

454 CORVETTE ROAD TEST

**WE REALLY DIG THIS CAR, BUT
THEN HOW COULD YOU HELP BUT
LIKE THE BEST SPORTS COUPE
IN THE WORLD!**

"The 454 Corvette is probably the best sports coupe in the world," and you can quote us on that. Undoubtedly many of you will disagree with such a sweeping statement, but read on and give us a chance to explain. For this introductory issue of SUPER CHEVY we decided to test the strongest '73 Chevy available. After all, things have changed a lot in the last few years and we wanted to give our new readers some idea where Chevrolet stands in terms of performance. From all that we saw, the new Corvette with the LS-4 version of the 454 c.i. big-block engine seemed the best choice. We were also interested in the new hydraulic cam-version of the Z/28 Camaro but felt the Corvette would have a slight edge in performance. If you're interested in the new Z/28, look for our next issue which will have a complete test, but on with the business at hand.

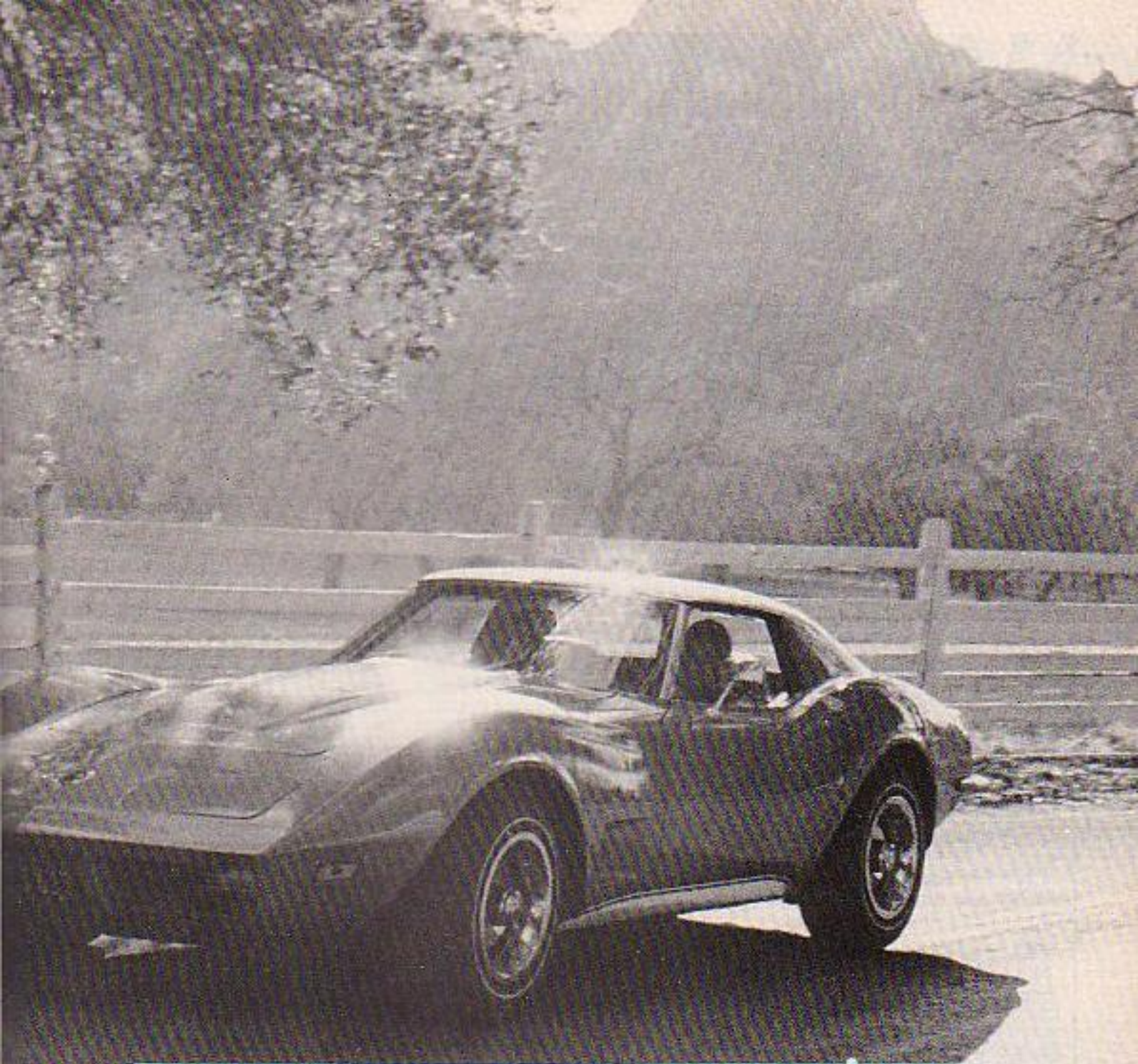
We don't often have the chance to buzz around town in such fine style, so we were understandably excited when our sleek gold-colored test car was finally delivered. We have driven Corvettes before, but each time we slide behind the wheel of a Stingray it's a unique sensation. This brings us

to the first reason we pick the Corvette as our all-time favorite. The Corvette is an exciting automobile that is designed to be driven. It literally *requires* a driver to get involved with his driving.

Personally we enjoy the time we spend behind the wheel and perhaps this is the reason we have always owned performance cars. It seems to us that many modern cars are designed to lull the driver into forgetting what he is doing. Super soft suspensions, climate-controlled temperature compensators, automatic transmissions, massive soundproofing and power-everything have been developed on the

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modern sedans to isolate the driver from the road and, in a sense, prevent him from experiencing the "ugly" sensation of driving. Many experts cite inattention to driving as the major cause of highway fatalities and with all this effort put forth to distract the average driver, it's a wonder that there aren't more accidents.



Driving the Corvette is different. As soon as you grab the wheel and look out over the hood you know the car demands involvement. Actually the experience begins as you get into the car. It requires some practice to slide smoothly into the seat, but when you locate the seat to reach the pedals comfortably and adjust the steering wheel for a convenient arm position, the car feels very natural. You are aware that the car is low when you get in but looking out at the peculiar fender bumps on each side of the lumpy hood adds to the illusion that

you are really close to the ground.

After settling down you check the interior quickly to find out where everything is located. The large tachometer and speedometer are directly to the front on either side of the steering column, which is where we feel they belong to be easily seen. The rest of the engine gauges (thank goodness there are no warning lights) are directly above the radio to the right. They can be quickly scanned to check that all is functioning properly. The shift lever falls to hand easily, but real purists may object that it is too

far from the wheel.

We poked around the interior to see what we could find of interest and were happy to see that everything fits together very well. The quality of trim is excellent and the styling is pleasing. If the car were ours we would realign a few of the pieces and check all the fasteners to make certain all was held in place tightly, but then we would do this on any car we owned merely because we like to make certain everything is snug.

During our examination of the interior we were delighted to find a



The front sports a new impact bumper.

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lockable glove compartment under the deck behind the seats. Further searching turned up three compartments below the storage area. One holds the battery, one is a glove box, and the third is also a small storage area with a removable bottom which covers the jack and tire iron. These boxes, though not very large, provide a nice place to store and secure valuable objects such as a camera or purse. This deck also has built-in straps to secure the removable top hatches when they are not being used to hold out the weather. Vinyl pouches are also

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provided to cover the hatches when they are stored. These will prevent them from being scratched during storage and will also keep the deck area clean, a nice touch.

The feature we liked best is the excellent seat and shoulder safety belt arrangement. It is the sort of thing we always notice since we have gotten into the habit of wearing seat belts. It is an easy habit to acquire and a healthy one, but when we first get into an unfamiliar car we frequently have to scramble around to find the belts which are often tucked under the seats or hanging loosely from the roof way back in the rear corner of the car. It is small wonder that so few people wear seat belts since they are not often designed to provide quick and easy use. Many cars have improved seat belt

arrangements, but few equal the Corvette for convenience. The lap belts are retained on a spring-loaded reel next to the seat and can be pulled across the lap to plug into a handy receptacle along the center console. No adjustment is necessary as a ratcheting mechanism takes up the slack and then locks the belt in place when it is tight. Since the Corvette seats are properly contoured the lap belt holds you firmly to the car. But if the seats were not so well constructed we would rather see a belt that could be pulled tight across the lap.

The shoulder belt is anchored to the upper outside seat back by an inertia reel and it is a beauty. It can be pulled down across the chest and snapped into place on the center anchor where it allows the driver or passenger to lean forward (as you must in adjusting the radio) and move around without restriction. However, if the car should be involved in a forward impact the reel will lock-up and hold tightly as excess pressure is applied to the belt by the driver as he is hurled forward toward the wheel.

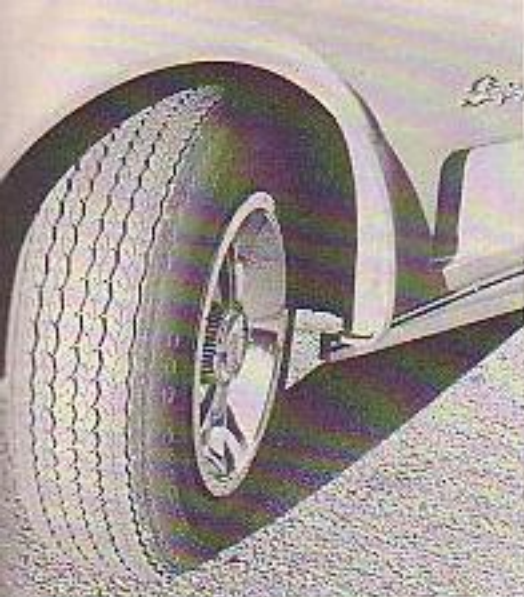
"Even with the unusually high number of Corvettes in California the new Stingray still elicits a lot of attention!"

When the reel locks, the driver is safely restrained from impact. This sort of belt arrangement is undoubtedly the easiest we have ever used. There is no reason why any driver should not use belts when they are this convenient.

We do have one very minor but significant complaint about the layout of the driving controls. Most of the

European cars incorporate turn signal, upper and lower beam switch and windshield wiper controls into one single stalk located where the turn signal lever is normally positioned. This allows the driver of manual shift cars to keep both feet on the control pedals (where they belong) while the high beam or windshield wiper control can be operated easily by the left hand just as simply as a turn signal is used. We really enjoy using this feature when the road is winding or crowded. You don't have to keep stabbing around with your left foot to control the high beams (though we must admit the Corvette dimmer is much easier to locate than most) or take your hand off the wheel to find the windshield wiper control if the weather is a little nasty. By keeping the driver's hands on the wheel and his feet on/near the pedals such arrangements make it much easier for the driver to keep his attention riveted to the road ahead, which again, is where his attention should be concentrated.

From the foregoing tirade you may get the impression that we really put this car through the paces out on the open road. We did and we loved it. When you first turn the key, the big 454 rumbles to life with a pleasant well-muffled tone of authority. As you flip the throttle the unmistakable big block torque tweaks the chassis smartly to the right. We had opted for the 3-speed automatic transmission (Turbo Hydra-Matic 400 series) along with the standard 3.08:1 rear end ratio, though an optional 3.36:1 gear is available. After the motor had warmed a bit and the oil pressure steadied out at 45 lb, we dropped the



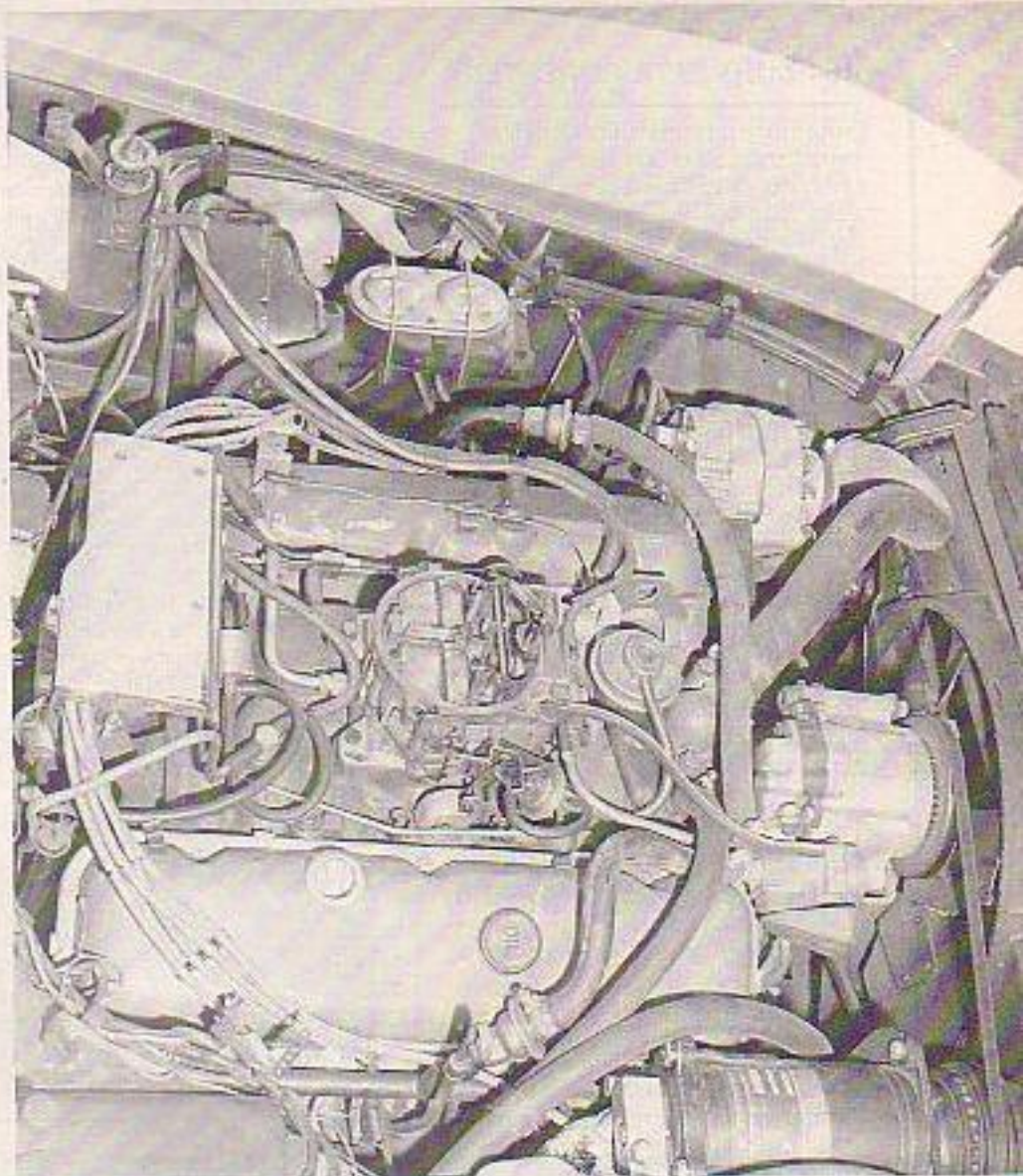
Steel-belted radial tires are now standard.

shift lever into drive and let it happen. The LS-4 is choked down a little more for '73 and the maximum claimed horsepower of 275 (net) is recorded at 4400 rpm, as compared to the all-time high of 425 bhp at 5600 rpm claimed

"The Corvette literally requires a driver to get involved!"

for the fabled aluminum head LS-6 in 1971. However, comparing the torque spec of 395 lb./ft. (net) at 2800 for the LS-4 with the 390 ft./lb. at 3600 rpm registered by the LS-6 would seem to indicate that this is still a fairly healthy engine. As much as we would like to believe this engine is almost as strong as the ultissimo LS-6, we have a feeling the figures for the LS-6 were very conservative, but don't get us wrong, this is definitely a good runner.

At first we were impressed with the smooth and effortless engine. It felt just fine as we cruised around town, even when extra horsepower is drained by the air conditioner, Air Injection Reaction emission system pump and power steering assembly. Naturally, the top of the engine looks like a barrel of snakes with all the smog and vacuum control hoses running across the manifold. To find out what was under this mess we checked out the LS-4 in the Chevy manual. For '73 the fuel metering is handled by the reliable Rochester Quadra-jet having 1.38-inch primaries and 2.25-inch secondaries which is fed cold air through the rear-facing hood scoop. The engine lower end features standard two-bolt bearing caps which surround a forged steel (four-speeds) or a nodular iron



Some will consider the LS-4 engine mundane but it will equal most driver demands.



The Corvette "involvement" begins here.

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(automatic transmission) crankshaft. Drop forged steel connecting rods join the crank to flat head cast aluminum alloy pistons which give an 8.25:1 compression ratio. Piston rings consist of a 5/64-inch wide graphite impregnated, cast iron alloy, barrel face upper compression ring; a cast iron alloy, inside bevel, taper face 5/64-inch lower compression ring and a three-piece oil ring with chrome plated steel upper and lower rails held in place by a stainless steel expander. The piston is located on the small end of the rod with a pressed-in chromium steel pin.

The camshaft acts through hydraulic lifters and 1.70:1 rockers on a 1.72-inch diameter exhaust valve and 2.065-inch diameter intakes. The valves reach a total of .440 inches of lift with 346 degrees of duration (55 degrees—111 degrees) on the intake lobes and 348 degrees of duration (105 degrees—63 degrees) on the exhaust. The springs have inside dampers and give 74-86 lb. pressure at 1.88 inches valve-closed and 288-312 lb. pressure at 1.38 inches height with the valve open.

The initial advance is 10 degrees BTDC at 900 rpm and the vacuum distributor gives 20 degrees advance while the centrifugal weights swing in 18 degrees (36 degrees total at the

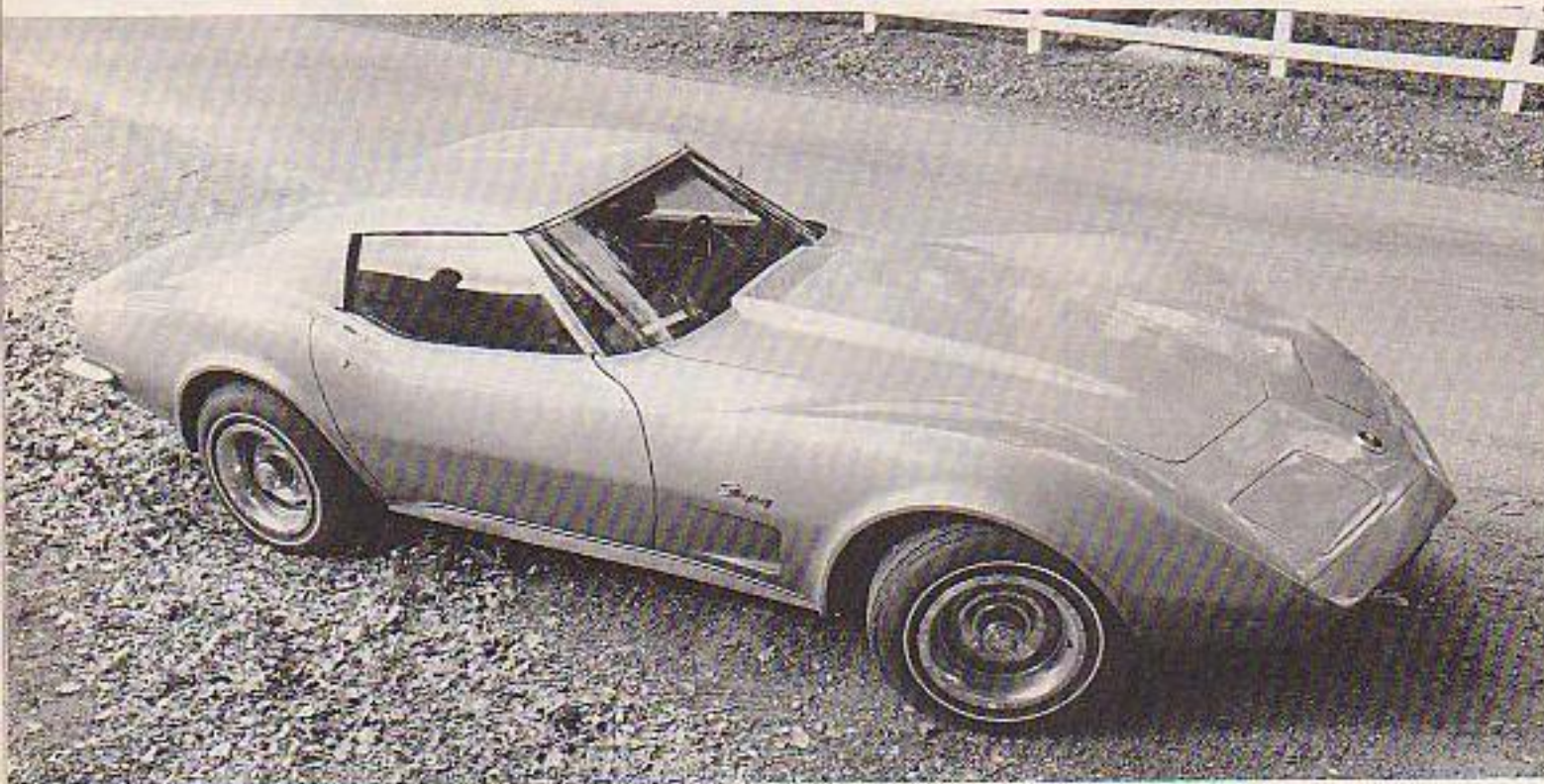
crank) by 4200 rpm. The exhaust is carried out through cast iron headers and dual reverse flow mufflers and 2½-inch exhaust pipes.

After a few minutes driving around town we headed for the freeway and put our foot into it on the way up the on-ramp. Though all-out acceleration was not blinding, the LS-4 pulls the car up very quickly. We blended inconspicuously (we hoped) into traffic and headed eastward toward Irwindale raceway for quarter mile times. With the windows up and everything sealed there is more wind noise than we prefer but it really isn't annoying. As we swung around a tight transition ramp from one freeway to another we discovered the only real flaw we were able to find with the Corvette. Though it is a personal opinion, we feel the power steering has a disconcerting "progressive" response. As you move the wheel, the steering seems to get "faster" as the driver continues through a turn. We constantly found ourselves diving to the inside of a curve as the steering seemed to overreact to our control. This is a personal criticism and may have been less bothersome if we had driven the car for a longer period. In any event, it was not a serious flaw and one we are certain most potential buyers will probably never notice.

The single lower A-arm front suspension remains unchanged from

last year and roll control is provided by a 3/4-inch front stabilizer. The independent rear suspension utilizes torque control arms and a 0.56-inch steel link stabilizer to hold the wheels to the ground. The multi-leaf transverse leaf spring is individually computer-selected by size and rate for each car according to the vehicle weight (including all optional equipment). The 4-wheel disc brakes are, of course, unequalled for stopping power even with the heavy motor up front. The standard tires are GR70 by 15 steel belted radials mounted on steel rims and they do an excellent job of holding the car nice and tight on hard corners.

Even with the unusually high number of Corvettes in the Southern California area we noticed on our trip to Irwindale that the '73 Stingray still elicits a lot of admiring glances. The most notable styling change on the latest model is the front bumper. The new nose job incorporates a urethane pad formed over a heavy gauge steel filler which blends smoothly back into the long sloping hood. These bumpers meet the "5 mph" federal impact standards and will restore themselves to the original shape with no sign of damage after a minor collision. The entire bumper is painted to match the lacquer colors of the body and utilizes an energy absorbing device to cushion forward impacts. It is definitely one of



Styling changes are simple but effective.



The fine seat belt arrangement complements the car's capabilities.



The rear end remains unchanged.



Locking storage and battery compartments have been added.



Where else can you get two roof hatch bags?

the best looking solutions to the impact problem.

The front fenders are restyled with molded "chute-type" side air vents replacing the old inserts. We are not styling experts, but to our eye this is a definite improvement and highlights the overall styling which we consider to be the best of any Stingray yet produced. Though the rear end styling remains unchanged (it doesn't need to be changed) the rear window is no longer removable. We also found a little map-reading light fastened up behind the rearview mirror which we really liked. It is focused to shine straight down for use at night without disturbing the driver's vision, a nice feature.

When we finally arrived at the strip we let the engine cool down a bit even though the temperature gauge never indicated above 200 degrees (normal operating temperature) and finished up the test with a few quarter mile

"It is reliable, extremely comfortable, easy to drive and very attractive!"

timed runs. The car launches slowly because of the relatively small tires and the gobs of low end torque produced by the engine, and a light foot was needed but we finally squeezed a best slip of 13.91/96 from the car. Undoubtedly an expert drag-strip hotshot could do a little better but we let it go at that. After all, we enjoyed driving the car around town too much to spend all our time at the dragstrip.

We were really saddened when it came time to turn the keys back over to our friendly Chevrolet PR contact but all good things must come to an end. Reflecting back we considered all we have ever heard, read and experienced with Corvettes. For our money it offers much more than just performance. Though not a rumbling monster, it performs with the best available today, but *more importantly it is reliable, extremely comfortable, easy to drive, and very attractive.* Best of all, parts and maintenance are readily available and reasonably priced as compared to the many exotic high-dollar sports imports. Though not the cheapest car to insure and gas mileage is lower than average, it is an incredible buy for the \$5634.50 base price (plus \$250 for the LS-4 option). Given the choice of any car in the world we would undoubtedly choose to own a new 454 Corvette, maybe a silver one with black interior, AM/FM radio, a stereo tape deck and . . .

