



2013 CHEVY CAMARO ZL1 CONVERTIBLE

NO SWEAT

MSRP: \$59,545 · AS TESTED: \$65,800

The latest addition to the Camaro lineup is the ZL1 Convertible. The top-ranging ragtop carries some impressive credentials. It's the fastest, most powerful Camaro convertible ever. That claim covers a lot of ground. The car's first generation included some with engines whose straight-line performance was hair-raising. But, those cars weren't nearly as happy when forced to go slow (or corner, for that matter). A bumper to bumper slog through the Twin Bridges construction zone (or its cousin, a stop-and-go slink through the Route 9 detour) would've resulted in rising temperature gauges, and rising blood pressure for the driver. Technology tames that worry, and the ZL1 happily putts through traffic jams with the indifference of a teenager listening to a parental lecture.

So, at 'round-town speeds, the ZL1 is the model of the docile, daily driver. But, given an opportunity to flex its muscles, it fairly oozes with smooth, lag-free power. The power numbers are as impressively high as the speed numbers are low. The 6.2-liter LSA small block engine produces 580 horsepower, and 556 lb. ft. of torque. That's enough to post a 0-60 time in the low, 4-second range, and run the quarter-mile in about 12 seconds.

The car's performance is notable for how casually the engine gets it all done. Dig your spurs in, and the Eaton Supercharger pours out the thrust with zero lag, and little strain. The throaty exhaust system drops its 'round town, Clark Kent restraint, in favor of a more menacing, baritone bellow. Indeed, one good argument for having the convertible might be just because it's easier to let the exhaust note wash over you. Gas mileage in the Uber Camaro is, unsurprisingly, not good. EPA says you can expect 12 mpg's city, 18 highway. I



managed 13 miles per gallon, but I'm pretty sure that anyone who buys this car is more interested in the mph results than they are the mpg's.

The engine is matched with either a six-speed (Tremec) manual or six-speed (Hydra-Matic) automatic transmission. My test car was fitted with the latter. My bias in performance cars is always slanted towards the stick, and were it my money, that's the way I'd go here. The automatic transmission isn't a dual clutch design, so it lacks the bang-bang response time that would make paddle-shifting entertaining. However, left in auto mode, it's smooth shifting and reliably quick from gear to gear.

The operation of the power, convertible top is as slow as the car is fast. It takes about 18 seconds to get the lid raised or lowered, which makes stoplight

switchovers a dicey proposition. Once up, the top lends the same turret-like visibility as the Camaro coupe. Once down, all is forgiven, as the lines blur between you, your car, and the landscape that you're driving through.

New this year, the rear view mirror takes on a retro, frameless look. Also added for 2013 is a 7-inch touchscreen interface for the radio and (optional) navigation system. Staying with options, the microfiber interior (\$500) adds suede-like inserts to the leather seats, along with wraps for the steering wheel, shifter knob and dash accents. The front seats are heated, supportive and comfortable without being confining. The flat bottom steering wheel is thick and feels good and grippy.

A quartet of auxiliary gauges, mounted low and forward on the center console, are a nice visual nod to first generation Camaros. The convertible's rear seat is 2+2 size. Front seat pushback quickly erases

rear seat legroom, but the back space is a logical ledge for a backpack or briefcase. It's also good for cargo overflow once you exhaust the trunk, which holds a decent 10.3 cubic feet of gear when up, and is much more modest when the top is down.

Convertibles are always less stiff than their hardtop counterparts, but the structural shoring done by Chevy in the interest of stiffening the ZL1 has largely done the trick. Choppy pavement extracts only modest cowl shake. The chassis' overall composure is helped in large measure by GM's Magnetic Ride Control system, and sticky Goodyear Eagle F1 tires. The ZL1 has very good reflexes, stout brakes and provides the driver with fine feedback through the steering wheel. And even with 20-inch rims, skinny sidewalls and the suspension dialed up to sharpen its cornering, the car rides comfortably.

Convertibles have always been far rarer than hardtops. Ditto and more so in muscle cars, where ragtops are heavier, and lighter mean faster. For that reason, some of the highest valued cars of the '60s were convertible muscle cars. As they say, when the top goes down, the price goes up. And when the speed increases, so does the value.

Owing to its first year status and sheer, all 'round performance, the 2013 Camaro ZL1 Convertible has already punched its ticket as a future collectible. But shrink-wrapping one and waiting for the payoff would be a shame. Few cars handle dual duty as daily fair-weather driver and weekend track terror as comfortably as this one can. And besides, as with any car, it will be years before it stops depreciating, let alone appreciates.

So, if you're considering the ZL1 ragtop, I say better to enjoy those years with some quality, fair weather driving, and then decide if you want to part with it.

