

The Corvette Z06's 7-liter 505-horsepower engine sounds like lots of small things exploding. Find a short highway on-ramp, stomp on the gas, and the explosions start coming faster and faster, turning into a roar.

Beyond about 3,500 RPM, the Z06's second set of exhaust pipes opens up. Those extra pipes don't have much muffler in them, you see, so as not to use up too much power pushing out the exhaust gases. The car's throat is wide open.

You stay in first gear -- the Z06 handles zero-to-sixty in as little as 3.7 seconds in this gear alone -- and the sound gets louder until there's an Alaskan brown bear riding shotgun and, man, he is *really* ticked.

As you back off and drop into traffic, the vicious roar dies back down to a mean rumble. The Z06 is still easy to handle in traffic. The regular 'Vette certainly has adequate road feel, but this one has more. Every bump

worth noticing shakes the steering wheel a bit and gives a gentle kick in the butt.

Around town, the Z06 is slightly less comfy a cruiser than the regular 'Vette. The



seats are still comfortable, the visibility's still good and there's even space for some luggage under the big back window. There are even cup holders. Try bringing your Pepsi with you in a Dodge Viper.

The one drawback of the Z06, or any Corvette, is that it's just not much fun around town. Oh, it's fine but suburban driving feels like taxi-ing your fighter jet out to the runway. There's no point to whipping a Corvette around a corner in your subdivision because, really, nothing whips. It

just goes around the corner. That's the drawback of any ultra-high-performance car, though. It's hard to push the envelope when the envelope's just so darned big.

If you're the type to compare numbers, the \$65,000 Z06's performance capabilities are up there with cars costing much, much more. Not that those who pay more are simply daft. They're just very rich. The Corvette's cost is largely used up in performance. There are levels of interior finery and overall sophistication that one could get for that extra hundred thousand or so.

On the open road the Corvette thrills. The Z06 was developed in tandem with the very successful C6R race car. As a "race car you can drive on the street," the Z06's capabilities are too far out there to do much more than poke at them gently with a long stick on public roads. Still, you definitely get the idea.

Top speed is 198 miles per hour. In cornering, maximum lateral g-force is 1.1.

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You can see what you're pulling in the "heads-up" read-out that seems to float in the air someplace forward of the front bumper. You can also see your speed, of course, and engine RPM. By the way, 0.4-g is about where the average person in the average car would start getting scared. Acceleration is catapult-quick. The firmer steering and suspension make turns a more earthy experience

than in the regular Corvette. Undulations in the pavement threaten to pull you off course unless you maintain a firm hand on the steering wheel.

The Z06 always feels a bit like Bill Bixby on the way to turning into the Incredible Hulk with buttons popping and sleeves tearing apart from the cuffs. Taking the 'Vette and pumping in over 25 percent more horsepower has that sort of effect, even with toughened

suspension and brakes that could stop a rock-slide.

The car feels like it can't quite handle what it's got and it needs your help, please, to hold it back a little. It's largely an illusion of course. The Z06 takes care of itself just fine.

All in all, it feels very much alive and wide awake. And it's not happy.