

1993 to 2002 THIRD GENERATION CAMARO

Chevrolet's successful run of 12 years for the second generation Camaro showed that by starting out with a leading edge design, a vehicle platform will live a long product life. The Camaro weathered many ups and downs during its long run including suffocating government emission and safety regulations. But in the end, its once graceful styling was showing signs of age. Not to be left in the dust, the designers and engineers at Chevrolet began working on the next generation car several years earlier. The biggest glitch in the program was the proposal to make the Camaro a front wheel drive car possibly based on the upcoming Citation. Pontiac had been lobbying for the front drive version, but the Chevrolet designers fought back saying that they could not produce a good handling car with adequate performance to reflect the Camaro spirit. This infighting eventually pushed the launch of the new Camaro back from 1980 to 1982.

The 1982 Camaro would be a totally different car from its predecessor. Shortened by ten inches and with a wheelbase of 101 inches rather than the previous year's 108 inches, the Camaro looked more nimble. The new design still provided about the same interior space. Models included a Sport Coupe, Berlinetta and the Z28. A new, very large rear glass gave the car a fastback look. Gone was the sub-frame unit that held the powertrain and front suspension, replaced by true uni-body construction. This allowed a more modern MacPherson strut front suspension design, however Chevrolet did not incorporate rack and pinion steering as many other companies had started to do. The tried and true leaf spring rear suspension was replaced by coil springs still using a live axle.

CAFE ratings were very important to GM so the brass decided to take a big step introducing a standard 4-cylinder engine on the base Camaro. Built by Pontiac and known as the Iron Duke, this 151 cubic inch engine spit out only 90 horsepower. For more performance, customers could jump up to a 173 cubic-inch V6 that provided 102 horsepower. A 145 horsepower 305 cubic-inch V8 was available in all models. Topped by a 4-barrel carburetor, this became a popular option as it was the only V8 that could be had with a 4-speed transmission. The largest engine available for the Camaro, and available only on the Z28 was a cross-fire injected 305 cubic-inch small block offering 165 horsepower and was available only with a 3-speed automatic transmission.

Consumers were excited about the new Camaro as were most automotive journalists, at least in the styling and handling side of things. The Sport Coupe was designed to be a low cost sporty car. The upscale Berlinetta brought added styling and comfort features and the Z28 continued to be Chevrolet's performance four-seater. It's performance however left something to be desired and when tested against a Mustang, most tests had the Mustang outperforming

the Z28. The performance issue didn't stop the public from snatching up almost 190,000 Camaro's during the first year, a 50% increase over 1981, impressive considering it debuted in February 1982 instead of the fall 1981. The performance enthusiasts took to the Z28, with sales of over 71,000. With increased sales, the Z28 was picked to pace the Indy 500 and Motor Trend named the Z28 it's Car of the Year, 1982 turned out to be a very good year for Chevrolet.

The Camaro took it on the chin for performance during the first year but the engineering team was working on a fix for the 1983 Z28. The exterior was carryover from the previous year. The big news was a new 5-speed transmission and an automatic with overdrive and the release of a 5.0 HO version of the small block. Using a Corvette camshaft and a Rochester 4-barrel carburetor that replaced the cross-fire injection system, this combination produced 190 horsepower. Known at the L69, when installed in the Camaro and matched with the 5-speed manual transmission, the Z28 could power through the quarter mile in 15.0 seconds, a one second improvement over 1982 (Car and Driver). Camaro's handling was considered outstanding. When testing the Z28 against the Mustang Car and Driver stated "As speeds increase the Mustang gets worse and the Camaro gets better." "The Z28 is the closest thing to a race car built on an American assembly line, closer even than the Corvette." Nineteen eighty three was a somewhat less successful year with total sales of 154,381 units.

Nineteen eighty four found the designers working overtime focusing on making the Berlinetta a more refined car. The result was an entirely new instrument panel with digital readouts, an overhead console, new seat covers and revised door panels. Sales of 34,400 units reflected the public's approval. Chevrolet was also listening to the road test of earlier cars and made some improvements to the suspension by tweaking the bushings in an effort to find a better compromise between performance and comfort. The 4-cylinder and V6 engines were still available as the LG4 V8 and L69 high output V8. While little changed for the model year Chevrolet managed to sell 261,591 vehicles with slightly over 100,000 of them being Z28'S, an all time high.

The big news for 1985 was the return of the IROC-Z after a few year absence. It was different in appearance from the Z28 with twin fog lamps in the grille, a front air dam, special hood louvers and striping at the rocker panel. The IROC-Z proved to have superior handling characteristics that came from a combination of a stiffened chassis with special front struts and springs, special rear shocks and stronger rear stabilizer bar. Ride height was lowered by a half-inch and when combined with new 16 inch Goodyear tires it became the best handling Camaro ever built. The 305 cubic-inch V8 was still the largest displacement available but a new Tuned Port Injection system helped to up the horsepower to 215 on the LB9 engine. The carbureted LG4 and L69 small blocks continued to be on the order list depending on the model you chose. Transmission availability included

either the 5-speed manual or 4-speed automatic with overdrive. Unfortunately the 5-speed manual transmission was not available with the high horsepower engine. A variety of automotive magazines tested the IROC-Z and gave it high marks in both performance and handling. Despite these changes, Camaro sales suffered with sales dropping from 261,591 to 180,018 units. It was a tough year.

Nineteen eighty six saw very few changes to the Camaro. The base car received an upgraded sport suspension, improved wheels, power steering and power brakes. The interior was mostly carryover with the exception of a new soft-feel leather steering wheel, shift lever and parking brake lever. The Berlinetta was still available for 1986 but early in the year it was cancelled due to dwindling sales and would be replaced by the LT option package. Powertrains were similar to 1985 with the exception of the LG4 having adding 10 horsepower and the LB9 used specifically in the Z28 and IROC-Z, losing 20 horsepower. The word on the street was that 1987 was going to bring some exciting changes to the Camaro. Sales for 1986, while slightly better than 1985, closed out the year with 192,219 units being built.

The rumblings of a larger engine for 1987 had the enthusiasts smacking their lips and Chevrolet was ready for them to get a taste of it. Enter the 5.7 liter 350 cubic inch small block (option code BL2). Available only in the IROC-Z, the 215 horsepower engine was a derivative of the L98 Corvette engine. Changes for use in the Camaro included replacing the aluminum heads with cast iron heads and cast iron exhaust manifolds. While the new 5.7 liter engine provided additional performance, the customer was straddled with the inability to order it with a manual transmission. Another big problem was that air conditioning was not available as the oversized radiator took up valuable space underhood. Still, Chevrolet had another new vice for Camaro lovers with the release of its new convertible. While it wasn't cheap, the convertible added another layer in the mix. Chevrolet decided not to produce the convertible directly and decided to send T-topped cars directly to American Specialty Company (ASC) in Southgate, Michigan for refitting into a convertible. ASC would add additional chassis stiffening hardware, slice off the top and install a manually operated convertible conversion. Buyers had to shell out nearly \$5,000 to grab this option. Due to the mid-year release and the price tag, slightly over 1,000 convertibles were sold in 1987 and total sales slid mightily down to 137,760 units.

By 1988, the Camaro was getting long in the tooth as Chevrolet was already working on its replacement. Little money was available for any big changes to the platform and it became Chevrolet's job to do the best they could to wring out as much as possible from the third generation platform until the new Camaro would be to be released in a few years. The big disappointment was the cancellation of the Z28, a stable commodity for many years. Only the Sport Coupe, IROC-Z coupe and a convertible in both models were available for the model year. Still using the same body styling as previous years the car was beginning to look dated. Minor engine changes enhanced performance with the top of the line 5.7

liter engine putting out 230 horsepower. There was nothing to write home about and sales reflected it with only 122,761 Camaro's sold.

Over the years, the price of the Camaro had escalated to heights that put a damper on the average performance car buyer. In 1989, an effort was put forth to give the public with a visually stunning car at an affordable price, Chevrolet, released the Camaro RS trim package. Essentially this package featured many of the Z28 externals wrapped up in a V6 Camaro. The car struck a cord with buyers and became the new base Camaro. The only other Camaro available was the IROC-Z and as with last year's car, both came as a coupe or convertible. Horsepower rose to 240 on the optional IROC-Z cars. Other than minor changes, the 1989 Camaro was simply a car to get by on. Sales sagged again to 110,580 units.

Nineteen ninety was a pivotal year. The shortened model year, due to a UAW strike, produced only 35,048 Camaros. The RS Camaro got a bigger 3.1 liter V6 and all cars benefited from a drivers side airbag. The IROC-Z convertible received standard 16 inch wheels which were also optional in the coupe. Horsepower in the highest form dropped to 230 from the previous years 240. It became a year of holding on. No major changes, no major improvements. Just hold on and wait for the new car.

There had always been a need for a special speed and handling package over the years. Police department required their cars to exceed the handling of the general public's vehicles. Hence the need for the B4C package. This was essentially the police performance package that gave excellent performance and handling. Nineteen ninety one brought the B4C package to the Camaro platform and what a package it was. Ordering a B4C essentially gave you a Z28 in RS trim. So powerful was this package that both local and state police department started ordering them for their fleet. The bad guys were now in trouble and the police loved the car. Due to popular demand, Chevrolet brought back the Z28 with the only change being a new spoiler. Other than that almost nothing changed for 1991 and sales remained low at 101,316 units.

By nineteen ninety two, the third generation Camaro had run its course. Chevrolet was celebrating the twenty fifth anniversary of its flagstar performance car with the release of the 1992 Camaro. They were in fact just buying time until the launch of the fourth generation Camaro. The 1992 Camaro carried over the 1991 powertrains and minimal exterior changes. Sales dwindled to 70,712 units. The third generation Camaro lasted for eleven years and during those years' new enthusiasts were brought into the fold. Chevrolet had once again done an admirable job at providing an exciting performance car to the masses. So what was in store for the next generation Camaro? Time would tell.

