

personality shift

by Joe Sage

A mid-engine car is defined as one with its engine behind the cabin, but the engine's center of gravity in front of the rear wheels. Many a supercar has this layout—from the Italians to Ford GT—as do more routine sports cars such as Porsche Boxster or Alfa Romeo 4C. (Rear-engine cars such as the 911 or old air-cooled VWs have engine mass centered behind the rear wheels.)

The Corvette rumor mill has been rife with mid-engine rumors for years. The Chevrolet Engineering Research Vehicle team (CERV) had worked on the possibility since its earliest days, revealing a CERV I Indy-style track concept in 1960, the two-seat race- or potentially roadworthy CERV II concept in 1964, and more beyond those.

Despite America's—and the world's—clear love for and fascination with seven generations of front-engined production Corvettes, the mid-engine possibility has always drawn a high level of interest. Speculation and spy photo activity have led to endless “we think this is it!” camouflaged mule sightings over the years, but all had ultimately proven fruitless.

Until now.

Chevy embraced the final stretch of rumors on

the eight-generation Corvette—widely known as the C8—wisely giving in to making its arrival a “worst-kept secret.” This took away none of the excitement of its impending arrival—in this case surely adding to it—with the final reveal of the C8 Corvette a landmark event caught by millions, through every medium possible.

That left one more thrill, however—driving it! We covered the new Chevy mid-engine supercar's launch drive, held at Spring Mountain Motorsports Ranch outside Las Vegas, in a cover feature by Paul Strauss in last year's March/April issue. And our own sample arrived in Arizona this winter.

In a sense, for something so startlingly new, the C8 Corvette is not exactly surprising. We knew it was coming, we knew what it looked like, we knew the advantages of a mid-engine placement, we knew its general impact on the Corvette family tree, we knew its specifications and timeline.

But there ain't nothin' like the real thing.

This new generation brings back one element of an earlier time—from the much-loved 1963 through '67 C2 Corvette (including the famous '63 Split Window)—and that is the other half of its name. Those were named Corvette Sting Ray (two

words); this is the Stingray (one word). One word or two, it's a great name to bring back (although C8 seems to be more widely used so far).

Layout

We thought the seat position and legroom in the C8 might be a little tighter due to the fixed restriction of an engine right behind, but legroom is the same as in the C7 (actually 0.2" longer). Specifications throughout are pretty similar, though fractionally tighter—0.1" less headroom, 0.6" less shoulder room, a notable 2 inches less hip room. The wheelbase is half an inch longer, overall length up by more than five inches, while height is exactly the same. Front track is almost an inch and a half wider, while rear is 0.1" narrower.

Wheel and tire fitment remain staggered, but with the engine moved, all are narrower: the front wheels change from 19x10 in the C7 to 19x8.5 in the C8, and the rear from 20x12 to 20x11, which might seem to attest to less stress and strain at both ends with a well-balanced mid-engine placement. Interestingly, the car's weight is less balanced now, front-to-rear. Depending upon engine, the C7 had close to 50:50 weight distribution,

while the C8 is closer to 40:60.

Weight distribution benefits and tradeoffs are more complex than front-rear—engine weight shifted rearward improves launch performance, while understeer tendencies are vastly reduced.

The interior continues to emphasize a driver-centric cockpit, with a raised rib along the right side of the console (featuring HVAC control buttons along its top edge) defining the look and feel.

Shift is via a set of console-mounted push-pull buttons and levers. While we don't philosophically welcome those—who knows when the unfamiliar may need to take over—odds are lower in this car that you will hand it over to the unfamiliar.

As with other mid-engine cars and many an EV, the C8 Corvette now a “frunk” (front trunk) as well a cargo area in the rear, behind the engine. Both are deep-well affairs—the frunk limited by suspension, steering and such, the rear by the engine. Their layouts are more important than stated volumes, able to carry two golf bags, an airline carry-on and a laptop bag, or all your groceries upright.

around town

The new Corvette Stingray is available only with an 8-speed dual-clutch automatic, a significant departure (figuratively and literally) for manual fans. Drive modes include weather, tour, sport and track. We weren't hitting any weather, nor were we hitting any tracks (though we'd love to give that a try sometime), so we started out in sport, which is

where we end up in most cases, anyway. The C8 tracks true, its 6.2-liter V8 sounds mighty fine, and throttle response is immediate. In tour mode, we sensed the slightest delay in throttle response, as you might expect out of an automatic, but surprising since sport behavior suggests it's not inherent.

We appreciate road feel, and the car's ride is very much in touch with the surface. This is partly due to run-flat tires (necessitated by the staggered fitment), though those have improved tremendously. Suspension feels good even on speed bumps, front and rear. Our C8 had optional magnetic ride control, a GM feature well worth its \$1895. General ride and handling are tight and responsive.

One behavioral oddity we noted repeatedly was when maneuvering slowly into, say, a parking space or garage, or even pulling up to a red light or stop sign—a feeling of being ever so lightly hit from behind combined with a borderline runaway throttle: jerk, pause, thump, all on its own. And its final stop can be as abrupt as throwing out a boat anchor—or letting off the pedal in a one-pedal EV. Our guess is that this is related to new eBoost Assist brake technology (being applied first to a couple of big pickups—and the C8). This is presumably to shave weight by not needing a vacuum booster, instead combining master cylinder and ABS functions. It might be drive mode sensitive, if so perhaps a downside to running sport in town.

KEEP RIGHT >>



SPECIFICATIONS (2020)

FACTORY	.....Bowling Green, Kentucky
ENGINE	.....LT2 6.2L V8 VVT dir inj, cast alum w cast-in iron cyl liners & nodular main bearing caps, cyl deactivation
HP/TORQUE	.....495 hp / 470 lb-ft (with performance exhaust)
TRANSMISSION	.....M1L 8-spd dual clutch (DCT)
ENGINE / DRIVETRAIN	.....mid-engine / RWD
ZERO-TO-60	.....(Z51) under 3 sec
SUSPENSION	.....F: short/long arm (SLA) dbi wishbone, forged alum upper & cast alum L-shape lower control arms, monotube shocks (46mm), Magnetic Selective Ride Control avail w Z51. (Adjustable front lift w memory avail); R: short/long arm (SLA) dbi wishbone, forged alum upper & cast alum L-shape lower control arms, direct-acting stblzr bar, monotube shocks (46mm), Magnetic Selective Ride Control avail w Z51
STEERING	.....Bosch/ZF variable-ratio rack & pinion w elec power assist; (incl Active Steer Stops w avail Magnetic Ride Control)
BRAKES	.....F: (w Z51) 13.3x1.18; R: (w Z51) 13.8x1.06
WHEELS	.....F: 19 x 8.5; R: 20 x 11.5x120mm bolt pattern
TIRES	.....(Z51) Michelin Pilot Sport 4S F: 245/35ZR19; R: 305/30ZR20
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....182.3 / 107.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....standard: 38.1 ft; w Magnetic Ride Control: 36.4 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....na
HEADROOM	.....37.9 in
LEGROOM	.....42.8 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....12.6 cu.ft
FUEL	.....3366 lb
WEIGHT / CAPACITY	.....na
MPG	.....15/27/19 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$58,900
2LT PKG:	Infotainment 3 w nav, Bose Performance 14-speaker audio, wireless charging, performance data/video recorder, heads-up display, HD front curb view camera, rear camera mirror, power heated folding auto-dim mirrors w turn indicators, heated wheel, driver & passenger memory, heated/vented seats, power lumbar control, power seat bolsters, advanced anti-theft, univ home remote, extended SiriusXM trial, rear cross traffic & side blind zone alerts, cargo nets.....7300
Z51 PERFORMANCE PKG:	performance brakes, performance suspension, performance exhaust, performance rear axle ratio, electronic limited slip diff, rear spoiler, HD cooling system, run-flat hi-po tires.....5000
MAGNETIC RIDE CONTROL	.....1895
GT2 BUCKET SEATS	.....1495
WHEELS:	19" front 20" rear 5-trident-spoke machined face Spectra gray painted aluminum wheels.....1495
BRIGHT RED BRAKE CALIPERS	.....595
TORCH RED SEAT BELTS	.....395
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1095
TOTAL	.....\$78,170



CORVETTE



open road

We took the Corvette up I-17, destination unknown. Climbing toward 3000 feet through Black Canyon, we noted the DCT 8-speed automatic was shifting regularly—between 6th and 7th quite a bit, then back up to 8th. We only know because we looked, and we only looked because it was so smooth, we wondered whether we were shifting at all. We had figured we'd use the paddle shifters through here, but had no overriding reason to do so—the automatic was doing a fine job on its own. Much of the downshifting was in fact due to other traffic being kind of slow through that winding two-lane climb, pushing down our speed. But with or without that, you can hold a higher gear easily.

We exited at Dewey-Humboldt Road, Arizona 169, elevation 4500 feet, among the piñon and juniper. We headed west on the two-lane, perfect sports car driving, then doubled back and took a small side road that brought us to a hidden pocket of Ponderosa forest at an altitude of about 5500 feet. This road offered more than perfect sports car driving, with spectacular curves on top of that elevation change, till the pavement ended and we turned the Corvette around. We'll have to revisit and continue on this in an off-roader sometime.

Back on I-17 and descending below 4000 feet, we again didn't have to use the paddles, but this time we did. Dropping to 7th, then 6th, rpms were below 2000, so we shifted down again to achieve more like 3000 rpm for more control. Before very long at all, we saw it was back in Drive (and reading out as 7th, then 8th). We do generally prefer a such a system, that reverts to Drive if a paddling driver forgets they were paddling, though maybe not so soon. The car was running about 2000-2600 rpm, against a 6000 rpm redline, so instead of just using paddles, we moved the main shifter (those push-pull buttons-levers) into Manual, for those higher rpms and more responsive downhill speed control via throttle. When we hit flatter terrain, we popped it back into Drive. We'd still welcome a manual, but in a grand touring scenario like this, the DCT is well suited to conditions.

As part of our sample's \$7300 2LT Package, we had a feature we've encountered in other recent GM vehicles: a rear-camera inside-rear-view mirror. These are clever because they see past indoor obstructions—whether a crowd in an SUV or the confined over-the-shoulder view in a mid-engined coupe. On the downside, it means shifting your eyes' focus from infinity out the windshield to 20 inches or so to a camera screen in the mirror's position, and split seconds matter here. Its image is superb and covers significant blind spots, but we get hung up on the eyeball refocusing issue.

The rear camera mirror's peripheral blind spot imaging may be extra useful in busy multi-lane

travel, where an over-the-shoulder glance is confounded by reflections on a (surprisingly noise-absorbing) vertical pane of glass between cockpit and engine, which gives the effect of something coming up on your right side at double your speed. Advantage: camera mirror, at least for content.

open roof

Corvette takes two approaches to open-top touring in the new C8—partly familiar, partly new, creating an interesting conundrum.

In the C8 coupe—our car—the roof is a single removable panel. With limited cargo space front and rear, we thought we'd have to remove it at home, leave it in the garage and commit to a day with no top, come what may. We also thought it might be a two-person job. Not so. Pop two levers at the front, one at the rear, angle up and remove. Shift your grip from edges to center (the trickiest move) and pop it into the rear trunk, where push-push, click-click it locks into storage position, leaving a bit of storage volume. It's a clever piece of work, available in body color, transparent, or carbon fiber with body color side rails.

Alternatively, the new convertible is a retractable hardtop, which operates in 16 seconds at up to 30 mph. The convertible has notably different body work from the seats back, with twin nacelles behind the headrests, but without the clear panel that shows off the engine, as in the coupe.

Usually, tradeoffs between a convertible and a removable top involve storage of the top, flexibility as conditions change or on a trip, luggage capacity, overnight security for a ragtop—but the tradeoffs here are minimal, enough so to make it a tough choice. The removable-top coupe loses a little luggage volume to the top panel (unless you leave it at home), but you can show off its clear-cover view of the engine, while the convertible loses that view but consumes no rear luggage space. Neither has ragtop security issues.

We did find significant ear-punching wind buffeting at certain speeds with the top removed and the windows up in our coupe, though windows down generally eliminated it. We haven't experienced the convertible yet.

features

You'll feel right at home in the Corvette's cockpit. If you're tall or have big feet, you'll notice this getting in, but then it basically feels tailor made for anyone with the good fortune to sit in it.

Features and details include the usual mix of delight and annoyance, both of which inspired more notes than usual, from which we'll touch on a few highlights.

From outside, doors are operated (and unlocked) by reaching below the mid-engine's intake

blade, which is a slick design. Door handle operation from inside is awkward, which has long been a Corvette hallmark. But the thing that annoyed us was an inability to touch-lock the car: even after reading all 40 pages in the manual on keys-doors-windows-locks, it appears the only way to lock when you leave is to either rely on waiting for automatic locking, far from ideal in any number of scenarios, or pull the key out of your pocket.

The aforementioned climate controls—all in a long row along the raised right rib of the console—are perhaps decent use of that space, but in no way intuitive to their purpose; you have to specifically look at which is which, at least for awhile.

The audio on-off-volume knob is off the upper left corner of the touchscreen, largely hidden by the wheel and stalks, which is manageable, except that your knuckles are almost surely going to change all the contents of the touchscreen.

The electronic parking brake button is ill-defined and lives in a very low, obscure spot.

You could live with this car indefinitely, pushing both the frunk and the rear trunk lid closed, before discovering that the rear one (but not the front) will power-close and latch itself if you just get it close—a neat feature that may also at least a little bit reduce the inevitable fingerprints you'll leave all over both.

Drive modes are awkwardly below a purposely placed obstruction, using a knob where a multi-position switch would work better, while steering wheel audio volume uses two single switches where a knob would be better.

Things like that.

You also might want to set a few bucks aside to visit the custom audio shop for an upgraded system—sound quality just doesn't live up to the rest of the experience.

"order today"

The rest of the experience is top notch. As far as style and personality, this car has no problem whatsoever going up against cars two to three times its price in the judgmental pecking order of Valley traffic, in both image and performance.

Corvette is one of the rare vehicles that's distinctive from front or rear, and (perhaps rarest of all) boldly distinctive from the side. You will glance back over your shoulder as you walk away.

While refueling during one of our longer drives, a guy pulled up to ask about the car. When we're still developing all the thoughts you've just read, it's easy to be speechless when asked for an insta-review, but this one was easy. "Hey, it's a \$59,000 mid-engine supercar!" He concurred.

The mid-engine layout and restyling earn the C8 Corvette that supercar term—but only if it's done right. And man, is this one done right. ■

NEW FOR 2021

- **NEW EXTERIOR COLORS:**
Silver Flare Metallic,
Red Mist Metallic Tintcoat
- **NEW INTERIOR COLOR:**
Sky Cool Gray/Strike Yellow
- **NEW FULL-LENGTH DUAL RACING STRIPES PACKAGE NEW COLORS:**
Blue, Orange, Red, Yellow
- **STINGER STRIPE IN THREE COLORS:**
Carbon Flash/Edge Red,
Carbon Flash/Edge Yellow,
Carbon Flash/Midnight Silver
- **Driver mode on-screen visualization and new track digital tachometer**
- **Magnetic Ride Control available without Z51 package**
- **Standard wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto capability**
- **Standard Buckle To Drive:**
This feature, when active, prevents the driver from shifting out of Park if the driver's seat belt is not buckled for up to 20 seconds, to remind you to buckle up before driving

2021 CARRYOVER PRICING

2021 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray pricing is the same as the 2020 model—starting at \$59,995 for the coupe (\$58,900 plus \$1095 destination charge) and \$67,495 for the convertible (including destination charge).

Coupe	
1LT	\$59,995
2LT	67,295
3LT	71,945
Convertible	
1LT	\$67,495
2LT	74,295
3LT	78,945
Z51 Performance Package	+ \$5,995

