

“THIS CAR HAS MADE MORE TRIPS  
UP AND DOWN THE EASTERN  
COASTLINE THAN MANY GREYHOUND BUSES”

HOW TO TURN AN 800-MILE COMMUTE  
HOME INTO AN ENJOYABLE JOURNEY

# 400 MILE RUN

STORY ANDY BOLIG



Wild Thing resting in front of the Richmond skyline



MANY TIMES, THE DRIVE HOME FROM WORK IS ANYTHING BUT MEMORABLE. THEN THERE ARE DRIVES THAT WILL LAST FOR A LIFETIME. IF YOU START YOUR DAY CATCHING A PLANE TO GO GET THE CAR THAT YOU WILL BE DRIVING HOME, THERE'S DEFINITELY MORE TO THIS TRIP THAN YOUR DAILY COMMUTE.

And, if the car that you are picking up happens to have 700 raging horses under the hood, you just pegged the memorable meter.

Readers of *Corvette Enthusiast* will remember "Wild Thing" (April 2010), that super-powerful and seldom-overlooked 2007 Z06 creation of Kirk Dobbs. *CE* ran a feature on the car and commended Kirk for his resolve to drive the car wherever he goes – and go he does! This car has made more trips up and down the eastern coastline than many Greyhound buses. Talking about driving is one thing, but when we were asked to pilot along with Kirk on a trip from the Zip Products facilities down to our home state of Florida, we couldn't purchase tickets fast enough!

We arrived at Zip early enough to get some shots of the car around the Richmond area. Besides being steeped in history, Richmond has scores of interesting spots to see (and photograph), and we couldn't resist putting the wild Z-car in some of the photos. After burning up a couple of memory cards, our grumbling stomachs directed us to find a nice dinner before retiring to our hotel for the night.

Morning greeted us with some great weather, and we picked up the car at Zip's facility, freshly treated to an oil change and cleaning. We packed our bags, and with the press of a button, the serene countryside awoke to the sound of thundering horses. Only those with the most optimistic of imaginations could ever consider using the word "subtle" to describe this car. The instant it roars to life, even they wonder what they were thinking. As I sat there, watching this car shake and pulse as if trying to



rid itself of the night's slumber, I had to ask myself, "Are we REALLY going to drive this to Florida?" Kirk sitting in the driver's seat and my bags in the rear hatch served to drive home the idea.

It goes without saying that if an engine makes almost twice as much peak horsepower, you'll feel the difference all through the rpm band, not just at WOT. That is truly the case with Wild Thing – to a point. If you think that expanding the horsepower horizon so drastically means that you're narrowing the range of drivability, you're seriously underestimating Zip's tuning capabilities and today's electronics. Justin Abbott spent a lot of time tweaking the tables deep within Wild Thing's computer, knowing full well that drives like this would be the norm and that he didn't want to burn up the fuel bill or blacken the backside of the car with excess fuel. In fact, during our drive, Wild Thing was surprisingly sipping away on petrol to the tune of 24-25 miles to the gallon average throughout the entire trip, highway and in town.



**ROCK STAR** Kirk, living the Rock Star lifestyle **CUBES** are filled with over 700 horses under those autographed fuel rail covers. **"GRAVE SIGHTS"** Taking in the sights in Savannah **WILD THING** takes a bath.

There's more than just gobs more power and a wild paint job that separates Wild Thing from your typical Z-car. Just before we set out, Kirk asked if we wanted to pop the top for the trip. Your average Z06's roof panel is secured for the life of the car, but while the craftsmen at Caravaggio Corvettes were working their magic on the interior, Kirk asked them to also put latches on the lid so that he had the option of basking in the sunlight while the odometer rolled around like

a slot machine.

Kirk took the first leg of the trip, winding our way down Interstate 95. There are a lot of ways to pass the time during a long road trip. We whittled away the miles with conversations ranging from politics to personal beliefs, and we had a great time doing it. We noticed a few things very early on in our travels. We were in no particular hurry to get home (although the Z06 could surely burn up enough miles to make any Cannonball Runner proud), but it was apparent that there were a lot of other people

around us who were in a hurry. We found it a bit ironic that there we were, in a super-powered sportscar, with minivans and econoboxes whizzing by us with unnerving regularity. Mind you, we were making the most of many officers' good graces by stretching the "safety-zone" of the speed limit. According to what we saw during various spots on our trip, there were some VERY gracious troopers on I-95 that day. We just weren't in the mood to run our "not-so-conspicuous" Corvette all the way to the edge of the safety net. Besides, we were having a

great time.

I've never been one who seeks to stand out in a crowd, but behind the wheel of this machine, it's impossible to keep a low profile. Heading down the highway, it became obvious that there were going to be pictures taken of the car. I lost count how many times I'd look out the side window to be face-to-face with a cell phone, Blackberry or occasional camera, marking the moment when someone saw Wild Thing for the first time. If we slowed down enough to have a conversation, undoubtedly, someone would ask about the car, give Kirk and I the thumbs up, or like all the others, snap a photo. I was beginning to see how "sharing your Corvette" (or any other car for that matter) with others can have various meanings. Everyone, from the very young to those who have seen many presidents come and go, would walk up to Kirk and start conversing about the car. On one of our stops, an elderly couple shared how their son was a fan of Corvettes and how he would simply love a photo of Wild Thing. Click – another photo opportunity. Then there was the time we stopped for lunch and a family of four came up and started talking with Kirk. Their seven-year-old



**TUNING** Justin Abbott from Zip tweaks the tune.

son took a liking to Wild Thing. Of course, Kirk opened the driver's door and let them get a few photos of their son at the helm. He went away smiling and a new enthusiast.

All of our other travels up and down I-95 usually are tightly scheduled, but on this trip, we found ourselves compelled to turn off the highway at the North/South Carolina border for some food and shade under the big sombrero known as South of the Border. Like a moth to a flame, we were drawn into this tourist haven, feasting on a not-so-Mexican burger and hot dog. After taking in a few of the local sights, we were again on our home run down I-95.

As daylight began to dwindle, we turned right, away from the interstate in search of a meal and a hotel. Along the way, we passed a car wash and couldn't resist the opportunity to remove some of the critters and road crud that we'd acquired along the day's journey. Some might have already questioned Kirk's decision to drive a car adorned like Wild Thing. Others still might require oxygen after hearing that Kirk's car is undoubtedly not a "dry-clean-only" type of car. We pulled right in to the spray bay. After a short suds, wipe and rinse cycle, the car looked like new, and we were ready to find a nice sit-down dinner and some rest.

We awoke the next morning with one question hovering over our breakfast conversation – should we divert our trip to make a loop into Savannah, Georgia? Considering our early start, it was unanimously voted that our trip wouldn't be complete unless we made a point to see some of this city's more interesting sights. With me taking the driving duties, we split the air all the way down into Georgia, and somewhere right before Savannah, we decided to pull off into a rest area. Between the conversation, taking in the sights and a slight case of sun exposure, I missed the fact that the ramp we were now on didn't lead directly into the rest area, but detoured us onto a set of roadside scales usually reserved for truckers. The red faces we wore were soon replaced with grins as a voice came over the speaker system, "Uh, you can park my car right over there in one of those empty spots!" Seems there was an enthusiast up in the booth at the scales. Camera-ready, no doubt.

I was a little reserved about driving Kirk's car in Savannah traffic. It was one thing to drive it down the interstate but something totally different to weave your way through downtown traffic in a 700-horsepower car. With Kirk's reassurance, I turned onto the ramp and headed toward our downtown adventure. Kirk's assurances were only strengthened by the way the car easily manipulated its way around the town. This was a 427, so the torque down low really shouldn't have been a surprise. But what really surprised me was how smooth the clutch worked in conjunction with the engine's low rpm. I was expecting at least some amount of chatter, revving or pedal feathering to get the car around town, but thanks to the ZR1 clutch, the pedal action was, if anything, lighter than a stock Z06 and just as smooth.

We picked out a few spots of interest and plugged them into the navigation system. We toured our way by the historical buildings that line the tree-

laden streets around town. We piloted the Z06 over cobblestone roads and found ourselves entering the gates to Bonaventure Cemetery. Bonaventure was made famous by John Berendt's book, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. In it resides some of Savannah's most notable dignitaries, as well as exquisite monuments and an incredible array of flowers and landscaping. We slowly and respectfully chugged our way over the dirt roads that encompass the gardens and noted the variety of stylized memorials that comprise the grounds.

Working our way back out the gates of Bonaventure, we headed for the tree-lined road that leads back to the Wormsloe Historic Site. With over 400 live oak trees lining the dirt road that leads back to the historic plantation, the drive will easily put you back in time and definitely made for a memorable experience in our 700-horsedrawn, colorful carriage.

After tasting the flavor of Savannah's history, we were soon southbound again, heading for the Florida border. I was still at the wheel, and as the sun began to set on our second day's adventure, we were certain that we would be home before midnight. The conversation continued well into the night. Before we knew it, we were pulling into my driveway. Even with the feeling of my two boys and wife Ami coming out to meet me, I was a little saddened that this adventure had to come to an end. I'm not sure if it was the thrill of corralling all those horses down the highway or the ease in which they made it possible. Maybe it was the opportunity to share so many miles with a fellow enthusiast like Kirk, engaged in conversation as the time flew by. Perhaps the places and the people that we met will have the most lasting impression on my memories of this trip. I had a great time, making this drive one that I will remember as long as I live. There's one thing that is for sure, in the annals of road travels, this trip was definitely a home run. 