

# A Gathering of Eagles

*There's only one way to find the fastest street car in America.*

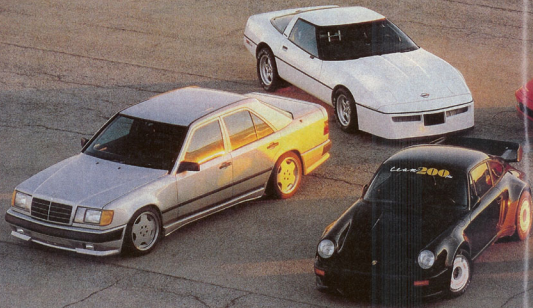
BY RICH CEPPOS

• It was hard to believe it was actually happening. At ten o'clock on a summer's eve, in a garage in the middle of nowhere, the cars began to arrive. One by one, the fastest street machines in America rolled out

of the pitch-black Ohio night and through the double-high garage doors, as if drawn by the bright lights inside. The Eagles were gathering.

Their arrival signaled the beginning of

a mission that was crystal clear in its simplicity: to crown the fastest street car in America. Why did we want to do that? Because, to paraphrase George Leigh Mallorey, they were there. For years, stories have

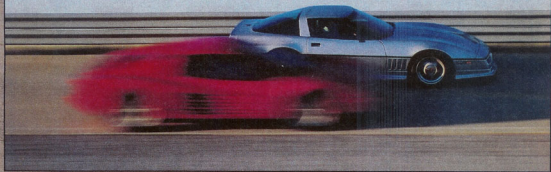


rippled through the automotive underground about superfast street cars, said to be capable of more than 200 mph. The banzai runners—wild men who terrorize the highways at warp velocity during the

wee hours—have been the subject of at least two magazine articles. Three years ago, our own Csaba Csere aided and abetted Gale Banks in developing a Pontiac Trans Am that cracked the double-centu-

ry mark. If there was one such car on the loose, there had to be dozens.

We baited the hook with a promise of a brush with fame and a chance to run flat out at one of the safest, best-equipped





high-speed facilities in the world. "Come join us at the Transportation Research Center of Ohio," our official invitation trumpeted. "We'll run your car against the clocks on TRC's 7.5-mile oval. Oh, and don't bother showing up unless your car is capable of at least 175 mph."

The other rules of the competition were equally straightforward. No thinly disguised race cars would be allowed. All entrants would have to be legally registered and properly equipped for road use. We would drive each contender on a 100-mile road loop to validate its streetworthiness. That was it, and may the best car win.

Let the record show that all of the big-name hypercar tuners were asked to the ball, and that most of them begged off. Gale Banks, Alois Ruf, Willy Koenig, Andy Granatelli, Rick Brady of Pegasus Automobili, and Jerry Wiegert, father of

the mythic Vector, declined. So did a host of hypercar owners—understandably so, in most cases. For one thing, machines in this lofty category often have price tags well into six figures. Who could know what expensive ills might befall them?

And so it went, the wheat separating from the chaff, until five brave souls bearing seven wondrous cars—the Eagles—were left. And now they were descending on East Liberty, Ohio, at the appointed hour. Reeves Callaway anted up a pair of his twin-turbocharged Corvettes. Advertising exec Mike Burroughs handed us the keys to his thundering, 8.9-liter Keith Black Camaro. Michigan businessman Brian DeVries showed up with a twin-turbo Porsche 911 and a dead-stock Ferrari Testarossa. Hartmut Feyhl, AMG of North America's technical director, standing in for his boss, Richard Buxbaum,



idled up in a whisper-quiet Hammer. And Texan Bob Norwood brought his blood-red, Chevrolet-powered, GTO-bodied 308. The festivities could begin.

The next morning, the TRC garage was a beehive of activity. The TRC day-shift mechanics eyed the strangers with curiosity, then pitched in to help like old friends. The C/D technical staff inspected each Eagle thoroughly. And there were tires to change. We weren't about to go hyper-sonic on anything but the safest rubber.

Two tire companies were kind enough to help our cause. Goodyear provided enough tires to outfit a Formula 1 team and sent us veteran tire engineer Reed Kryder to take temperatures, set pressures, and make sure the cars and the tires were properly matched. Michelin anted up fresh, carefully inspected TRX tires for the Testarossa and mailed us design engineer Kevin Clemens. Both tire men would prove invaluable to the safety of this event, and we thank them and their companies for their concern and largess.

While the final tuning and tweaking were taking place, we stole out to the huge, banked oval to set up the kind of speed traps that state troopers man only in their wildest nightmares. Normally we



The Car: Norwood Ferrari-Chevrolet GTO

The Man: Bob Norwood, age 44; president, Norwood Ferrari Service, Dallas, Texas



would have canceled the effects of wind and grade by locating one trap on the front straight and one on the back; however, a large patch at the end of the back straight might have caused some of the cars to bottom at high speeds. We decided instead to set our traps on the front straight only, one at either end. Each car would circle the oval first in one direction, tripping the lights at one end of the straight; then in the opposite direction, through the other trap. JACircuits auto-cross timing lights would yield readings accurate to 0.1 mph. The two speeds for each car would then be averaged to produce its official top end.

Considering that most of the contestants were one-offs, the testing would go amazingly smoothly. There would be five on-track breakdowns, but only one car would fail to complete the minimum of two timer runs necessary to register an official speed. And how the Eagles would fly! Beginning with the least swift, the finishing order was as follows:

#### Norwood Ferrari-Chevrolet GTO No Official Speed

In at least one way, the Ferrari-Chevrolet was the most exotic car in this test: it

began life not as a car at all. Bob Norwood and his cohorts at Norwood Ferrari Service in Dallas, Texas, built it from scratch out of spare parts. Most of those parts are Ferrari: the 308GTB chassis, the Boxer brakes, and the factory GTO body panels. The fit and finish are exquisite; you might well take this red rocket for the real thing.

Until it's fired up, that is: the sting in its tail comes not from Maranello, Italy, but from Warren, Michigan. Norwood fitted his GTO with a longitudinally mounted 5.0-liter Chevy V-8 built to Can-Am racing specs and mated it to a ZF transaxle. He claims it develops 661 hp at 7800 rpm.

Unfortunately, the Ferrari spent most of its time at TRC on jack stands. A number of maladies struck it, from a loose belly pan to high-speed instability. Finally, our high-speed Hungarian, Csaba Csere, coaxed it through the traps at 187 mph.

The return run never happened, thanks to the failure of a distributor-shaft seal. End of story. A few days later, Norwood towed his hybrid to Bonneville, but there were more problems; it turned "only" 193 mph on the salt flats.

If everything had worked properly at TRC, the GTO should have hit at least 200 mph—though we suspect its racy character would have made it a bear to live with on our road loop. Unfortunately, we'll never know.

#### Ferrari Testarossa 172.9 mph

The redhead from Maranello made it look easy. Going 173 mph in the Testarossa on the TRC oval was so simple, your Aunt Jane could have done it. The 380-hp, 48-valve twelve-cylinder revved to a taut, premium-quality howl,



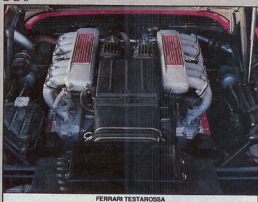
The Cars: Motorsport Design Porsche 911 Turbo, Ferrari Testarossa

The Man: Brian DeVries, age 37; chairman, Spectra Products Corporation; president, Johnson Manufacturing Company, Inc.; president, Progressive Management Associates, Inc.; Grand Rapids, Michigan





NORWOOD GTO



FERRARI TESTAROSSA

the wind whooshed, and the next thing we knew, we were there. The drivetrain, complete with catalysts and mufflers, felt as if it could have maintained the TR's top speed forever. A topped-out TR gives you plenty of time to take in the sights—but you do notice that you have to steer it, even down the straights.

As for the fact that the Testarossa at TRC was three miles per hour slower than our last TR test car, we can only cite the vagaries of time and mileage: Brian DeVries's go-to-work Ferrari was two years and 16,000 miles old.

On the road, the TR was a model citizen. Half of the cars in this test were so noisy that we couldn't hear ourselves think in them, but the Testarossa's engine

was turbine smooth, its cabin refreshingly quiet. It had a fully operational climate-control system—no small advantage on a hot summer day. Yes, we had to wrestle the gear lever through the gated shift plate, and the steering was numb on center—typical Testarossa behavior—but in general DeVries's car was the picture of civility. You could drive a TR to the office every day, and that amounts to a very big compliment for an automobile that's capable of flying on the ground.

#### AMG Hammer 181.4 mph

If the Testarossa was impressive, the AMG Hammer was astounding. The Hammer is a sedan that sacrifices virtually

nothing to the great god speed. It offers all the comfort and refinement of a standard Mercedes 300E, but with nearly 200 more hp and 45 mph more top speed.

On the track, we found we could one-hand the Hammer easily at 170 mph. It was so sure-footed that Csaba was able to hurl it around for one full lap with its throttle pinned flat—over the wavy pavement in the north banking, across the rough patch on the back straight. "No sweat," Csaba concluded upon his return. In our after-hours acceleration testing it clicked off a 0-to-60-mph dash of just 5.0 seconds and ran the quarter-mile in only 13.2 seconds at 108 mph. All of this, mind you, with catalytic converters and mufflers in place. (We allowed the entrants to uncork their cars' exhaust systems for testing, if they so desired.)

Around town, the Hammer was so docile that no one suspected we had the devil himself under the hood. When we held the pedal down flat, though, a demonic howl let loose as the Hammer lunged through the atmosphere. As we bounded over the roads around East Liberty, we did find the one nit to pick: the Hammer's squat suspension sunk into its bump stops so often that another inch or two of travel might be just what the doctor ordered.

Aside from that one reservation, we were in hawg heaven behind the AMG's thick-rimmed wheel. It's not every day that an aftermarket outfit transforms a four-seat sedan into a car that can run and gun like a Testarossa—better even. Grooming it until it also has the manners of a duke is almost unheard of. In that respect, the Hammer was the most amazing Eagle in our gathering.

#### Callaway Corvette 191.7 mph

Reeves Callaway is a crafty sort, a former racer who likes to push the limits in other ways now. Last year his company sold 200 Twin-Turbo Corvettes. He came

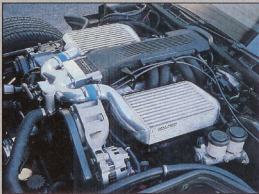


The Car: AMG Hammer

The Man: Richard Buxbaum, age 39; president, AMG of North America, Inc., Chicago, Illinois; co-owner, Continental Toyota and Continental Imports, Joplin, Missouri



AMG HAMMER



CALLAWAY CORVETTE

to TRC with two of them, loaded for bear.

The car under discussion here is the 1988 production Callaway—well, *not quite* production, because Callaway and his merry band couldn't leave well enough alone. They fitted the silver bullet's turbos with larger turbine housings for more high-end efficiency. They rigged a spray system underhood to douse the intercoolers with water, further cooling the intake air. They offered the catalysts so that high-octane race gas could be used—an added hedge against detonation. For 1988, all Callaways are pumped up to the same 381 hp as our test car—a 36-hp improvement. Callaway claims that the changes to the test unit flattened its power curve only modestly, if at all.

The aerodynamics of the test car were fine-tuned as well. The Callaway boys fitted it with the front air dam and rocker skirts from the Corvette aero package now available at Chevrolet dealers. They also bolted an extra lip onto the front air dam, further narrowing the gap to the road surface. Callaway rejected conventional wisdom, however, when it came to combating the destabilizing effects of high-speed lift at the rear—which Corvettes have in fair measure. No rear spoiler was fitted because, according to Reeves, "it would add drag." To set the rear suspension at the desired ride height, 200 pounds of ballast was added to the luggage compartment.

During our top-speed tests, the Callaway was street-car comfortable. On a warmup lap, Reeves sailed through the traps at 186 mph. After the mufflers had been removed, and with Don Sherman at the wheel, the silver Vette registered a one-way best of 195.5 mph.

It's not clear how much the fine-tuning helped on the track, but it was of negative value on the street. The oversize turbos took longer to spool up than a stock Callaway's, and a mysterious, intermittent misfire hobbled the engine.

Otherwise, the Callaway behaved just as

you'd expect a turbo Corvette to: as if it had a couple booster rockets strapped to its tail. Since everything but the drivetrain had been left as Chevy intended, the Callaway was all poise and no drama.

What's even more impressive about the Callaway is its 58-grand price. In the hypercar neighborhood, this is the cheapest house on the block.

#### Motorsport Design Porsche 911 Turbo 202.5 mph

The Motorsport Design Porsche 911 Turbo crossed two thresholds simultaneously. The more important one for our purposes was the magic 200-mph mark, which it streaked across with ease. And

while the three lower finishers in this test drove like street cars on amphetamines, there was a basic personality shift from there on up. The 911 felt like a race machine tamed barely enough for the road.

The blue bullfrog was born fast. In its first incarnation it was a lightweight 911 Turbo (aluminum fenders, doors, and deck lid; no A/C or sunroof) modified by Ruf, the German tuning concern. When owner Brian DeVries decided he wanted enough power to light up western Michigan, John Stanchina and Rob Holcomb of Motorsport Design in Scottsdale, Arizona, had wrenches at the ready.

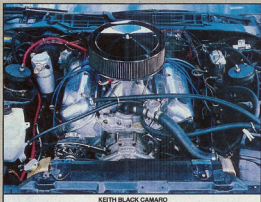
Starting with a stock 3.3-liter 911 Turbo engine, Motorsport added ported twin-plug cylinder heads, its own twin-tur-



The Cars: Callaway Top Gun Corvette, Callaway Corvette  
The Man: Reeves Callaway, age 40; president and CEO, Callaway Cars, Inc., Old Lyme, Connecticut



MOTORSPORT 911



KEITH BLACK CAMARO

bo system, intake runners from a 962 race car, and custom fuel-injection electronics. One of DeVries's companies fabricated the huge air-to-air intercooler that swaddles the engine. Pressurized with an incredible 21.8 psi of boost, the engine whumps out 646 hp at 7500 rpm.

The Porsche, with Dr. Sherman at the controls, wailed through the traps with its hood caved in from wind pressure. No problem, said Sherman. "It was like falling off a log." The hood even popped back into shape all by itself.

In the real world, the 911 was insanity with a license plate. Want a taste of AAU/Fuel dragster? Snap the throttle open in first or second and fight to hold your head up. The tach needle spins crazily. Are 3.8

seconds to 60 mph and a quarter-mile of 12.0 seconds at 126 mph enough to keep you awake? This is IMSA GTP performance on the road; you're so busy trying to get slowed down for the corners, you hardly notice the handling.

Unfortunately, the 911 faltered badly when asked to do what the lowliest econobox does on a milk run. The triple-plate racing clutch was all lurches off the line. The engine quaked and spat under 3500 rpm. And when the revs were up, it was impossible to hold a steady speed. Stanchina blamed the half-developed fuel injection. "It was never made to be driven at part throttle," he shrugged.

The twin-turbo 911 was a mind-boggling thrill ride, all right, but its bad man-

ners limited it to the weekend-toy category. Further development is planned, according to Stanchina and Holcomb. They also intend to sell replicas of the engine, as well as a number of hop-up kits based on it. As for the blue flash itself, Brian DeVries can look with pride at the "Team 200-Plus" decal he stuck on its windshield before this test. He earned the right to keep it the hard way.

### Keith Black Camaro 216.0 mph

Now we're really getting up into the rarified air. The Keith Black Camaro represents the nothing-beats-cubic-inches philosophy: try 541 cubic inches (8.9 liters) of all-aluminum, Keith Black-manufactured

## Vital Statistics

	price	engine	intake system	horsepower	transmission/ gear ratios:1/ axle ratio:1
AMG HAMMER	\$160,000	V-8, 363 cu in (5956cc), aluminum block and heads, chain-driven double overhead cams, 4 valves per cylinder, 9.7:1 compression ratio	Bosch KE-Jetronic fuel injection	360 bhp @ 5750 rpm	Mercedes-Benz 4-speed automatic/ 3.88, 2.41, 1.54, 1.00/ 2.24, limited slip
CALLAWAY CORVETTE	\$58,000	V-8, 350 cu in (5733cc), iron block and aluminum heads, pushrods, roller hydraulic lifters, 7.5:1 compression ratio	2 Roto-Master Compact turbos with 11.6 psi of boost and 2 intercoolers, GM-Chevrolet fuel injection with Callaway Micro-Fueler	381 bhp @ 4250 rpm	GM/Coug Nash 4-speed with electronic overdrive/ 2.88, 1.91, 1.33, 1.00, 0.60/ 3.07, limited slip
CALLAWAY TOP GUN CORVETTE	\$155,000	V-8, 355 cu in (5819cc), iron block and aluminum heads, pushrods, roller lifters, 7.7:1 compression ratio	2 Rajay E10 turbos with 10.0 psi of boost and 2 intercoolers, GM-Chevrolet fuel injection with Callaway Micro-Fueler	712 bhp @ 6750 rpm	GM/Coug Nash 4-speed with electronic overdrive/ 2.88, 1.91, 1.33, 1.00, 0.60/ 3.07, limited slip
FERRARI TESTAROSSA	\$120,700	flat 12, 302 cu in (4943cc), aluminum block and heads, belt-driven double overhead cams, 4 valves per cylinder, 9.2:1 compression ratio	Bosch KE-Jetronic fuel injection	380 bhp @ 5750 rpm	Ferrari 5-speed/ 3.37, 2.16, 1.64, 1.25, 0.94/ 0.93 x 3.21, limited slip
KEITH BLACK CAMARO	\$80,000	V-8, 541 cu in (8861cc), aluminum block and heads, pushrods, roller lifters, 12.5:1 compression ratio	1x4-bbl Holley 850-cfm carburetor	700 bhp @ 6000 rpm	GM/B&M THM-400 3-speed automatic with Gear Vendors overdrive/ 2.48, 1.48, 1.00, 0.70/ 2.56, limited slip
MOTORSPORT DESIGN PORSCHE 911 TURBO	\$175,000	flat 6, 201 cu in (3299cc), aluminum block and heads, chain-driven single overhead cams, 7.0:1 compression ratio	2 AiResearch T04 turbos with 21.8 psi of boost and 1 intercooler, Zytek electronic fuel injection	846 bhp @ 7500 rpm	Ruf 5-speed/V 2.78, 2.00, 1.12, 0.83, 0.65/ 4.00, limited slip
NORWOOD FERRARI-CHEVROLET GTO	\$100,000	V-8, 306 cu in (5017cc), iron block and aluminum heads, pushrods, roller lifters, 13.2:1 compression ratio	Hilborn/Lucas timed mechanical fuel injection	661 bhp @ 7800 rpm	ZF 5-speed/ 2.23, 1.61, 1.32, 1.09, 0.70/ 3.23, limited slip

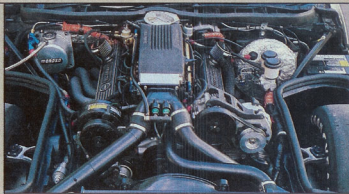
Chevrolet V-8, pumping out 700 hp at 6000 rpm. Good golly, Miss Molly!

Keith Black originally built this car for a *Hot Rod* magazine article. Black, in case you don't know, is a well-respected manufacturer of Fuel dragster and Funny Car engines. As if the KB Camaro needed any more credibility, owner Mike Burroughs showed up at TRC with eleven-time NHRA champ John Lingenfelter in tow. Lingenfelter had worked a little of his own tuning magic on the engine. As it turned out, he also saved the day at TRC, when a cam bearing went awry during the car's first pass. The problem was relatively minor, but it required an all-night thrash.

The next day, Lingenfelter blasted to 215.1 mph, and Sherman ran it back at 216.9, in two picture-perfect passes.

The road drive was another story. The KB Camaro's drivetrain was so tractable that we could idle down Main Street at 15 mph, but there were rough edges elsewhere. From its vision-robbing hood scoop to its huge engine's cruel assault on our senses, the KB Camaro was too lewd and crude for anything but short trips. Its lowered suspension allowed its air dam and front crossmember to crash into the pavement time and again. Halfway through the road drive, the pounding split the oil pan open, and the world's fastest Camaro had to be parked.

Obviously, some of the things that helped the Keith Black Camaro to achieve its prodigious speed just didn't work on the street. With another round of finessing, though, this woolly mammoth could



CALLAWAY TOP GUN CORVETTE

almost be transformed into a purring kitten. Would you believe a purring lion?

### Callaway Top Gun Corvette 222.4 mph

Here's one car that came by its nickname honestly. We hereby proclaim the Callaway Top Gun Corvette the fastest street car in America. It went an astounding 222.4 mph on the track, survived 100 miles on the road, and convinced us that it still had plenty of untapped potential.

The Top Gun was under construction as a research-and-development project long before our invitation arrived. Callaway's plan was, and is, to use it to study road-car turbocharging, aerodynamics, and cooling at the outer reaches

of speed and power. No off-the-rack Callaway Corvette drivetrain could have done the job reliably, so a fresh one was brewed up. The ingredients include a 355-cubic-inch Chevy racing block, special Brodix heads, a one-off intake system, reworked GM electronic injection, dry-sump lubrication, two large Rajay turbos, and a pair of huge intercoolers, located behind the front fascia where the turn signals normally live. (The signals were removed to provide airflow to the coolers.)

The goal was 1000 hp. Callaway wouldn't reveal the Top Gun's maximum output, but reliable sources peg it at 900 hp when the boost is set near the destruction threshold. Because a stock Corvette gearbox-and-overdrive assembly was

curb weight, lb	tires	TOP SPEED, MPH
3600	Pirelli P700, 215/45ZR-17	181.4
3450	Goodyear Eagle ZR40, P275/40ZR-17	191.7
3470	Goodyear Eagle (racing), 26.0 x 10.0-16	222.4
3760	Michelin TRX, F: 240/45VR-415; R: 280/45VR-415	172.9
3705	Goodyear Eagle VR50/ZR50, F: 225/50VR-16; R: 255/50ZR-16	216.0
2610	Goodyear Eagle (racing), F: 23.5 x 10.5-16; R: 25.5 x 12.5-16	202.5
NA	Goodyear Eagle (racing), F: 23.0 x 9.0-15; R: 25.0 x 11.0-15	NA



The Car: Keith Black Camaro

The Man: Michael Burroughs, age 37; president, Burroughs & Associates, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee

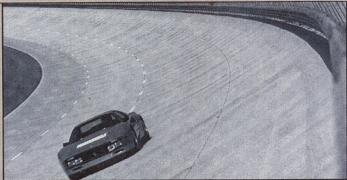


used for this test, the boost was dialed down to 10.0 psi, and a mere 712 hp at 6750 rpm was on tap.

Surprisingly, a huge front air dam was the Top Gun's lone aero aid. To keep the wind from sucking the side glass and the hatch from the bodywork, special clips were added to the doorframes and the lower corners of the rear window.

Inside, the Top Gun had enough gauges, knobs, and buttons to sustain manned spaceflight. Every critical engine variable, from intercooler temperature to exhaust-gas temp, was measured. On the passenger's side of the dash was a large control box that allowed the engine computer to be programmed on the roll. A five-point racing harness, a roll cage, and a fuel cell were installed for added safety. And, again, there were 200 pounds of sand in the cargo hold.

The rest was pure Chevrolet—1986 Chevrolet, as a matter of fact. The Top Gun was fashioned from the same white Callaway prototype that graced our No-



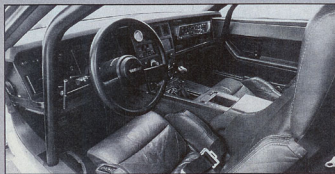
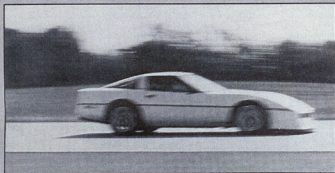
vember 1986 cover—the same car that ignominiously puked coolant after one easy lap of the Michigan International Speedway road course. That was the other reason Reeves Callaway brought his quarter-million-dollar machine to TRC: "Redemption," he said with a grin.

And redemption he got. Reeves himself ran the white car on its first run and brought it home at 214 mph. Later, he said he could have gone a lot faster but for a case of first-lap nerves.

In light of what happened next, there was no reason to doubt him. On the re-

## Over the Top

*To 231 mph on turbocharged wings.*

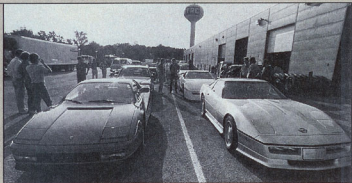


• I think I now know how the first astronauts felt as they watched the hatch slam shut. It came to me when I was in the Top Gun Corvette, with Reeves Callaway at the controls, both of us suited up like spacemen. We were being sealed in for liftoff. There was a space-age control panel in front of me. The crew was snuggling the windows up against the special anti-blowout strips that had been added to the doorframes.

Reeves was nervous—very nervous—and that made me nervous, too. The guy had been coy with us about his car. He wouldn't tell us how fast it would go or how much power it had, though any squid could see it was a monster.

This squid was used to find out how big a monster. "Whoever drives this car better be prepared to go faster than he's ever gone before," Callaway had said while pulling on his racing suit. "A lot faster." Now, in the driver's seat, his nerves making him talk, Reeves was finally letting some numbers slip. Did he really say "220 mph"? There, I heard it again. Oh, boy—what had I gotten myself into?

I had gone 180 mph earlier that morning, but this would be a bigger jump than I wanted to make; it would be a leap. I was about to go where I'd never gone, where few men have gone: *way out there*. I had watched a couple of the other cars rush past at more than 200 mph, and the experience had been sobering. The simple act of driving in a straight line had



turn pass, yours truly at the wheel, the Top Gun screamed through the traps at 231.1 mph. Not bad for a car that had been completed only 48 hours earlier.

Unfortunately, the lack of development time showed on the road. The Top Gunner may have been the contest winner, but

it was nearly undrivable. There had been no time to calibrate its fuel-delivery curve below 4000 rpm, so the super Callaway shuddered like an old locomotive at low engine speeds. The plugs were fouled much of the time as well, so all-out blasts to the redline were few and far between.

suddenly looked lethal. The noise had been unlike any other: the whoosh of a jet fighter, mixed with the howl of an Indy car, seasoned with a pinch of wild-animal roar. I had sensed the invisible fingers of the wind trying for a handhold, trying to rip pieces of bodywork off the cars. We've all seen sickening footage of NASCAR stock cars getting sideways at 200-plus mph, fluttering into the air like paper airplanes, then crashing down like World War III. Every time a car had screamed past at 200 mph, I had thought, "That guy has got *cayones* to keep his foot in it all the way down the straight. If a spoiler rips off, or a tire gives out, or the engine blows on the banking..."

So as they buttoned us in for the first pass, I felt as if I were on the way to the moon. Maybe I'd be back. Maybe not. Reeves had other ideas, though. On the warmup lap, he slowed abruptly on the front straight, pulled in, and dropped me off. "I wouldn't feel comfortable exposing anyone else to this kind of risk," he said. Then he went 214 mph, the fastest run to that point.

I sat by myself in the grass, waiting for my turn. I didn't feel like talking. This was a time for asking oneself, "What am I doing here?"—and I was asking. I'm finally grown up enough not to deceive myself about dangerous undertakings. Anything could go wrong, and I had a lot to lose. It had been a wonderful life so far. I loved my wife. I had a great job. I would hate myself if I wadded my body into a ball, just for a thrill.

But then I heard that familiar voice in my head reciting the just-let-me-get-

through-this-in-one-piece-and-I'll-never-do-it-again routine. All I wanted was one ride over the top, to the far side of 200. Just one taste. Maybe I'm not so grown up after all.

By the time we were ready for the return lap, the part of the psyche that generally keeps us from seeing our mortality had turned on like a blinding spotlight. I belted in, feeling good. "Work into it," counseled Reeves. I assured him—and promised myself—I'd only go as fast as I felt comfortable going.

I eased out of the pits. On the back straight I decided I needed more information on the car's high-speed behavior *right now*, so I squeezed the throttle. The Top Gun pulled from 150 to 190 mph as easily as most cars go from 50 to 90—and it felt rock-steady. My brain found the spigot marked "confidence" and turned it on full.

I coasted across the wavy pavement in the north banking at 145 mph, then squeezed the trigger again. "You need 170 by the front straight," Callaway had said. I was at 190 when I got there. I centered the car on the track. The throttle hit the stop. I felt as if every nerve ending in my body were firing at the same time. I saw the speedo tick over 210 mph and stopped looking.

The pit lane and the people standing in it got yanked backward in the blink of an eye. Then animal instinct took over. Funny, I didn't feel courageous. A strange, detached calm came over me. There was no noise anymore; just a movie of a road unreeing in front of me on fast forward. My world was focused now, down to essentials. Nothing mattered

The Top Gun Corvette gimped along, noisy and hot (it had no A/C), but it was never unexciting. Of all the cars in our test, only the Porsche pushed our innards around with as much ferocity.

As rough-mannered as the Top Gun was, we think it could be taught a new way of living pretty easily. Given Callaway's close ties to GM engineering and his company's own high level of in-house technology, he could probably tame his project car enough to make it livable. Given a little time, the Top Gun's low-speed disease—its worst trait—could be cured. Air conditioning could be reinstalled. A stouter gearbox could be fitted.

Mr. Callaway is considering all these measures as he contemplates his next moves. "I think I could duplicate this car for a hundred fifty or a hundred sixty thousand dollars," he says, looking off into the distance. "I figure there must be five or six people in this country who might want a car like this."

Spoken like a true Eagle breeder. ●

except keeping my foot down until I got through the traps, and then turning left at the end of the straight.

The timing lights. Lift! Steer! The car bobbed, then moved up the banking toward the guardrail. Turn, damn it. The g-forces built abruptly. Then the car stabilized in the top lane. I stole a glance at the speedometer; it was still reading 186.

I coasted down, feeling light and exuberant. I whooped for joy. I had done what I had wanted to do. I had pushed my fear back into a little compartment and kept it there as I had ventured into the unknown. My foot had obeyed. I didn't know how fast I had gone, but it didn't matter.

Back in the pits, they asked me how it felt to go 231. It felt so good, I could hardly sleep that night. But the more I think about it, the more I realize that the big speed was only part of what made my 7.5-mile trip so memorable.

Yes, I'll always have a magic number to trot out for my grandchildren, but the blinding-speed part of the program lasted only a few seconds. It's the thrill of going to the edge, taking a look over the side, and then coming back to tell about it that I'll cherish most. How Indy-car drivers operate at such velocities lap after lap is incomprehensible. For that alone, they are heroes.

I can be happy having done it just once. A few times in life you get a shot at your own personal Mount Everest, a chance to get *way out there* just for the thrill of it. The Top Gun Corvette was my ride over the top, and I'll treasure the memory. Next time, though, the kids on the staff can do the driving. —RC