

COURTESY OF GENERAL MOTORS/CHEVROLET DIVISION



2011 Camaro Convertible 2LT

BY DURHL CAUSSEY

The 2011 Camaro has a powerful 312 hp, 3.6L, V-6 engine that powers like a V-8, yet still boasts 29 mpg highway and 18 city mpg. This comes with a 6-speed manual transmission.

The Camaro has a jaw-dropping design, as it highlights sculpted shoulders resting on 19" painted aluminum wheels, situated on sport suspensions.

Chevy engineers have retooled Camaro's body and chassis, adding four types of braces from a strut tower-to-tower to a pair of underbody V braces. Noise and vibration have gone down, thanks to even more reinforcement in key areas like the A-pillar and windshield header.

The Camaro convertible is easy to convert to a topless state. An overhead console switch operates the Z-fold triple layer insulated canvas top for easy opening and closing. The fun happens in only 20 seconds.

An aluminum front roof bow makes it possible. Aluminum

front and rear-side rails, stamped and tubular steel links all come together to echo the original coup design. Personally, I think Camaro looks as good with the top up as down.

How the interior of a car looks and feels is determined by the seats. Quality is the barometer. Camaro seats have thick bolsters on top of supportive structures that are all about comfort. The meticulous stitching reminds me of the quality and craftsmanship that go into the making of a fine pair of Nocona Boots.

Two boldly lit gauges flank a helpful Driver Information Center display. A low-mounted four-pack of auxiliary gauges are standard.

On July 4, cities large and small across America had their annual Independence Day Parade. The south Dallas suburb of Duncanville was no different. For several years I have driven the red truck that pulled the float for the Daughters of the American Revolution Old Chisholm Trail Chapter. The parade coincided with the week I drove the victory

red Camaro convertible with the black leather interior. I sat in the Camaro near the location where the ladies were putting the finishing touches on their parade entry, listening to patriotic music.

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Thirty minutes before the parade was to start my wife, the Regent of the chapter, came rushing towards me breathlessly, commanding me to run an errand, but to get back before the parade started. Being the independent-minded, strong-willed man and

head of the household that I am, I quickly replied in the affirmative with a timid and brow beaten voice.

Getting out of the parade area was difficult. Every street leading to and from the float formation area was cordoned off and patrolled by an array of police and local senior volunteer militia. Finally I broke out, and quickly completed the task with only a few minutes before the parade was to start.

In short time I was back, and headed toward the parade starting point. However, blocking the way, surrounded by a dozen flame-colored cones, was a short, stout, fully armed police officer that looked like he could wrestle three dozen donuts from a Dunkin Donuts delivery boy without much effort. As I approached, I already had a story to tell that made me look less like a wimp and more like a hero. I was going to tell him I was in pursuit of bank robbers escaping in a fire truck. To my amazement, he quickly removed the cones, stood aside, waved me through



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and saluted as I swept through the opening.

Suddenly I found myself alone on the actual parade route. Large crowds were on both sides, waving enthusiastically as I drove slowly past. Several yelled "Happy birthday America and God Bless America." Some even said how much they liked my Camaro. Then I realized the crowd thought I was part of the parade. Maybe even the Grand Marshall.

I turned up the XM Satellite station playing patriotic music enjoying the sound coming from the Boston Acoustic Premium eight-speaker audio system with 10" subwoofer and returned the waves of the friendly crowd.

As I passed what must have been the reviewing stand, several

people stood up and gave me the thumbs up sign, a couple held signs with "1" printed on them. I waved, tipped my Uncle Sam hat and smiled as broadly as Washington must have done when he lost his dentures.

I made it back just as the parade started. Now I drove the truck with the float and the ladies. The kind police officer that had let me in the route earlier waved at me and winked. I heard him shout, "I really did like that Camaro." I wanted to shout back that it costs only \$32,000, but the crowd was too loud.

Durhl Caussey writes a car column read around the world. He may be reached at this paper or dcaussey@sbcglobal.net.

VW Jetta: Finding the Jetta's Truth

BY CASEY WILLIAMS
MYCARDATA

Here's what we have to find out: Is the re-designed 2011 Jetta the great new car Volkswagen claims it is or just an Americanized version of its former self? There's no denying sales are up 58 percent since 2010. Jetta is bigger, re-styled, and more powerful, but is it better?

I have a silly test that I like to do with cars that drives my friends nuts. I tap every interior surface with my fingernails. In seconds, I can tell what is high

quality or just thin plastic. Your eyes would tell you the new Jetta is as expensive as its predecessor with nicely grained dash panels, piano black touches around the radio, metallic finishes, and a thick sport steering wheel. You can see it looks as expensive as an Audi. But, I tap, and tapping sets the truth free.

My fingers found hard plastic where soft padded rubber used to live on the dash and doors. The center armrest is no longer height-adjustable either. And apparently nobody cares (note those increased sales). VW's new customers are daz-

zled by the heated leatherette sport seats, expensive-feeling leather-wrapped steering wheel, Bluetooth, and in-dash NAV. The trunk, with seats folded, is big enough to conceal three dead German Shepherds and two Cannondale bicycles. I could really go for a USB port to connect my iPod, but no luck here.

Outside, we get the equivalent of styling hard plastic. Mind you, the Jetta isn't ugly—I just liked the old shape better. While the new edition is as conservative as Aunt Beth on Sunday, its horizontal grille slats, chiseled bodysides,

and 17" alloys should age well.

My father, who builds street rods in his spare time, may find the Jetta underpowered. You and I won't. Step on the throttle from a stop and the 170-HP 2.5-liter five-cylinder engine sets you in your seat. Click down at Interstate speeds and there's still plenty of spunk. A six-speed automatic transmission with Tiptronic manual shift mode makes it more fun. If VW wants to seriously take on other compacts, it must do better than 24/31-MPG city/hwy. Several competitors top 40-MPG

hw. VW snuck another change under the trunk. In place of a sophisticated independent sus-

pension system is a lower-cost twist beam axle. To be honest, I couldn't tell a difference from behind the wheel. The car feels sprung to run and laps up curvy roads. Nasty jolts at high speed didn't disturb it. As is typical in VWs, the steering is light and precise—a real driver's car.

So, does any of this matter? If you're planning a cross-country

journey to your favorite parade with four friends aboard, the new Jetta is better. Getting baby seats in and out will be easier and that all-terrain stroller fits. Despite lower grade materials inside, the solid VW driving experience remains. I just miss the attention to detail in the old Jetta. At \$24,865 as-tested, the truth is our car was anything but cheap.



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2011 Volkswagen Jetta

INFOBOX

2011 VW JETTA SEL FIVE-PASSENGER, FWD SEDAN

- Powertrain: 170hp 2.5-liter I5.
- 6-speed auto. trans.
- Suspension f/r: Ind./Twist beam.
- Wheels: 17"/17" alloy f/r.
- Brakes: Disc f/r/r with ABS.
- Must-have feature: Space, handling.
- Fuel economy (city/hwy): 24/31-MPG
- Manufacturing: Puebla, Mexico.

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