

## 1970 to 1982 SECOND GENERATION CAMARO

Looking back, the first generation Camaro's three year lifecycle was truly considered a success by any measure. While the sales numbers never matched that of Ford's very popular Mustang, the Camaro was still a solid competitor in the pony car arena. The big question at the time was "*what did GM have up its proverbial sleeve to replace the 1969 Camaro*". Immediately following the launch of the 1967 Camaro, Chevrolet was already starting down the long road of developing the Camaro's replacement. Working hard to stay ahead of the curve, GM's design studio, led by the talented Design Vice President Bill Mitchell, was on a mission to up the ante on the styling of Chevrolet's newest pony car. The directive was to have the new styling mimic, as much as possible, a sleek European sports car. Mitchell's edict was not only to design a radical new exterior but also develop a new radical interior design.

The end result was stunning. Exterior styling was light years ahead of its predecessor. Staying pure to the long hood short deck design, the second generation Camaro looked like what Mitchell had envisioned, an expensive sleek European sports car. The launch of the new car was delayed until February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1970. This delay actually became a blessing to the design staff who was working hard to make the car as perfect as possible prior to production launch. When the car was finally announced, the public and most automotive journalists raved about the car. While some were disappointed that a convertible was no longer available Chevrolet continued to offer a myriad of models and options to keep most customers happy. Available models included a base Camaro, a beautiful split bumper Rally Sport, a Camaro Super Sport or the Camaro Z28. The base car could be had for a meager \$2,749, a Rally-Sport would set you back \$3,008, an L78 SS Camaro listed at \$3,724 and a Z28 equipped with an automatic transmission retailed for \$3,878. Not cheap, but not bad for a stylish pony car.

Second generation Camaro buyers had an ample list of engine options that ranged from the reliable 250 cubic-inch six cylinder to the 375 horsepower 396 cubic-inch big block. If a buyer wanted more power than the standard six, the next step up would be the 200 horsepower, 307 cubic-inch V8 or the 250 horsepower, 350 cubic-inch V8. The Camaro Super Sport featured a standard 300 horsepower, 350 cubic inch small block. If that were not enough power, the option list also included a 350 or 375 horsepower 396 cubic-inch (actually a 402 cubic-inch) engine or a 450 horsepower 454 cubic-inch LS6. Chevrolet's high performance Z28 added 48 cubic-inches and 70 horsepower over the 1969 Z28 by using the 360 horsepower, 350 cubic-inch Corvette LT1 engine. When combined with the four-speed transmission, this gave the Z28 blistering performance. Transmission availability for the Camaro included a three-speed manual, four-speed manual, PowerGlide or Turbo-Hydra-Matic transmission.

Exterior and powertrain improvements weren't the only things changed in the new Camaro. The interior was substantially different from its predecessor. A beautifully styled dash wrapped around the driver and provided a sculptured look and the restyled bucket seats that gave comfort to the front passengers. In general, the interior looked much richer than previous model years. From every vantage point the interior was pleasing to the eye.

In the end, the 1970 ½ Camaro proved to be a big success. Almost every automotive journalist praised the car for being a great road handling, affordable, fun to drive car. The public raved about the new styling and performance and Chevrolet's new baby was ready to last another eleven years. By the end of the first year Chevrolet produced 121,901 Camaro's. While the car didn't sell as well as Ford's Mustang, the new Camaro was still a sales success.

The 1971 model year brought limited changes to the Camaro. It was a time of trouble for GM with a United Auto Workers (UAW) strike that idled Camaro production for 70 days. The Camaro's exterior was carry-over but the interior was now equipped with hi-back bucket seats and a revised steering wheel. Under the hood, things were starting to deteriorate in the performance area. Government regulations required the big three to lower compression ratios in an effort to improve emissions. This in turn lowered horsepower ratings and had a dramatic impact on Chevrolet's high performance cars. Horsepower of the 1971 Z28 was now 330, down from 360 the prior year.

Nineteen seventy two saw additional emission standards forced upon the Big Three. The horsepower of the Camaro would once again be reduced. Chevrolet's big block was still available on the SS versions but at a lower horsepower rating of 300. In addition to tighter federal emission guidelines, the United Auto Workers shut down the factory for 171 days providing a punishing blow to the Camaro sales. Only 68,651 units were sold that model year.

Nineteen seventy three was the last year of the "steel bumper" Camaro. A luxury touring or "LT" version was added to the product line while the SS package was dropped from the option list. The LT was designed primarily for the female buyer and featured rocker accent moldings and rally wheels. The powerful LT-1 engine was replaced by the Corvette L82 engine on the Z28 model. Power was decreased with the new engine providing 245 horsepower from its 350 cubic-inches. A new Rochester four-barrel carburetor sat on a cast iron intake manifold that replaced the previous aluminum manifold. By the end of the 1973 model year, sales stood at 96,751, a substantial improvement over the 1972 figures but not close to previous years.

Nineteen seventy-four brought several styling changes to the Camaro along with hopes for added sales. The biggest change came when the Camaro received new stronger, impact-absorbing aluminum-faced bumpers designed to meet the

new federal standards. The new bumper system added 7 inches to the length of the car as well as adding additional power robbing weight. The Rally Sport was cancelled only to be re-introduced in 1975. New taillights adorned the rear end treatment for 1974. Horsepower on the Z28 declined to 245 due to the restrictive government regulations. Another stab in the heart was the cancellation of the big block Camaro.

The big news for 1975 was the cancellation of the Z28 and the return of the Rally Sport. It is speculated that the cost of developing a dual catalytic converter exhaust system was prohibitive and that the volume would not support development and production costs for the Z28. The Camaro continued to soldier on with the same basic design. However the rear window was revised which reduced a blind spot for the driver while at the same time adding a new look to the car. Leather interior became available for 1975 for the first time. The most powerful engine was the 155 horsepower, 350 cubic-inch V8, a far cry from earlier cars.

Minimal changes occurred for 1976. The exception was a new grille. Three engine options were available including the new 305 cubic-inch small block and the LM1 350 cubic-inch small block. The inline six remained unchanged for 1976. No major body or interior changes were offered for the model year. Sales of the Camaro increased to 145,770 units.

Nineteen seventy seven was a pivotal year for Chevrolet's Camaro with the reemergence of the Z28. The standard sport coupe was still available as was the upscale Type LT, and the Rally Sport. Chevrolet's 250 cubic-inch six cylinder continued to be standard equipment on most Camaro's but other engine options included a 145 horsepower 305 cubic-inch V8 and the 170 horsepower, 350 cubic-inch V8. While not the powerhouse of previous years, the "Z 28" was exciting enthusiasts nationwide. It's 185 horsepower V8 was less potent than past models but the new badges, stripes and other decals made the Z28 the car to have. End of year sales stood at 218,853 units.

The 1978 Camaro saw a change in exterior design. Gone were the aluminum front and rear bumpers, replaced with a new body-colored soft nose front section and rear bumper. The grille was similar to the 1977 grille but with less horizontal bars. Its wedge-shaped wrap-around taillights that had become Camaro's trademark replaced the round taillight of the early 70's. Chevrolet's in-line 250 cubic-inch six cylinder engine was still standard and the 305 and 350 cubic-inch engine were available options. The Camaro Rally Sport finally became a separate model instead of an option. Nineteen seventy eight proved to be another record sales year with 272,631 Camaro's being sold with 55,000 of those being Z28's. Chevrolet also celebrated the production of the two-millionth Camaro in 1978.

Nineteen seventy nine brought out a new Camaro model but little else. The Berlinetta, that replaced the previous Camaro LT, provided little more than a few revised visuals to the line. It featured unique pin stripping, a bright grille and black rocker panels. No other changes can be attributed to 1979 except for a four-barrel 305 cubic-inch V8, a revised instrument panel and an added front air-dam and front fender flairs on the Z28. In spite of this, sales again rose to 282,582 units.

With the new Camaro coming out in two years, Chevrolet saw little need to make any major changes to the current platform. The 1980 car was, for the most part, carry-over with the exception of a revised grille, front fender vents and a new functional hood scoop. Powertrain changes included the replacement of the tried and true straight six with a new V6 engine and the release of a new small block V8, displacing 267 cubic-inches. This engine provided adequate performance along with good gas mileage but little else. The Z28 was still the hot ticket for 1980 and garnered 190 horsepower from its 350 cubic-inch small block. But 1980 was the start of a recession and sales reflected it. By the end of the model year only 152,021 Camaros were sold and it was looking like things wouldn't be getting better the following year.

Nineteen eighty one became the swan song for the second generation Camaro. Very little changed for the model year. All powertrains used the new Computer Command Control System to meet the 1981 emission standards. If you wanted a 350 cubic-inch engine in a Z28, the only transmission available was an automatic. The four-speed was however available with the standard 305 cubic-inch V8. The Rally Sport was cancelled for 1981 leaving buyers with three models to choose from including the base Camaro, the Berlinetta and the Z28. Sales continued to slide due to the poor economy and the dated styling of the Camaro with only 109,707 units sold. The public knew a new Camaro was on the horizon and Chevrolet was ready to woo the crowds back into the showroom. Time would tell if it would succeed.