

# 2002 Chevy Corvette Z06 - A Fine Line

## Race Car Or Street Car? For This C5, The Answer Simply Is Yes

Barry Kluczyk Oct 1, 2003

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This paint scheme, a proposal for the C5-Rs for the 2000 racing season, was seen only once and on this real C5-R, in the GM display at the 1999 SEMA Show, and in some press release photos.

If it weren't for the Michelin Pilots and leather interior, Mike Lowry's '02 Z06, with its C5-R styling cues, could easily be mistaken for a GTS competitor in the paddock. Then again, a set of slicks and a five-point harness would fix that. To the enthusiastic, 50-year-old Texas owner, that's the point. "I wanted a car that would be 'out there;' something that would be the ultimate streetcar for a few years to come," Lowry says.

A quick check of the patriotically-painted Vette's specs certainly points to a high-water mark in street-legal performance: A 641hp, 7.0L Gen. III engine, T1 road racing suspension, 15-inch brakes with six-piston rotors up front, custom center-lock hubs, 18- and 19-inch wheels, and Specter Werkes/Sports GTR-inspired bodywork. And those are just the basics.

"Yes, the project got a little out of hand," admits Lowry, who went more than 14 months without setting eyes on his Vette during its construction. "I drove the car for about two months and put 329 miles on it before deciding to do something extreme to it. That was the last I saw of it for more than a year." The virgin Z06 left Texas for Arizona, where Extreme Motorsports performed the T1 suspension upgrades, including the road race-spec stabilizer bars and bushings. They also were scheduled to drop in a custom, 585-horse Katech-built engine, but Lowry's conversations with the engine builders put a halt to the new motor just as it was being lowered into the empty engine bay. "I got to talking with the folks at Katech and we decided to go with something wilder," he says.

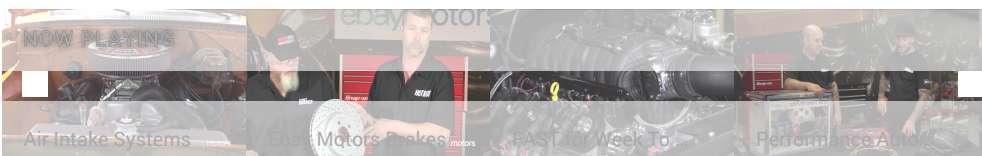


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That "something wilder" was a C5-R aluminum block with 4.125-inch bores, combined with a Moldex forged steel, 4.000-inch crank, resulting in 427 cubic-inches. The C5-R block is a different casting than production-style LS1 blocks. Revised coolant passages and a modular cylinder bank design permits overboring options unavailable to the standard LS1-type Gen. III block. Lowry's engine also boasts 6.000-inch. Carillo rods pinned to custom forged pistons. Katech, a company with integral ties to Corvette's racing program, was reluctant to divulge all the details of Lowry's unique combination, but we were able to pry out of them that the pistons deliver a 12.21:1 compression ratio. They also told us the cam is a solid roller, but were mum about its lobe profiles. Heck, they wouldn't even divulge the diameter of the throttle body.

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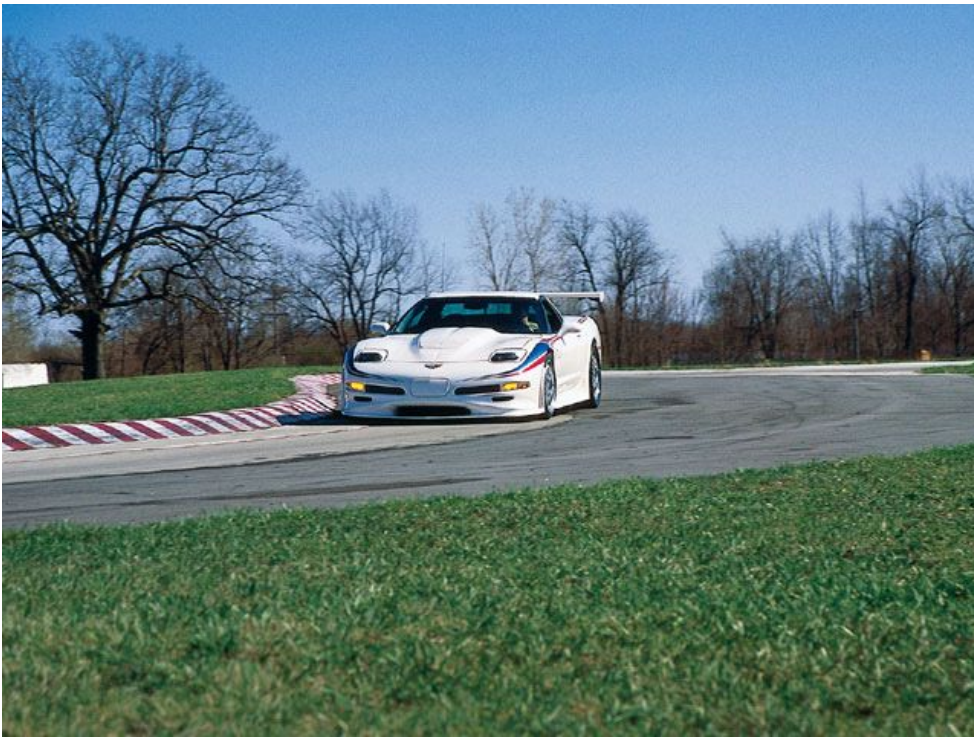
valve covers is a set of artfully sculpted C5-R cylinder heads, the inner contours of which are—you guessed it—as secret as Bill Gates' ATM card PIN. We know this: They've been ported, have 2.180/1.625 valves, and were expensive. Really expensive. Really, really expensive. We know how much they cost, but were asked not to publish it. Here's a hint: Lowry spent more on the heads than some people spend on, say, a brand-new car. In the understatement of the year, Lowry admits, "Katech did a lot of work to them."



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And though it wasn't cheap, Katech's work paid off. On the dyno, the engine peaked at 641hp and 590 lb-ft of torque. "I can't say enough about how great Katech was in putting together this engine," says Lowry.

During the course of discussions about the engine, Lowry was also turned on to nearby Specter Werkes/Sports, the Troy, Michigan-based specialty shop, run by Jeff Nowicki, which turns out the race-inspired GT-R Corvette. Convenient in that Specter was near Katech in the Detroit area, Lowry talked with Nowicki and discovered Specter would be the appropriate enabler of his race car craving. "I always loved the '00 C5-R that was displayed at SEMA, but never raced," he says. "To me, that was one of the best-looking cars I ever saw. Jeff, being a racer, knew all about that car." With that, the Vette left Arizona and landed at Nowicki's doorstep in Michigan. Once inside the Specter Werkes/Sports shop, the car was shaved of all its original bodywork, save the roof and decklid. Specter's GT-R body panels, which add 6 inches in overall width to the car, replaced the stock fenders, fascias and doors.



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The GTR panels follow the car's original contours, adding visual muscle to the Vette's stance, but in a tasteful, restrained manner. The wider panels, which weigh the same as the Vette's stock panels, also provide room for steamroller-sized rubber.

Of course, Lowry's Vette takes the Specter GTR package to a higher level. Nowicki added a racing front splitter, C5-R HID headlamps, a Specter PowerdomeSC hood, and a Specter-built rear wing (and stanchions). "The rear wing is tied into the chassis, just like a race car," says Nowicki. "It's as functional as it is good looking."

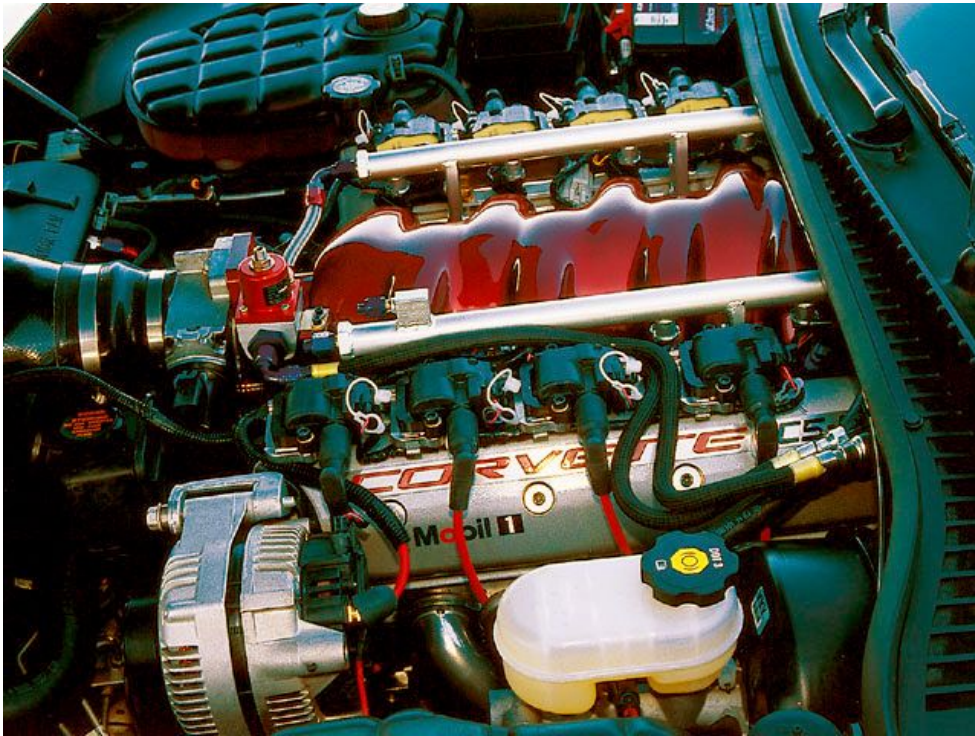
Specter didn't skimp on race-spec parts for the chassis, either. The brakes (initially installed by Extreme Motorsports) are made up of 15-inch-diameter, drilled, zinc-washed Baer rotors and Alcon calipers (six-piston calipers in front, four-piston in the rear). HAL QA1 adjustable, twin-tube shocks were installed, too, along with GM Racing coolers for the transmission and rear differential.



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But, perhaps, nothing on Mike Lowry's Vette says "race car" like the custom center-lock hubs, which hold in place the 18x11-inch and 19x12.5-inch BBS racing wheels. Custom built by Specter, they add a detail to the car that will likely be unmatched by any other street car. "This Vette is really as close as you can get to a real C5-R for the street," says Nowicki. Indeed, we caught up with Nowicki and the Vette at Waterford Hills Road Course, north of Detroit, as the car was being sorted out prior to delivery to Lowry.

"With all the race-specific parts, especially the engine and suspension, we needed to put the car on a racetrack to fine-tune it," Nowicki says. "We adjusted the ride height, checked for tire clearance in the fenders, and put laps on it to make sure everything was operating as it should." Believe us, as the car casually negotiated the tracks' corners, it looked and sounded the part of a race car.



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Most race cars, however, don't have a stock leather interior (altered only by GT-R-embroidered seats and a dash plaque with the car's Specter build number, 02-002-20), or paint job as rich and detailed as this Vette's. The pearl white metallic paint absolutely glows in the setting sun, while the red and blue graphics accent the car's track-ready demeanor. "The paint scheme reflects my feelings of American spirit," says Lowry, a Vietnam-era veteran with a background in special operations and intelligence. "I proudly served my country and want the car to reflect that patriotism."

Show-quality paint notwithstanding, Lowry's Z06 seems to be missing nothing in terms of racing equipment...except, maybe, air jacks. But that'd be a ridiculous extravagance, right? "Well, we looked at it," Lowry says, pausing for a moment before adding: "But Jeff felt it would add too much weight to the car. So, we left them off-for now." There's also talk of a Kinsler-style injection setup. "I really think those eight velocity stacks look cool," he says. They certainly do. And they'd look right at home under the hood of a Corvette that, itself, would look at home at Le Mans.

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