

FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1984-1996 Chevrolet Corvette C4 Buyer's Guide

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1984-1996 Chevrolet Corvette C4 Buyer's Guide

Model Year 1984-1996

Models	Corvette C4 coupe (1984+); convertible (1986+)
Engines	L83; L98; LT1/LT4; LT5 (ZR-1)
Market	~\$10k nice drivers; ZR-1 \$22k-40k
Watch for	ZR-1/Callaway clones; dash; cooling; OptiSpark
Support	Corvette Central; Eckler's; Zip; CorvetteForum

Every specification in this guide was checked against factory literature, marque references, period road tests, and documented survivor cars. Where sources disagree or the record is silent, this guide says so rather than guessing.

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Inside This Guide

The chapter order follows the RestorationEssentials house standard: history first, then year-specific identity, then the technical chapters you will use at the car.



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Chapter 1 - Why the C4 Is the Smart Corvette Buy

Here's the math that makes the C4 irresistible: nice examples trade around \$10,000. Early cars in good condition sit between \$6,100 and \$9,000. For that money you get a genuine Corvette - a car that was Motor Trend's 1984 Car of the Year, that out-handled contemporary Porsches, that won SCCA Showroom Stock until it was banned for winning too much - with parts support from three major Corvette houses and the deepest forum knowledge base in the hobby. Nothing else in the collector-car world delivers this much car per dollar.

Why so cheap? Supply and reputation. Chevrolet built hundreds of thousands of C4s across thirteen model years, and the early cars' reputation - harsh ride, 'Cease-Fire' injection, rattly cabin - stuck long after Chevrolet fixed the problems. The market prices the reputation, not the sorted reality. Your job as a buyer is to find the sorted reality at the reputation's price - or better, to buy the right unsorted car at a price that funds the sorting.

This guide covers the full 1984-1996 run: the Cross-Fire and TPI early cars, the LT1/LT4 later cars, the ZR-1, the Callaways, and the special editions. The companion restoration guide covers 1984-1990 in depth; this guide is about buying any C4 right.



Chapter 2 - The C4 Story in Brief

The C4 (1984-1996) was Corvette's great leap: the uniframe chassis, SMC/plastic body panels, forged aluminum front suspension designed by computer, multilink rear on a transverse fiberglass leaf spring, and a fully digital instrument cluster that updated sixteen times per second. There was no 1983 production car - 43 prototypes, one survivor at the National Corvette Museum.

The arc of the generation: 1984 launched the revolution with the carried-over Cross-Fire 205-hp V8; 1985's Tuned Port Injection made it a real performance car; 1986 brought the convertible back and made ABS standard; the late-80s refined the formula; 1990 brought the ZR-1's 375-hp LT5 and a new interior; 1992's LT1 brought 300 hp and modern engine management; and 1996 closed the run with the Grand Sport and Collector Edition. Every year is buyable; some years are smarter buys than others, and the chapters ahead name them.

Chapter 3 - Year-by-Year: What Changed and What It Means

1984: 51,547 built - huge supply, lowest prices. Cross-Fire injection ('Cease-Fire' reputation), coupe only, digital dash, harsh ride. Buy it cheap, budget EFI sorting. The 4+3 manual cars are the interesting ones.

1985: 39,729 built. L98 TPI - 230 hp, the performance car the C4 promised. Softer suspension. The value sweet spot for early cars: sorted performance at reputation pricing.

1986: 35,109 built. Convertible returns; Indy pace car replicas (console plaque cars); ABS standard; aluminum heads mid-year. Convertibles carry a premium (~\$7,600 vs \$6,200 for coupes in good condition).

1987: 30,632 built. 240-hp roller-cam L98; Callaway B2K twin-turbo (dealer-installed, GM warranty) - the exotic option.

1988: 22,789 built. 35th Anniversary edition; D-port heads; 17-inch wheels with Z51/Z52. Lower production, slightly firmer prices.

1989: 26,412 built. ZF 6-speed replaces the 4+3; last digital-dash year. The driver's early car.

1990: 23,646 built. ZR-1 debut (375-hp LT5); new interior with driver airbag; L98 up to 250 hp.

1991: 20,639 built. Exterior restyle; last Callaway B2K year. Refined late-early car.

1992: 20,479 built. LT1 - 300 hp, 330 lb-ft, modern management, ASR traction control. The OptiSpark distributor sits under the water pump - its moisture vulnerability is the known issue. Best performance-per-dollar in the C4 world.

1993: 40th Anniversary ruby edition; ZR-1 up to 405 hp. Anniversary cars carry premiums.

1994-95: LT1 refinements; final ZR-1s in 1995. Mature, sorted cars.

1996: Grand Sport - Admiral Blue with white stripe, LT4 330 hp, 1,000 built - the collector's C4; plus the Collector Edition. End of the line, top of the market.