

HOW-TO: MINI-TUBS FOR '68-72 NOVAS

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SUPER CHEVY

THE #1 CHEVROLET ENTHUSIAST MAGAZINE



CHEAP TRI-FIVE HANDLING INSTALL

'69 THE CAR THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING! CELEBRATION

- CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF GREATNESS
- FROM PRO TOURING TO PRO STREET
- ZL1 CONTINUATION DRIVE REPORT



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SHOCKING! EASY COILOVER CONVERSION

REBUILDING THE COPO PAST

THANKS TO CARS INC. AND GM PERFORMANCE PARTS, YOU CAN BUILD A BRAND NEW '69 ZL1 CAMARO JUST THE WAY YOU WANT IT.

By Patrick Hill

Photos by the author

In the March '09 issue of SUPER CHEVY, we showed you the first in a series of "continuation" cars built by the experts at Classic Automotive Restoration Specialists (CARS Inc.), a reproduction of the iconic Yenko Camaro. Based off a new '69 Camaro body, which is a faithful copy of the original '69 shell, it opens the door to infinite possibilities for building what is essentially a new Camaro. The blue Camaro in our feature is a great example of what CARS will build if you want a restomod, and the Garnet Red example shows what CARS will build if you want to pay homage to the original.

Early in 2008, CARS owner Jim Barber hatched a plan to build on his Yenko continuation series by reproducing the next iconic '69 Camaro, the ultra rare ZL1. Produced in small numbers by Chevrolet to invade the ranks of NHRA and AHRA drag racing (69 total), most of the cars never saw time on the street. Those cars that survived the strip demand a king's ransom. Just like the COPO 9561, iron block, 427-powered Camaros, the ZL1s started out as base/stripper Camaros with no options and as little add-on weight as possible. All cars had front disc brakes, 12-bolt rears, and could not be ordered with the SS or RS option (though two cars did manage to "sneak" through production with the RS option).

Power came from Chevrolet's all-aluminum version of the L88 427 race engine (though there were important differences). The blocks were cast aluminum with iron sleeves, and gave a significant weight savings over the iron blocks. Combined with a ported version of the aluminum heads from the L88, the engine weighed around the same as an all-iron small-block, and was rated at 430 hp (but at only 5,200 rpm). Peak power was at least 1,000 rpm higher than that.

Ok, we're done with the history lesson, back to our story.

In 2007, GM Performance Parts announced it had brought the original ZL1 tooling out of mothballs to do a special run of 427 aluminum engines, to commemorate the anniversary of the famous

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powerplant. Once the run is complete at 427, GM will retire the tooling permanently, making each of these engines very special.

When GM announced plans for this new crate engine, the light bulb went off in Jim Barber's head about his next continuation car. And to build the first car right, Jim wanted motor 001 for car 001. But GM Performance had already earmarked the first ZL1 assembly for auction at the Barrett-Jackson Scottsdale auction, so it would've seemed Jim would have to start with number 002. Not to be denied, Jim flew to Arizona for the auction, and came back with serial number 001.

With aluminum Rat in hand, Jim mobilized his crew and started construction on the first ZL1 '69 Camaro in 40 years. All parts used on the car were to be authentic and original as possible, right down to reproduction steel wheels and dog dish hubcaps. On the outside, you can't tell this car is a reproduction. Even the fender gaps have the right amount of "production variance" in them. Wanting the car to look as original as possible, Jim noted that frequently the cars had uneven and sometimes large gaps between the fenders and the doors. For a true recreation and authentic look, that's the way the car should be.

Inside, the ZL1 Continuation has a reproduction '69 interior. Seats, carpet, gauges, the whole thing looks just like it would on the dealer's lot in fall of



1968 and through all of 1969. (Remember, '69 Camaro production actually went into the 1970 model year because of a strike.) The car even has a push-button blue light FM stereo made by Antique Automobile Radio. It features all modern internals in a reproduction OE radio case, so you can listen to crystal clear music while cruising in the Camaro (albeit through one speaker).

For the running gear behind the new ZL1 engine, first up is a reproduction Muncie four-speed by Auto Gear Equipment, with a Zoom twin-disc clutch setup in a Keisler 621 reproduction bellhousing. Yes, the originals had monster single discs that could handle big block power, but also work your left leg to death. So, this car has a much more leg friendly clutch to make driving more enjoyable.

Out back is a Moser 12-bolt rear with 4.10 ears and a Posi unit. The Moser 12-bolt housing features welded axle tubes for more strength, 11-inch OE GM drum brakes made by Right Stuff, and heavy-duty Moser axles so the ZL1 can be unleashed onto the asphalt in full fury.

Suspension on the car is bone stock, with Classic Industries control arms up front with Eaton Detroit Springs and A/C Delco shocks, and stock GM disc brakes. In the rear are stock Eaton Detroit leaf springs with A/C Delco shocks. At all four corners are Wheel Vintiques reproduction 14-inch steel wheels with Coker reproduction Firestone Wide





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rattles, shakes, or other oddities you'd expect from an old car. Going over bumps and ruts in the road, the car steered straight and didn't beat my spinal column out of my back, though the bias plies do like to wander. The ride was comfortable and wasn't too hard or soft. With power steering, the '69 took corners easily and was maneuverable in traffic, tight streets, and parking lots. The tight gate on the Hurst shifter took a little getting used to, but was otherwise smooth and trouble free. And the car is a real head turner. Anywhere we went, almost everyone stopped to look and watch the car go by. Other drivers gave thumbs up signals and waved enthusiastically as the Camaro rumbled down the streets of Tampa.

Pacing the ZL1 was another F-body built by CARS. Using a new body but restomod parts was John Rosatti's LeMans Blue '69 Camaro convertible. This car was an absolute animal. Power comes from

Oval tires.

Driving the ZL1 Continuation is, well, awesome. I got the chance for an extended test drive, and the Camaro did not disappoint. It honestly felt like a new car, and in new I mean a modern car. There were no funny squeaks,

a GM Performance 572/720 HP crate big-block. Just so you have an idea of the power this car puts out, in the GMPP catalog it's listed in bold letters "engine not intended for street use." This is due to the engine's requirement of high-octane race gas (12:1 compression ratio) and lack of vacuum. An auxiliary vacuum pump had to be installed to power the brakes and other necessities.

Billet Specialties True Track front drive system keeps all the accessories such as alternator, A/C compressor, water pump, and power steering working properly with the 572. One last neat feature is the custom cowl induction hood that feeds the Rat air. A stock cowl induction hood was modified with the air filter being installed into the induction cowl

Turning a Tremec TKO 600 with Zoom 11-inch clutch, this car is like an old F-104 Starfighter, essentially a big engine with a man belted to it. Hit the throttle wide open and your head is slammed back almost through the front seat headrest. Putting all that power to the pavement is a Moser 12-bolt with 3.73 gears, Posi-traction, and Moser axles.

Supporting the ragtop up front is a full complement of suspension parts from Detroit Speed & Engineering. Upper and lower control arms connected to 2-inch drop spindles, and Koni coilover adjustable shocks. Out back are more DSE



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goodies, with a DSE Quadralink conversion kit installed to keep the Moser 12-bolt straight and on the ground, with Koni coilovers for an assist, and DSE subframe connectors to keep the chassis from doing a pretzel imitation. Stainless Steel Brakes Corporation hardware

is installed at all four corners to help get the Camaro stopped. Wheels are American Racing Torq Thrusts wrapped in BFGoodrich G-Force T/A rubber. At the strip, this was all good for a tire-roasting 12.01 at 120.16, even in 94 degree heat.

Inside Rosatti's Camaro has factory Camaro buckets stuffed with foam padding and covered in white leather. Keeping tabs on the 572 are Auto Meter Phantom II gauges in a DSE cluster assembly, and Vintage Air climate controls to keep the car's cabin comfortable. A Keisler shifter makes the gear choices on the 5-speed. Cruising tunes are handled by a Pioneer head unit with cabin and trunk mounted speakers.

For those who yearn for the days of old, when you could walk into a Chevy dealership and order the car you wanted with just the options you wanted, give the folks at CARS Inc. a call. They'll build you the '69 Camaro of your dreams. 