

FINDING A MUSTANG BEATER

Jane chose the low volume Camaro ZL-1. He purchased two from a US Chevrolet dealer in Florida, 1969. The cars, a manual (VIN 610732 in Huger Orange with M21 gearbox) and an automatic (VIN 620934 in LeMans Blue with Turbo 400) were from a batch of 69 cars factory fitted with 7.0 litre (427ci) engines to meet drag race homologation requirements.

US Chevrolet dealer Fred Gibb is credited as the father of the ZL-1. Gibb was an enthusiastic supporter of drag racing, in much the same way car dealers like Max McLeod (McLeod Ford) and Ron Hodgson (Holden) were patrons of Australian touring car racing for many years.

It was Gibb who threw down the challenge to Chevrolet to build an all-aluminium 427 Camaro with which to tackle the NHRA Super Stock class. Gibb knew exactly what he needed - a stripped-out 1969 Camaro, with 'poverty pack' interior trim, minimum weight, tough drivetrain and that monster full race, all alloy 7.0 litre engine. (Bob Jane says it was the same engine used by Bruce McLaren and Denny Hulme to dominate the US Can-Am sports car series).

However, NHRA rules demanded that a minimum of 50 cars be built for public sale before they could be eligible for competition. Gibb immediately signed up to take the whole batch of 50 cars which he would sell through his dealership. To get around GM's corporate red tape, the ZL-1s were ordered using a special 'Central Office Production Order' (COPO) system which only a few dealers with strong connections to the factory knew about.

The ZL-1 carried COPO No.9560 which could be ordered in a choice of five colours with either a four-speed manual (Muncie M-21 or M22) or heavy duty Turbo 400 automatic transmission. In addition to the ferocious 427 engine with four-bolt mains, cast-iron cylinder liners, 12:1 pistons and open chamber heads, the ZL-1 was also equipped with front disc brakes, a special raised 'cow' induction bonnet scoop (which breathed from the rear like an A9X Torana), heavy-duty radiator, performance suspension and a 12-bolt Positraction rear axle assembly loaded with 4.10 gears.

At a retail price of over \$US7000 (the factory quoted Gibb a sticker price below \$5000 when he placed the order!) the ZL-1s were slow sellers and Gibb finally convinced Chevrolet's top brass to allow him to return 37 of his batch of 50 cars to the factory to be re-distributed to other dealers to try and sell (including the dealer in Florida from which Bob Jane purchased his two cars). In addition to the initial batch of 50 ZL-1s made for Fred Gibb, another 19 were manufactured by Chevrolet. The final total of 69 ZL-1 1969 Camaros eventually found buyers and today are among the rarest and most sought-after muscle cars in the world.



Above: Jane and his Camaro cleaned up round five of the 1971 ATCC at Mallala Raceway in South Australia, taking pole and winning the race.
Above right: Final round of the 1972 ATCC at Oran Park and Jane is locked in one of his many intense confrontations with Allan Moffat's Trans-Am Mustang. Below: 'Drop tank' fuel cell aided the big car's handling by lowering the centre of gravity. Check out that fat rubber!

