drivetrain choices for the Corvette over the years that finding rare combinations can become an obsession. How many Fawn Beige '61s were built with red interiors, RPO469 engines, RPO686 brakes, RPO290 whitewalls, FOA109 windshield washers and FOA101 radio delete? Do you know? Do you care? But some option combos really do make a difference, and the pristine '64 on these pages represents one of the most interesting and rare mixes.

So, what do you call a '63 Sting Ray with the hottest engine—the 360-horsepower fuel-injected 327—the metallic racing-brake pack-

age, Borg-Warner T-10 gearbox, Positraction, heavy-duty suspension and a 36.5-gallon fuel tank? As any mid-year fanatic can tell you, this list adds up to only one thing—the fabled RPO Z06 package. But what do you call a '64 with the same options? Good question.

### The Ultimate Option

The Z06 Special Performance Equipment package was developed to help the Corvette be competitive in Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) A-Production racing. This was the top class for production-based sports cars and had been a battleground between the 1962 Corvettes, the new Jaguar XKE and the Ferrari 250 GT SWB coupes and Spyder Californias. With independent rear suspension, the

rapid DB4 in 1958. Mercedes switched to disc brakes on the front of its 300 SL Roadsters in 1961. This left the Corvette as the only sports car saddled with outdated drums.

However, Chevy did offer an updated optional brake package for 1963, using finned and vented cast-iron drums, wider sintered metallic brake linings, “elephant ear” brake scoops to direct air into the drums, vented backing plates, a unique dual master cylinder and a novel brake adjuster that worked going forward instead of backwards like the standard system (race cars don't back up). While J56 brakes were a big improvement over the stock binders, they still suffered from fade and were, in the end, no substitute for discs.

Heavy-duty suspension components were

included with the Z06 package, as well, including an improved rear transverse leaf spring with seven leaves (two less than stock), heavier front springs and a thicker one-inch front sway bar. Specially calibrated shocks rounded out the suspension upgrades.

The Z06 package was only available with certain other options, like the fuel-injected L84 327. Compared to the previous year's version, it featured an all-new two-part fuel-injection system with a larger plenum and improved drivability. With a 11.25:1 compression ratio and solid lifters, the L84 had plenty of muscle—it pumped out 360 horsepower, comfortably more than its European competition—



but proved temperamental to those who did not understand how to tune it. Other “mandatory options” were the Borg-Warner T10 4-speed gearbox and the proven Positraction limited-slip differential.

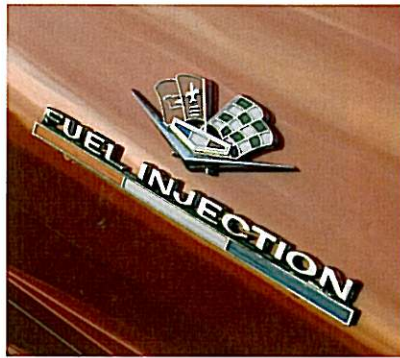
The Z06 package was initially only available on coupes, as Chevy planned to include a 36.5-gallon endurance-racing fuel tank which wouldn't fit in the convertible's body. Chevy intended to fit its new aluminum wheels with triple-eared knock-offs, but porosity problems resulted in them being deleted from the Z06 package before deliveries began in late 1962. The big fuel tank was also dropped from the Z06 package and made into standalone option N03. Eliminating these items lowered the price of the Z06 package



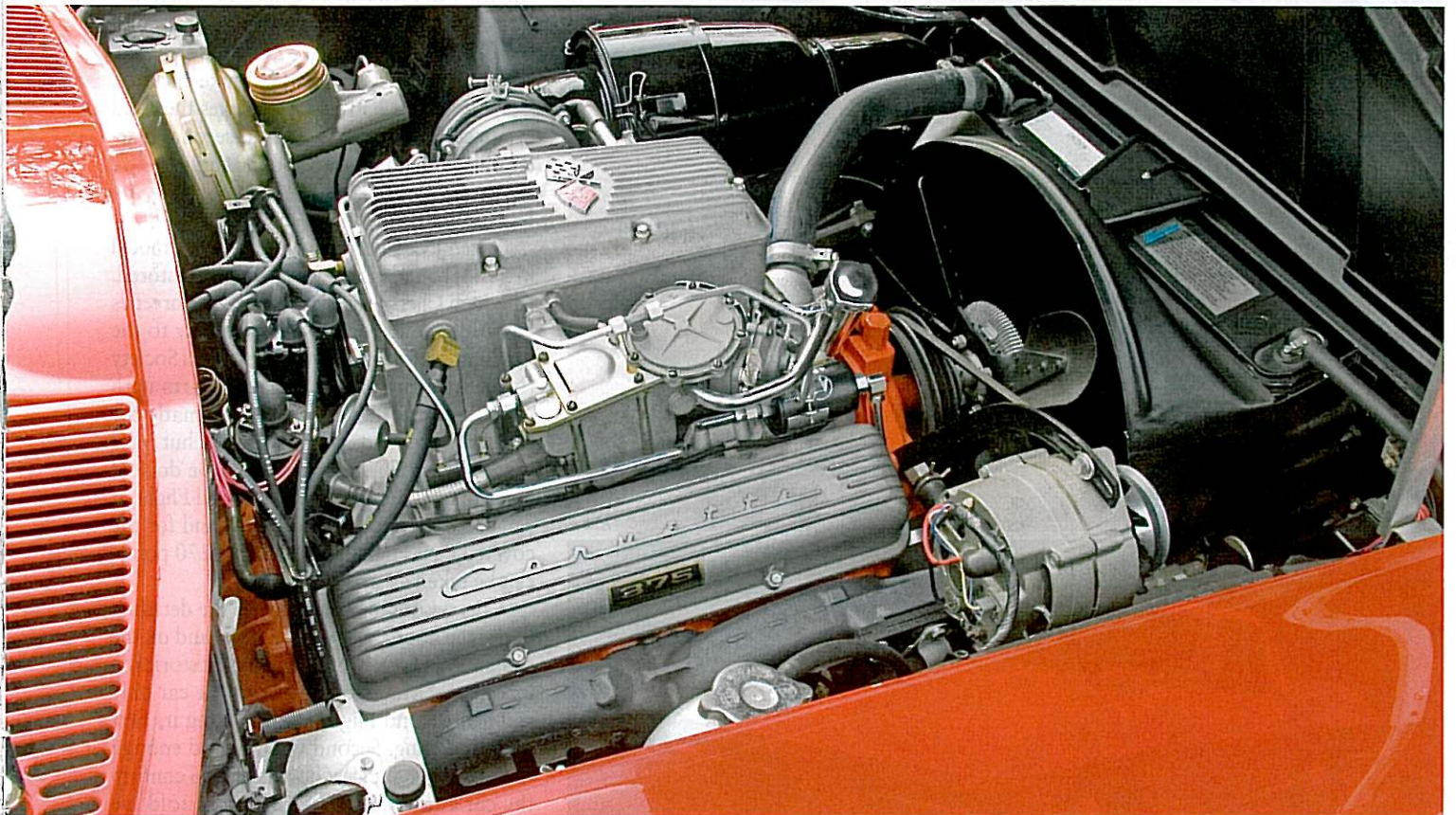
from \$1,818.14 to \$1,295.00, but the mandatory options still added over \$600 to the sticker. Bear in mind the base price of the '63 Sting Ray was only \$4,252, so this options group was not for the budget conscious.

### The Snake Strikes

In October 1962, the Corvette world was turned upside down during, ironically, a prestigious victory by the Z06 in its first race. The event was the season-ending three-hour enduro at Riverside International Raceway, one of the most prestigious races for SCCA production sports cars. Although veteran Corvette pilot Doug Hooper outlasted the



Above right: Drum brakes feature wide sintered metallic linings and "elephant ear" air scoops to aid cooling. Below: Displacing 327 cubic inches and utilizing mechanical fuel injection, this L84 V8 generates 375 bhp.



field in a new Z06 owned by the legendary Mickey Thompson, the star of the day was an Anglo-American hybrid called the Cobra. It had easily led the race until a hub failed, handing the win to Hooper, and the Corvette drivers—and Chief Engineer Zora Arkus-Duntov, who was watching from the pits—knew the future lay with the lightweight Cobra.

Although much has been made of Cobra domination, it was not as complete as Snake fans would have you believe. Corvettes still won a ton of SCCA amateur races. In 1963, the SCCA National Points Championship for A-Production saw Cobras in the first two spots, but Dr. Dick Thompson drove his Corvette to an impressive third place. Thompson also bested the Cobras in the three-hour FIA enduro

at Daytona in 1963; he trailed two Ferrari GTOs to take third overall and first in class.

The following year, Corvette-mounted Dick Lang finished third in the SCCA A-Production points standings. And in the '64 American Road Race of Champions runoff race, Dick Guldstrand picked up a third. But third-place finishes do not a legend make, and the racing glory went to the Cobras.

### Back in the Real World

Meanwhile, the new Sting Ray was slaughtering the Cobra in the sales race. Chevy sold 20,513 '63 Corvettes versus a total of only 654 Cobras (260 and 289-cubic-inch models) built from 1962 to 1965. While the Cobra appealed only to dedicated performance fans,

the Corvette satisfied anyone who wanted a quick, stylish sports car, while the extensive option list allowed owners to slant it from comfy cruiser to weekend racer.

Chevy sold 199 Z06 coupes in 1963. Halfway through the year, it offered the Z06 package (minus the N03 option) on convertibles as well, but few were built, and only one is reported to have survived.

By 1964, the word was out in racing circles that the Corvette was no snake killer, so Chevy, anticipating lower demand, dropped the Z06 package. However, it did not ditch the individual options. Buyers could still order the same go-fast parts, but they had to check a lot of boxes on the order form.

The other good news was that the hottest





Above left: Fitting the optional 36.5-gallon fuel tank necessitated unique trim. Above right: Optional alloy wheel with knock-off. Below: There's no radio in this Corvette; it is also devoid of air-conditioning and has no heater.



fuel-injected engine got even hotter for '64, now packing 375 horsepower due to a revised Duntov cam and a redesigned head with bigger valves. The option number remained L84—check!

For those wanting to re-create the Z06 package, the next mark went beside the all-new Warner transmission (part number M20), followed by the N03 36.5-gallon fuel tank, G81 Positraction unit, N11 off road exhaust, J56 racing brakes and the F40 suspension setup (it included the Z06's race-ready upgrades). You could still delete the heater and

defroster (C48) and pass on ordering a radio. By mid-1964, you could also order the P48 6-inch wide aluminum knock-off wheels. And that is exactly the combination of options ordered by the original owner of this Riverside Red rocket.

Since fewer 1964 Corvettes were being ordered for racing, the demand for the extreme options declined. Only 29 buyers lined up for the J56 package in 1964, 82 masochists chose the stiffer F40 suspension package, 38 gasaholics grabbed the N03 big-tank option, 1,953 rebels opted for the N11

loud pipes and 60 hardy souls declined the heater. The L84 engine attracted 1,325 customers while the 4-speed did better, with 19,034 buyers—over 8 percent of total production. Records don't show how many chose all the former Z06 items, but the number was surely lower than the 199 folks who plunked down for the Z06 package the previous year.

A few of these rare performance-optioned cars found their way to major magazines for road testing. In 1963, *Road & Track* tested an L84/4-speed convertible and came back with a 14.9-second quarter-mile time. *Car Life* magazine tested a Z06-spec coupe in its August 1964 issue in a "Cobra vs. Corvette" feature. Although it lacked the big fuel tank, the Corvette packed the 375-hp L84 engine, aluminum wheels and the J56 brake package. *Car Life* said it had the best brakes they had ever tested, and cranked a 14.6-second quarter mile with a top speed of 133 mph.

### Doing It Right

When J.C. Cherry bought this 1964 model in 2008, he thought it was perfectly restored. Although Cherry has owned over 20 Corvettes and other collector cars, he was new to the world of National Corvette Restorers Society (NCRS) certification. Each car starts with 4,500 points and deductions are made for each tiny error. No one gets a 4,500, but to be scored Third Flight the car can't be docked more than 1,125 points. For Second Flight, it can't lose more than 675 points, and for the coveted First Flight, only a trifling 270 points can be taken away.

Cherry soon discovered that the detailing under the hood, inside the interior and on the chassis was lovely to look at but historically inaccurate. Much to his dismay, the car only reached Second Flight status during its first NCRS judging. Second wasn't good enough for Cherry, but at least he was able to confirm the car's rarity. "The NCRS guys told me there's probably no more than two or three with this combination of options," he says.

The next stop for the '64 was at Carr's Corvettes and Customs in Plano, Texas. Company owner Carr Campbell looked the car over and found a long list of items that needed to be put back to original condition. He found problems with its hardware, finish and interior trim, and with its date codes, inspection stamps and chassis markings. No detail escaped Campbell's scrutiny: "The carpet relief cuts and loop size were incorrect for a '64, especially for a big-tank car," he says. "All the interior painted finishes were incorrect and almost all the interior fasteners were wrong. The fuel-injection unit was about 60-percent correct, but again most of the finishes were wrong. Many of the hardware and general



maintenance items had been replaced or lost over the years.”

It took Campbell three and a half months to determine everything that needed to be done and disassemble the car for corrective action. “We removed the fuel-injection system, exhaust manifolds, water pump and accessories and correctly restored everything,” he says. “This included completely refurbishing all the zinc, cadmium, black oxide, painted and gray oxide coatings on the fuel-injection system and all engine-compartment hardware. We also did hours of research on the fuel-injection intake manifold overspray patterns and re-created those.”

That last item was due to the Corvette’s production-line assembly process, where overspray would fall on various parts of the car as it was being painted. Gaining Top Flight status meant duplicating what some would consider flaws in the finish.

“The extremely rare J56 master cylinder was rebuilt by locating each individual part inside it,” Campbell recalls. “Finally, we re-created all the correct engine compartment black-out and overspray patterns.”

Putting the interior “right” was an equally painstaking process. Campbell explains, “We disassembled the entire interior and repainted all the interior trim and console components correctly. We then had Al Knoch make us up a correct ’64 ‘big tank’ carpet set and then installed it with the correct cuts and slits for the seat tracks, and correct installation around the tank. We also replaced the door panels and most of the door-panel components. We replaced all the interior fasteners with the correct items.”

The chassis was next. Campbell’s crew disassembled and cleaned the frame and suspension before restoring all the parts to NCRS standards. This included replacing all the quality control and assembly markings applied by the factory line workers. The last step was to apply the correct frame stencil on the passenger-side frame rail.

Thankfully, the previous restorers had used the correct lacquer paint on the body. The few blemishes were touched up and blended by Trade Secret Auto Care in Plano. “The job they did in matching years-old lacquer paint is amazing,” says Campbell.

When acquired, the ’64 had a set of the P48 knock-off aluminum wheels that Cherry was very fond of, plus they were correctly dated for the build date of the car. According to the NCRS this was impossible, so a set of date-coded steel wheels and restored ’64 hub caps were sourced.

Campbell’s crew completed the car in eight months, and then took it to Killeen, Texas for NCRS judging. Long story short—the scoring process is a time-consuming one—the car successfully made the jump from Second Flight to Top Flight. ○

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