

**First
Drive**

Radical New Acura Integra

MOTOR TREND

TOP GUN **AMERICA vs the WORLD**



DODGE VIPER RT/10 | **TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO**
CHEVY CORVETTE ZR-1 | **PORSCHE 911 TURBO**
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO | **MAZDA RX-7**

PLUS:
AURORA by OLDSMOBILE;
MINI-PICKUP SHOWDOWN;
BMW VS MERCEDES VS AUDI

08

AUGUST 1993⁰
USA \$3.25
CANADA \$3.95
NEWSSTAND
EDITION

CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1

DODGE VIPER RT/10

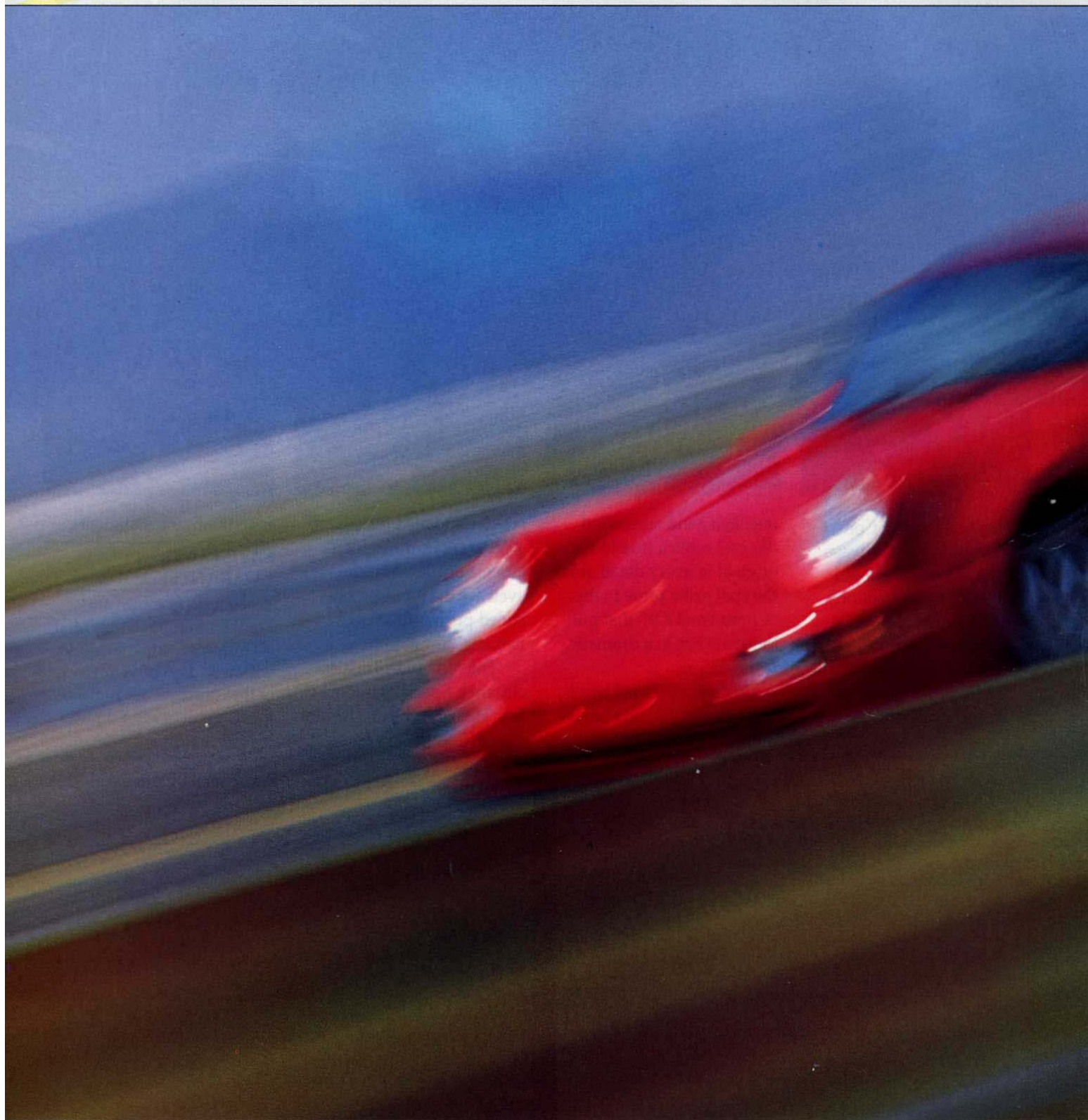
LOTUS ESPRIT

**COVER
STORY**

by the Editors of *Motor Trend*
Photography by Scott Killeen
and Rick Graves

*A winner-take-all
test of the best from
America,
Europe,
and Japan*

TOP GUN



It's fairy godmother time. Imagine these six outrageous performance cars suddenly appeared in the driveway. For your use, free of charge. No rules; no limitations. Just feed them gasoline and have fun.

Yeah, we know. You'd drive them. Hard. Day and night. Until the toothpicks snapped under the strain of bloodshot eyelids. Until the steel cords poked from abused tire treads, not stopping before each machine had been thoroughly wrung out. Naturally, you'd show them to all your friends—and most of your enemies. You'd cruise all the Main Streets you could find. Intimidating the plebeians in their sensible cars. Brutalizing the interstate with late-night power runs. Redline

in each gear. A burnout from every stoplight. After humiliating the local braggarts, you'd seek out a deserted stretch of straight road and hold down the loud pedal until the speedometer needle stopped climbing. Top speed. In each car. Big numbers all. Back-to-back runs quickly separate the fact from fiction. At 180 mph, there are no pretenders.

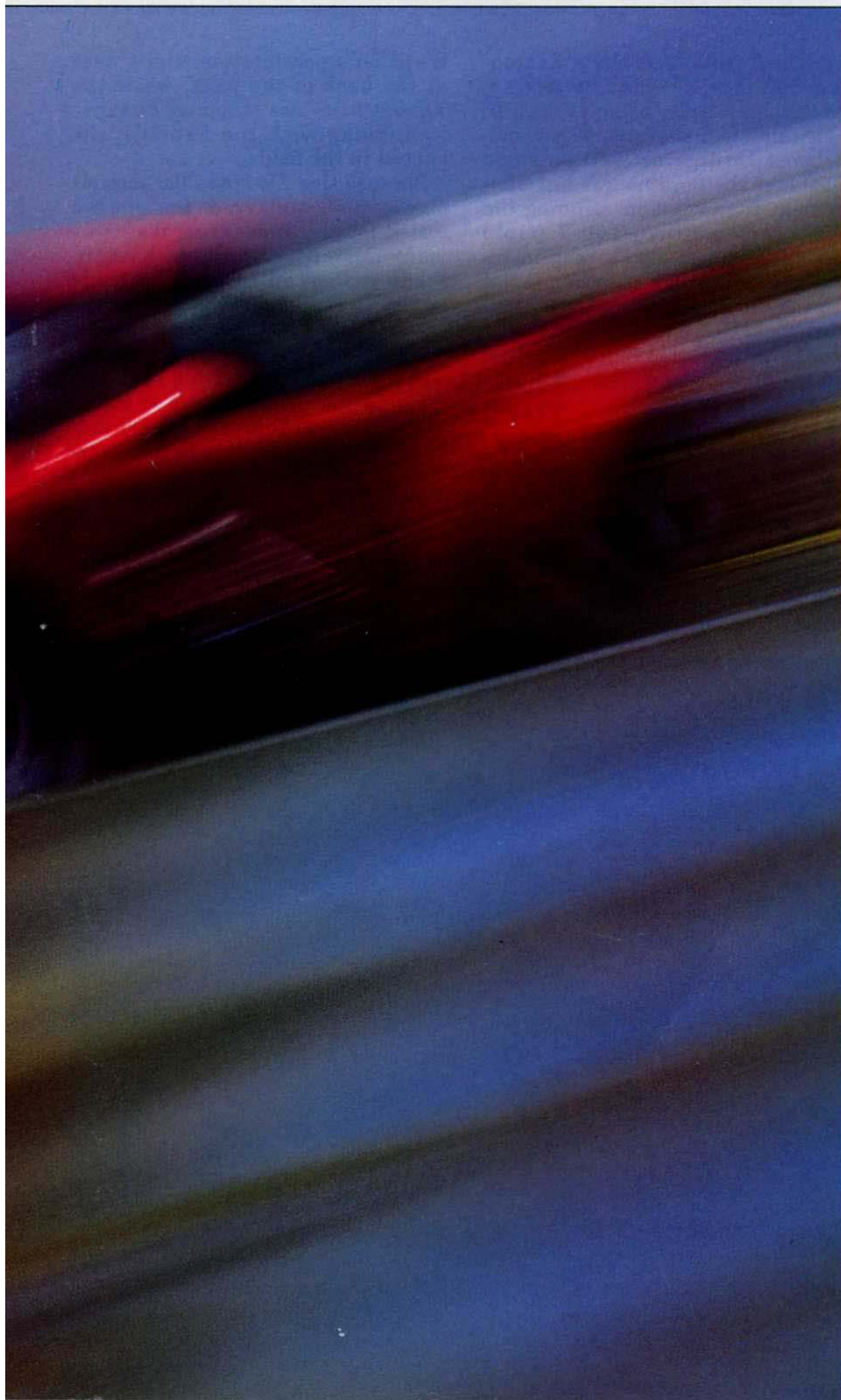
Look closely. See the speed. Hear the sounds. The Top Guns of the sports-car world are here. Each delivers head-turning looks, pavement-rippling acceleration, spleen-compressing braking, and handling that'll catapult any loose dental work into the next county. In this mix, no two engines are alike. And no two cars target exactly the same philosophy. Their one common thread is unabashed performance.

This array of Top Gun entries wasn't chosen on a whim. With as-tested prices ranging from about \$34,000 to just over \$100,000, these aren't cars for which you casually trade in your mini-van. Though considerably easier to swing a loan on than a new Lamborghini Diablo or Ferrari 512TR, actual purchase of one of the pricier Top Gun competitors might require a lucky hit on a medium-size lottery. Thus, in an effort to limit the field to reasonably affordable machinery, we established a base-price cap of \$100,000. Of the six cars we chose, only the Porsche 911 Turbo 3.6 lives at the upper end of this range. The Mazda RX-7 and Toyota Supra Turbo provide the \$30K mix of "affordable" machines, while the Lotus Esprit Turbo and Chevrolet Corvette ZR-1 share the podium in the \$65,000 to \$68,000 arena. Sequestered in between is the Dodge Viper RT/10, a roofless Cobra throwback that'll provide 10 cylinders of fun for a paltry \$50,000.

Don't be disappointed that there are no prancing-horse or raging-bull hood emblems in this test. Beyond our \$100K cut-off is where those truly exotic machines dwell. And it'll take every cent of your first-year payment—before taxes, of course—from winning a \$5 million lottery just to buy one. Besides, a couple of our cars will beat the Diablo and 512TR in certain performance tests anyway.

But we're testing more than just speed. Subjective evaluations gleaned from real-world driving experiences will be valued as strongly as any performance test. Brute force alone isn't enough to prevail.

After skimming the cream from our big comparisons in the last two issues, we're ready to settle this once and for all. There are a V-8 and a V-10 from America, versus a turbo four and a turbo flat six from Europe, combating a pressurized rotary and a sequential turbo inline six from Japan. Never before have we had them all at the same place, at the same time, and with such a gantlet of test tracks to overcome. When the tire smoke clears and the turbos cool, there'll be only one winner. Gentlemen, fire 'em up.



at the TEST TRACK

We assembled at the Los Angeles County Fairplex to scientifically measure acceleration, stopping performance, and two components of handling (using our standard slalom test to assess transient stability, and quantifying cornering power on the skidpad).

As a special addition to our usual battery of tests, we computed how long it took each of these beasts to accelerate from a standing start to 100 mph and then immediately brake to a stop. It's virtually impossible to transition rapidly and precisely from full-bore acceleration to maximum braking *exactly* at 100 mph. Imagine the advantage if one car's transition occurs a quarter blink under the target at 97 mph and another's a hair above at 103. So, to get as accurate a 0-100-0 time as possible, we first clocked a 0-100-mph run with our computerized fifth wheel, then a 100-0 maximum braking effort, and added the times.

The Supra Turbo and 911 Turbo each won three of the six tests that made up this phase of the compari-

son. The Toyota took firsts in stopping distance, skidpad cornering, and slalom. Despite being difficult to launch due to a shortage of low-end, off-boost torque, as well as some wheel hop, the Porsche was top eliminator at the dragstrip, winning the 0-60/quarter-mile/0-100-0 triple crown. These two also turned in respectable showings in other tests: The easy-to-drive Supra Turbo was third in both quarter-mile acceleration and 0-100-0, while the Porsche tied for second in slalom.

The RX-7 and the Viper were runners-up in the categories won by the Supra Turbo and 911 Turbo, respectively. Yet, with a horsepower deficit of up to 145,

the RX-7's acceleration times were at the back of the pack, while the Viper's ABS-less stopping distance was, along with the Esprit's, the longest in the field.

Because this ZR-1 was 0.3 seconds slower 0-60 mph than the one we tested for the June issue, it's likely many Corvette enthusiasts have already rushed off to write scathing letters to the editor, impugning our

maternal relationships and, worse, our driving skill. The truth is we've tested four '93 ZR-1s, and the results have varied wildly. Examples: ABS-managed stopping distance for these four fluctuated from a spectacular 104 feet to a mediocre 127, while

The Supra Turbo and 911 Turbo dominated the instrumented testing, each winning three of six categories



top speed varied up to a dozen mph.

The Esprit's acceleration was impressive and easy to produce; but away from the dragstrip, it was last in both slalom and skidpad and tied for last in stopping distance.

For the 0-100-0 test, acceleration is far more important than deceleration. There was just 1.3 second between the best and worst stopping times, while the 0-100 spread was 3.6 seconds. The 911 Turbo and Viper, which produced the best 0-100 times, were first and second, respectively, in 0-100-0, while the two best brakers, the Supra and RX-7, were third and sixth.

Now, that ought to fuel plenty of bench-racing arguments.

at the RACE TRACK

A fast lap of a road-race circuit demands a dexterous combination of acceleration, braking, and handling. Thus, we felt a day on the Streets of Willow critical to determine which of these is the best all-around athlete.

To assist the numerous

licensed racers on staff in getting the best out of all cars, we enlisted show-room stock champion and occasional NASCAR Winston Cup competitor Scott Gaylord. Each hot-lapper ran a maximum of five timed laps; the drivers' best times then were combined and averaged. In addition, we looked for how the cars behaved at the edge of the performance envelope, harder than any sane person would drive on the street: Back off a hair, and all have excess capability to behave impeccably.

Even on this sinuous, hairpin-packed circuit, acceleration is more important than handling, with

braking least significant. That's why the Viper, strong in acceleration and cornering power, but not as adept in braking, easily won the King of the Hot Lappers title. But don't overlook its balanced, predictable, responsive handling. "It acts and feels like a race car," noted one driver. Though it may be too much like a race car:

"Even wearing a helmet, the exhaust bellowing in your ear was intimidating," said another.

The Viper's biggest edge over the second-place Porsche is its grace in transitioning from braking to cornering and then to acceleration. The 911 Turbo, on the

The Viper used a combination of spectacular acceleration and impressive handling to take the pole position by a comfortable margin



other hand, only reluctantly changes tasks. With loads of steady-state understeer built in to protect the unwary on the street, the Porsche demands precise trail-braking to provoke initial rotation and then a quick, exact application of throttle to offset understeer. But if it's not in the sweet spot of the torque and boost band when you accelerate, it understeers even more...so you have to lift off the gas, which causes snap oversteer. And by the time you catch the slide and go back to the gas, the boost is up and you get even more oversteer. "To master this car, it's not necessary that your father have driven for Auto Union in the '30s, but it helps," remarked a staffer. "With more practice, I'm sure the drivers

could figure out how to make the 911 Turbo transition more gracefully, but getting up to speed quickly is part of the test," added another.

Conversely, the Corvette, third fastest, is easy to drive fast and, a 90-mph half-spin notwithstanding, very forgiving. "I'd forgotten how great it is to drive Corvettes on the track," said one tester. "The Corvette group worked hard to make the ZR-1 easy to drive fast—and they succeeded," said another. Still, a recent switch to narrower front tires to make the ZR-

1 more street-stable produces too much understeer for maximum racetrack performance.

With 0.15-second covering second through fourth places in racetrack lap times, and fifth spot just another 0.35 back, the difference in behavior is

Differences in at-the-limit behavior are more important than which is a half-tenth of a second quicker

more important than which is a half-tenth quicker. Many of the drivers thought the Supra Turbo was the easiest of the bunch to drive fast. "It has impeccable at-the-limit manners," said one. "It works beautifully on the track and feels like a real street car, where the Viper and RX-7 feel like race cars." "Though it handles fantastically and did everything I wanted it to, it feels soft," countered another.

While the Supra Turbo feels comfortable and forgiving, the RX-7's steering is quicker and offers more sensation, and while very catchable, it oversteered more each lap as its rear tires overheated. "Even though it's not the fastest, the RX-7 is my favorite on the racetrack," said one editor.

The Esprit didn't stop well, wouldn't amiably change directions at the limit, and couldn't put power to the ground effectively while exiting tight corners. The result: It was at the back of the grid, well off the pace. Significant inherent understeer is compounded by slow, high-effort steering. It complied grudgingly when asked to corner while braking, this complicated by ABS that comes on early and cycles slowly. The lack of a limited-slip differential and hard-to-predict turbo boost combined to waste some of its acceleration aptitude, its lightly loaded inside rear tire spinning easily, making smoke instead of propelling the car down the road. And old-design Eagle ZRs don't help. "It has severe understeer going in and se-





vere oversteer coming out." Reports from Europe say Lotus corrected these problems with its new S4 upgrade, due here in '94.

Now, let's invert the grid for a 50-lap feature race!

driving at **TOP SPEED**

There's no more basic aspect of automotive performance than top speed. But getting a car up to top speed and accurately recording it isn't easy. We use a semi-secret road to nowhere in the Cali-

fornia desert, obtain police approval, block the road, and record the speeds with timing lights.

These are fast cars: Blink for one second at 170 mph, and you'll miss 249.3 feet. Those cars with better suspensions or aerodynamic treatments may not be much of a chore to drive, but others can be unforgivingly difficult when going really fast.

The Lotus Esprit was steady at 156 mph. Its low shape looks swoopy, but it's probably not as aerodynamically clean as its more modern competitors. The RX-7 made 159 with ease; its excellent suspension makes driving it a piece of cake. The Supra Turbo, electronically limited to 155, momentarily reached 159 and was as stable as a low-interest bank account. At 181, the Corvette ZR-1 hammered straight and true, making the fastest of the group also one of the easiest to drive. The Porsche 911

Turbo, with a short wheelbase and "vintage" suspension design, was the definition of a handful: At 172, it was thrilling, but not enjoyable. The Viper did a relentless 168, but because of aerodynamic and other forces, it was all over the road, and the most pulse-quickening ride of any car we've tested on the same venue.

What's it like achieving top speed in the 911 Turbo? Going through the gears hard, it's fairly calm up to about 90 mph,

although with 355 horsepower, you blast right on through 90 like a bullet through cardboard. You shift from third to fourth at slightly over 100; with the aerodynamic forces and the bumps, the car is moving around a lot, and there are still two gears to go. By the time you shift into fifth, at about an indicated 142, keeping it in the middle of the narrow road surface requires serious concentration, and the engine is still

Shift the 911 Turbo into fifth at 142 mph and concentrate on keeping it more or less in the middle of a narrowing ribbon of bumpy pavement



pushing like a Saturn booster with unlimited credit at the liquid-oxygen store. Nearing the end, the needle on the 180-mph speedometer is pointing to where 183 would be, and by now, the car is difficult to control: seemingly jumping from bump to bump, using up most of the width of the two-lane road, bounding all over the place as it blows through the timing trap at a true 172. There's a sweeping corner coming up, and slowing from this speed takes care. Entering the bend, the speedo reads over 140, and it's still showing 125 on the exit side.

Based on the 911 Turbo's price of \$101,825, each one of those 172 mph cost \$592. Speed costs money; how fast do you want to go?

on the ROAD

Life with this breed of car is one thing on a racetrack, but can be quite another out in the real world of potholes, stop-and-go traffic, and 55-mph speed limits. Sure, track numbers, lap times, and top speed are great for bragging rights and bench racing, but the public road is reality. So, after all the performance numbers were in, we ventured off into the land of center lines and road repairs.

The Supra Turbo is the most well mannered of the group. It's not only quick and surefooted, but also a plea-

sure to drive. With the best ride quality of the group, the Supra soaks up road irregularities like a well-tuned sport sedan. The steering, too, is pleasantly firm and controlled, transmitting a good sense of the road, while remaining unfazed by bumps and rough pavement. Plus, outside noise is well isolated. In fact, the purist might say the Supra is *too* refined, lacking the eye-opening sensory stimulation of the others. Our testers would take their chances, voting it the best candidate for a long-term relationship.

The RX-7 R1 offers a load of on-road goodness, as well. Both the steering and suspension are precise and well controlled, enhancing the car's quick, nimble feel. A quiet whir is all that comes through from the rotary engine (although road noise rises dramatical-

About a quarter mile after the timing traps is a bend. We enter with the speedo reading 140. It's showing 125 when we exit



ly on rough pavement). And shifting is firm and positive. However, it has one drawback: The race-tuned R1 is punishing in ride quality. For everyday driving, the Base or Touring versions of the RX-7 are better choices.

The 911 Turbo makes similar demands in return for its lightning acceleration and taut handling. Its ride is sports-car firm, but the suspension offers excellent damping on large bumps. The steering is tight, accurate, and impervious to bumps in a

straight line, although some kickback is noticeable in corners. Tracking is accurate at lower speeds, but as one tester logged, "At elevated speeds, it hunts as persistently as Daniel Boone." And while road noise comes through as a constant rumbling, the sound of the 911's turbo winding up from just behind the driver's seat is a thrill.

On smooth roads, the ZR-1 is sharp and capable. The easy power delivery of its V-8, predictable handling, and traction control allow the driv-

er to have fun while maintaining a wide safety margin. On rougher surfaces, however, it loses its composure, exhibiting, as one editor put it, "a heavy, clunky feel." Steering is accurate, although somewhat vague on center. Bumps aren't as much controlled and absorbed as reacted to, and rough roads require constant small steering corrections. The Vette's ride-control system provides three modes, but the car feels the most controlled in the firmest—and unfortunately, harshest—setting.

There's no pretense with the Viper. It's a big, thundering, fire-breathing, no-frills hulk of a car. It views finesse the way "real" men view quiche. One editor noted, "There's enough torque in the V-10 to shift it into third gear first thing in the morning and leave it there until dark." The steering is quick and crisp, but, like the ZR-1, vague on center. Living with it on a daily basis would be taxing to all but the most devoted. Noise and vibration are ever present. Ride quality is harsh. And the suspension and steering are buffeted mercilessly on rough roads at higher speeds. But the Viper never was intended as a daily commuter. It's the ultimate driving toy.

The Esprit Turbo comes across like an ex-high-school quarterback still stuck in his glory days. It hasn't kept up with the times. While the suspension remains controlled and well damped on larger bumps, the ride is harsh. Steering is direct and responsive, but heavy. Spending any extended time behind the wheel would be a chore due to its cramped leg area. Wind and road noise is loud at highway speeds, and rear visibility is almost nonexistent. But if you're into "golden era" sports cars, none of this will detract one whit from the Esprit's exotic personality.

The Supra soaks up road bumps like a well-tuned sedan. The ZR-1 shines on smooth roads



Talking TECH



Lotus is a world leader in the design and manufacture of fiberglass components and structures.

Commonalities among sedans are many, but the design philosophies of sports cars are much more free ranging. Each of our Top Gun players has a distinct technological personality, six different answers to one question.

Through 40 years of production, all Corvettes have shared four basic elements: steel frame, plastic body, front engine driving the rear wheels, and lots of glitz. In '55, the Vette got a V-8, and to this day, the all-American formula remains unchanged. The current Vette is sophisticated in some areas (aluminum suspension links, fiberglass leaf springs, braking system), disappointing in others (overstyled instrumentation, unhappy ergonomics), but retains its hereditary glitz. It also, in either LT1 or ZR-1 form, delivers a whole bunch of V-8 performance in any direction you can name, execute, or invent.

While the Corvette is a relatively balanced package, it's clear the Viper is an engine wearing a car. Everything in the Viper begins with and is subjugated by the massive 8.0-liter V-10. The car is wide, long, and heavy, and even the two passengers must sit with their feet slightly outboard of their torsos' centerlines to make room for the drivetrain.

The Viper is the definition of awesome, hammering horsepower, the kind that clubs a challenge to death instead of whipping it with swift jabs. And if the challenge is to go fast, the Viper provides a sure, if brutal, answer.

At the far end of this brutality is the Colin Chapman ideal of doing the most with the least: With any Lotus ever built, light weight takes precedence over anything else. The Esprit Turbo, with its mid-mounted four-cylinder engine and weight of only 2700 pounds, exemplifies this ideal. Less well known is that Lotus, guided by Chapman, became a world leader in fiberglass technology. The Esprit body is made by the vacuum-assisted resin injection process, with Kevlar reinforcement in the roof: more effort to reduce weight while maintaining necessary strength. The Esprit lacks in detailing, but its concepts are out front.

The other lightweight in this group, the Mazda RX-7, takes advantage of its compact powerhouse of an engine, the dual-sequential turbocharged rotary. As the huge V-10 defines the Viper, the tiny rotary defines the RX-7, but where the V-10 forces everything else on the car fit around it as best as possible, the



Chevrolet Corvette ZR-1

Somewhat surprisingly, there's only one V-8 in our Top Gun group. Predictably, it's under the hood of the Vette. This 5.7-liter all-aluminum powerhouse features chain drive to the cams, hydraulic valve-lash adjusters, a fully girdled lower end, a sophisticated intake system, and 405 chorus-rousing horsepower.



Dodge Viper RT/10

No car in this bunch is as much identified by its engine as the Viper. This all-aluminum V-10 might appear a crude bludgeon, with pushrod valve actuation and eight liters. But there's sophistication in such things as the complex block casting, and the irresistibility of its force is undeniable.



Lotus Esprit Turbo

This is Mighty Mouse: Only 2172 cubic centimeters of a four-cylinder engine, turbocharged and charge-cooled to 264 horsepower, for the highest horsepower-per-liter figure of any piston-powered production car available. Wringing a gallon of performance from a pint bottle was a Colin Chapman dictate, and this engine meets that tough demand.



RX-7's rotary allows space for everything else to be optimized. The small engine also contributes to 50/50 weight distribution. (However, the big Dodge also sits at 50/50.) The RX-7 has been made light, tidy, and nimble, paying big dividends in all facets of performance: Acceleration, braking, and handling are top-notch. But there's also room inside for full-size people plus some luggage. The Mazda is a neat, modern package and a joy to drive.

Modern doesn't apply to the 911 Turbo, a car whose ancestor was introduced at the Frankfurt auto show in 1963 and that traces a direct line to the first Volkswagen Beetle. Contrary to popular belief, there's really not much wrong with the rear engine placement: Most of the legendary bad habits (Porsche folks call them personality traits) are due to the short wheelbase and quaint suspension layout. Still, Porsche engineers are skilled, dedicated, and thorough, and the subsystems on this car, such as engine, gearbox, and brakes, have been developed to a superb state. The 911 Turbo will accelerate like a scalded jackalope, brake like it's hitting a wall, and corner ferociously. The problem arises in trying to

The exquisite brake calipers of the 911 Turbo are beautiful to look at and deliver impressive stopping power.

get from one of these activities to another. This car can go really fast; it's not for amateurs.

The newest of this bunch of high-tech hot-rods, the Supra Turbo, represents a somewhat balanced approach: Lots of power, lots of chassis, lots of tire, and lots of brake should equal lots of performance. The equation came out right. It's not the outright fastest in a straight line (although with the speed limiter disconnected, it might have been), but its handling balance approaches that of the wonderful RX-7, while delivering more performance in most situations. The dual-sequential turbocharged engine is a key, but it's not as overriding a factor as in some other engines in this group. This is a complete, conceptual effort, and the thorough Toyota engineers left no stone unturned.

And any of these six will go like the absolute blazes.

Textbook examples of modern engineering, the aluminum suspension links of the Corvette are light and strong.



Mazda RX-7

Nothing beats the power density (maximum output for the total engine package size) of Mazda's turbocharged rotary. The dual-sequential turbos give crisp initial throttle response with a seemingly limitless ability to rev. With the rotary's proven bulletproof nature, you can hammer it on a racetrack all day.

Porsche 911 Turbo 3.6

This is one of two opposed sixes, the only rear-mounted, and the only air-cooled engine on the market, and Porsche engineers have developed it to the nth degree. Turbocharged and intercooled, it's a powerhouse of 355 horsepower and gives the old 911 just about the hardest accelerating thrust of anything sold off a showroom floor.

Toyota Supra Turbo

The Supra Turbo's engine is modern monster science, Japanese-style. The inline format, while long and tall, offers advantages in intake and exhaust layout over those of a V-type, and the clever dual-sequential turbos leave no dips in the power curve. Disconnect the 155-mph limiter, and there's enough scoot to go close to 180 mph.

ON THE DYNO: DO HORSEPOWER FIGURES LIE?

Factory horsepower numbers are generally considered the last word in automotive data charts. As far as we know, it's been decades since any manufacturer purposely inflated a power rating. In fact, we've surmised that certain car makers are *underrating* their motors for various political reasons. The tip-off is performance that's better than the power-to-weight ratios and gearing/aerodynamic factors would suggest.

But as any mechanical engineer will tell you, it's unlikely every copy of an engine (all Viper V-10s, for example) will put out exactly the same level of power. Slight variations in manufacturing tolerances, differing fuel quality, and even the weather on a given day can alter the real-world power output by several percentage points.

Every new car sold in the U.S. is rated in "SAE net" horsepower figures, the Society of Automotive Engineers' formula for checking power at the flywheel. In real-world terms, however, these numbers are generally 15 to 20 percent higher than what actually reaches the drive wheels, due to para-

sitic loss from the driveline components.

To check the drive-wheel output of our Top Gun competitors, we put each car on the rollers at Bob Jennings Dyno Shop in Sepulveda, California. To our surprise, only the ZR-1's dyno number showed a drop in output versus its SAE net horsepower number. The Viper could possibly have exceeded its rated 400 horsepower, but that's the maximum this dyno is capable of measuring. All the other cars either equaled or beat their net horsepower ratings. So, is it a conspiracy or just optimal conditions on the day of our test? Word from from one of our deep-cover operatives confirms that certain motors are underrated by the factory to avoid raising the ire of insurance companies or other fun-hating factions.

So, do us all a favor and keep this info to yourself.

Vehicle	Factory "net" horsepower rating, rpm	Drive-wheel dyno horsepower, rpm
Corvette ZR-1	405 @ 5800	395 @ 6000
Dodge Viper RT/10	400 @ 4600	400 @ 5500
Lotus Esprit Turbo	264 @ 6500	275 @ 6800
Mazda RX-7	255 @ 6500	255 @ 6600
Porsche 911 Turbo 3.6	355 @ 5500	360 @ 6000
Toyota Supra Turbo	320 @ 5600	320 @ 6000

Performance

TOP SPEED (mph)

CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1	181
PORSCHE 911 TURBO 3.6	172
DODGE VIPER RT/10	168
MAZDA RX-7	159
TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	159
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO	156

ACCELERATE/STOP 0-100-0 mph (sec)

PORSCHE 911 TURBO 3.6	14.7
DODGE VIPER RT/10	15.4
TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	16.8
CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1	17.4
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO	17.4
MAZDA RX-7	18.6

FUN-FACTOR RANKING

DODGE VIPER RT/10	33
MAZDA RX-7	26
TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	25
PORSCHE 911 TURBO 3.6	19
CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1	15
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO	8

(cumulative total of judges' ranking points; max. score possible 36)

ACCELERATION 0-60 mph (sec)

PORSCHE 911 TURBO 3.6	4.4
DODGE VIPER RT/10	4.5
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO	4.8
TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	4.9
CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1	5.2
MAZDA RX-7	5.3

ACCELERATION QUARTER MILE, (sec/mph)

PORSCHE 911 TURBO 3.6	12.7/112.3
DODGE VIPER RT/10	13.2/112.1
TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	13.4/106.7
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO	13.4/105.1
CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1	13.6/106.0
MAZDA RX-7	13.9/99.7

STOPPING DISTANCE 60-0 mph (ft)

TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	109
MAZDA RX-7	110
CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1	117
PORSCHE 911 TURBO 3.6	120
DODGE VIPER RT/10	129
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO	129

SLALOM (mph)

TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	68.5
MAZDA RX-7	68.0
PORSCHE 911 TURBO 3.6	68.0
CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1	67.2
DODGE VIPER RT/10	66.8
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO	66.4

SKIDPAD (lateral g)

TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	0.98
DODGE VIPER RT/10	0.97
MAZDA RX-7	0.97
CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR-1	0.92
PORSCHE 911 TURBO 3.6	0.90
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO	0.84

Ergonomics

Chevrolet Corvette ZR-1

Once you've negotiated the high, awkward step-in, the Corvette surrounds you with showy techno-touches, from the digital instrument display to the multitude of power seat adjustments to the breathtaking whoosh of the rear hatch being released (reminiscent of a "Star Wars" space probe launching). Its tight, noisy cockpit actually seems to enhance the charisma of the car.



Dodge Viper RT/10

The Viper's back-to-basics concept is evident everywhere: the clumsy ragtop and side curtains limit foul-weather use; storage is scarce; placement of the rearview mirror in the center of the windshield is poor; and the hot side pipes demand a wide berth. But in the face of overwhelming ergonomic deficiencies, the inevitable reaction is, "Who cares?"

Lotus Esprit Turbo

The Esprit Turbo is a throwback to days when the entry requirements for exotic cars were cramped seating, limited visibility, and homespun build quality. The small VDO gauges are hard to read at speed; the front wheelwell fights the driver's left leg for room; the seats are flat and stiff; and the rearview mirror is completely filled by the rear spoiler.



Mazda RX-7

The RX-7 asks you to accept a relatively Spartan level of convenience in the name of saving weight. Though ergonomically friendly, the passenger cabin has a tight jet-fighter feel. The seats are firm and snug with only basic manual adjustments. Gauges and controls are easy to read and operate. Surprisingly, cargo space is plentiful (for this crowd). And the styling is among the cleanest of the group.

Porsche 911 Turbo 3.6

The owner's manual is required reading for most of the 911 controls, although knowing how to operate them soon becomes a source of Porsche-owner pride. The well-contoured seats remain comfortable and supportive. Trunk capacity is meager. There's no center armrest, but for lack of a cupholder, a soda can will fit snugly between the emergency brake and seat.



Toyota Supra Turbo

The Supra's driving environment is similar to that of a sport/luxury sedan. The front seats are roomy, comfortable, and power adjustable. Buttons are large and contoured. Entry and exit are easy. Noise is muted. Plus, its fold-down rear seat, though cramped, adds an extra degree of passenger and cargo-carrying versatility.



TECH DATA

GENERAL

	<i>Chevrolet Corvette ZR-1</i>	<i>Dodge Viper RT/10</i>	<i>Mazda RX-7</i>	<i>Lotus Esprit Turbo</i>	<i>Porsche 911 Turbo 3.6</i>	<i>Toyota Supra Turbo</i>
Importer/manufacture	Chevrolet Motor div., General Motors Corp., Warren, Mich.	Dodge div., Chrysler Corp., Detroit, Mich.	Mazda Motor of America Inc., Irvine, Calif.	Lotus Cars USA Inc., Lawrenceville, Ga.	Porsche Cars North America Inc., Reno, Nev.	Toyota Motor Sales, USA, Inc., Torrance, Calif.
Location of final assembly plant	Bowling Green, Kentucky	Detroit, Michigan	Hiroshima, Japan	Hethel, England	Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, Germany	Motomachi, Japan
EPA size class	Two-seater	Two-seater	Two-seater	Two-seater	Two-seater	Mini-compact
Body style	2-dr., 2-pass.	2-dr., 2-pass.	2-dr., 2-pass.	2-dr., 2-pass.	2-dr., 4-pass.	2-dr., 4-pass.
Drivetrain layout	FE, RD	FE, RD	FE, RD	ME, RD	RE, RD	FE, RD
Engine configuration	V-8, DOHC, 4 valves/cylinder	V-10, OHV, 2 valves/cylinder	Twin rotary, turbocharged, intercooled	Inline 4, DOHC, 4 valves/cylinder, turbocharged, intercooled	Opposed 6, air cooled, SOHC, 2 valves/cylinder, turbocharged, intercooled	Inline 6, DOHC 4 valves/cylinder, turbocharged, intercooled
Engine displacement, ci/cc	349/5727	488/7990	80/1308	133/2172	220/3600	183/2997
Horsepower, hp @ rpm, SAE net	405 @ 5800	400 @ 4600	255 @ 6500	264 @ 6500	355 @ 5500	320 @ 5600
Torque lb-ft @ rpm, SAE net	385 @ 5200	462 @ 3600	217 @ 5000	261 @ 3900	384 @ 4200	315 @ 4000
Transmission	6-speed man.	6-speed man.	5-speed man.	5-speed man.	5-speed man.	6-speed man.
Airbag	Driver's side	None	Driver's side	Driver's side	Dual	Dual
Base price	\$34,595	\$50,000	\$32,500	\$66,350	\$99,000	\$37,000(est.)
Price as tested	\$67,878	\$52,800	\$33,925	\$67,944	\$101,825	\$37,000(est.)

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in./mm	96.2/2444	96.2/2444	95.5/2425	96.0/2438	89.4/2272	100.4/2550
Track, f/r, in./mm	57.7/60.6/ 1466/1539	59.6/60.6/ 1514/1539	57.5/57.5/ 1460/1460	60.0/61.2/ 1525/1555	56.8/58.6/ 1442/1488	59.9/60.1/ 1520/1525
Length, in./mm	178.5/4535	175.1/4448	168.5/4280	170.5/4331	168.3/4275	177.7/4515
Width, in./mm	73.1/1856	75.7/1923	68.9/1750	73.2/1859	69.9/1775	71.3/1810
Height, in./mm	46.3/1177	43.9/1115	48.4/1230	45.3/1151	51.6/1311	50.2/1275
Ground clearance, in./mm	4.2/107	5.0/127	4.5/115	5.8/147	5.5/140	5.1/130
Mfr's base curb weight, lb	3503	3476	2800	2700	3274	3450
Weight distribution, f/r, %	52/48	50/50	50/50	49/51	40/60	53/47
Cargo capacity, cu ft	12.6	11.8	17.0	14.0	3.8	10.1
Fuel capacity, gal	20.0	22.0	20.0	18.5	20.8	18.5
Weight/power ratio, lb/hp	8.6	8.7	11.0	10.2	9.2	10.8
Fuel economy, EPA city/hwy., mpg	17/25	13/22	17/25	17/27	13/21	18/23

CHASSIS

Suspension, f/r	Independent/ independent	Independent/ independent	Independent/ independent	Independent/ independent	Independent/ independent	Independent/ independent
Steering	Rack and pinion, power assist	Rack and pinion, power assist	Rack and pinion, power assist	Rack and pinion	Rack and pinion, power assist	Rack and pinion, power assist
Turning circle, ft	40.0	40.7	35.4	36.0	37.5	35.4
Brakes, f/r	Vented discs/ vented discs/ABS	Vented discs/ vented discs	Vented discs/ vented discs/ABS	Vented discs/ discs/ABS	Vented discs/ vented discs/ABS	Vented discs/ vented discs/ABS
Wheel size, in. Material	17 x 9.5/17 x 11.0 Cast aluminum	17 x 10.0/17 x 13.0 Cast aluminum	16 x 8.0 Cast aluminum	15 x 7.0/16 x 8.5 Cast aluminum	18 x 8.0/18 x 10.0 Cast aluminum	17 x 8.0/17 x 9.5 Cast aluminum
Tire size f/r Mfr. and model	275/40ZR17/ 315/35ZR17 Goodyear Eagle GS-C	275/40ZR17/ 335/35ZR17 Michelin XGT-Z	225/50ZR16 Bridgestone Experia S07	215/50ZR15/ 245/50ZR16 Goodyear Eagle ZR50	225/40ZR18/ 265/35ZR18 Yokohama A-008P	235/45ZR17/ 255/40ZR17 Michelin XGT-Z

The WINNER

Now that we've fried the tires off our first-round draft choices for Automotive Dream Team of the year, let's choose the MVP (Most Valuable Performer). Determining the recipient of this accolade isn't as simple as just plucking the fastest performance test times and seeing which key fob matches the name at the top of the charts. Though any of our gang of g-force junkies would gladly sell a minor internal body organ for one more chance to hot-lap the Viper, ZR-1, or 911 Turbo around Willow Springs, there's far more to discuss when it comes time to spend your own hard-earned green.

For those of us who aren't rock stars, Beverly Hills orthodontists, or undiscovered corporate embezzlers, the small detail of price creeps quickly into the picture. At a cool hunnert grand, the 911 is seriously costly—despite the undeniable fact that it'll suck the doors off a Viper in straight-line acceleration and stop you with all the force of a three-wire carrier landing. It's a great car with classic styling and a bragworthy racing heritage to boot, but is clearly out of reach for mere civilians.

Similarly, the Viper rates its share of high praise. The big V-10 roadster showed its tail-lights to everything else on the

road course and rated a near clean sweep (with only one of our six judges dissenting) in the Fun Factor classification. At \$50,000, it's a go-fast value. However, drive one in the rain or back and forth in the urban daily commute, and you'll beg for the soft (by comparison) ride of the ZR-1 and little comforts like roll-up side windows. Unlike any of the other vehicles in this test, the Viper can't sanely be considered as one's only mode of transportation.

The Esprit Turbo and the ZR-1 share the \$65,000-plus price niche, but have virtually nothing else in common save the requisite four-wheels-and-a-motor configuration. Each does its particular performance trick, but neither commands the well-

rounded talents to rate highly as any judge's choice of "one car for everything." However, a four-banger that goes 0-60 mph in 4.8 seconds, and a Corvette that'll hit 180 mph, ain't nothin' to sneer at. They're just not the best values.

The surprise player in this group is the Supra Turbo. Shedding its former GT-cruiser image for hard-core sports-car muscle, this machine does what few other cars in history have been able to accomplish: combine exotic performance with luxu-coupe grace and deliver it all at a price that won't cause angina pectoris. Though the fabulous Mazda RX-7 took home the best-buy trophy, the Supra was consistently at or near the top for the other subjective scoring categories.

Stretching the 30-something price of entry to its upper limit, the Supra is assuredly not a bargain-basement automobile. However, when you consider its phenomenally well-rounded performance abilities, cushy ride and comfort paybacks, and the casual, quiet, confident manner in which it does literally everything, there's little else to quarrel about. The ante to compete in the world's order of ultra-performance cars has just been raised. The Toyota Supra Turbo is the new Top Gun. **MT**

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