

AMERICAN MUSCLE MATCH

Want punch? Gloves come off in battle of Challenger SRT Hellcat, Camaro Z/28

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We like to think of the 1960s and early '70s as the glory days of the muscle car, but today marks a new golden age for American muscle.

Muscle cars are pushing the performance envelope, and two new cars in particular can achieve performance figures never dreamed of in the glory days.

Dodge revived the Challenger for the 2008 model year, and along with a 2014 refresh comes the Challenger SRT Hellcat, the most powerful U.S. car of all time.

Meanwhile, after its 2010 revival, Chevrolet updates the Camaro for the 2014 model year and brings back the Z/28 moniker.

Having had the opportunity to drive both within days of each other, we break down these cars based on three main factors.

Round 1: Power

The 2014 Camaro Z/28 is powered by the 7-liter LS7 V-8 that had previously done time in the Corvette Z06. This all-aluminum V-8 spins out 505 horsepower and 481 foot-pounds of torque.

It's not as powerful as the ZL1 Camaro's supercharged 6.2-liter V-8, which makes 580 horsepower, but this naturally aspirated engine offers immediate throttle response, ridiculous amounts of torque to help the car leap off the line, and plenty of thrust as speed increases into triple digits.

The Z/28's performance numbers are fantastic. Chevrolet says

the top speed is 172 mph, and according to Car and Driver it accelerates from 0 to 60 mph in 4.4 seconds and covers a quarter-mile in 12.7 seconds. We love the immediate response and rumbling note of this engine, and few engines can top it.

One power plant that can top the LS7 is Dodge's new supercharged 6.2-liter Hellcat V-8. The supercharger force-feeds the engine 11.6 pounds per square inch of air, helping the Hellcat produce an astonishing 707 horsepower and 650 foot-pounds of torque.

The Hellcat rumbles like the Earth is opening up so hell can spew forth. The engine is surprisingly tractable in city driving, though initial throttle tip-in is a bit too aggressive.

Stab the throttle, though, and the power erupts, pinning you back in your seat and sending the car forward like it was shot out of a cannon. Dodge has posted a 0-to-60-mph time of less than four seconds and a quarter-mile run of 11.2 seconds.

But be aware that achieving those times requires straddling the line between traction and chaos. It's awfully easy to light up the tires in a puff of smoke, which results in slower times. Amazingly, the big, wide Challenger can reach a top speed of 199 mph.

Scoring: Hellcat, without a doubt.

Round 2: Dynamics

While the Hellcat is a tactical missile that does its best work in a



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The 2015 Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat, the most powerful American car of all time, produces an astonishing 707 horsepower and can reach a top speed of 199 mph.



GENERAL MOTORS

Chevrolet says the top speed of the 3,820-pound 2014 Camaro Z/28, which costs \$75,000, is 172 mph.

straight line, the Camaro is a precision fighter jet built for agility. Chevrolet engineers started with the already great-handling ILE package, reduced the weight as much as possible and threw every part it could at the Z/28 to turn it into a factory-ready road racer.

For agility, they installed spool-valve shocks borrowed from Formula One racing and sticky Pirelli Trofeo R compound tires that are the closest thing to racing slicks legal for the street.

To prevent oil starvation during hard cornering, Chevrolet outfitted the LS7 with a dry sump oiling system. And to help it stop on a dime, it opted for Brembo ceramic composite brakes.

The Z/28 weighs in at a somewhat hefty 3,820 pounds, but it feels much lighter. It doesn't just track through corners, it attacks

them with incredible agility. The sticky tires provide unrelenting grip, and the car changes direction like a wide receiver.

Despite the phenomenal handling, we have a few caveats.

The tires provide so much grip and the car leans so little that there is little feedback when the car is approaching the limits of grip, resulting in likelier spinouts. Also, the tires are so specialized that they are probably only good for 5,000 miles or so, and they cost \$500 a pop. And the suspension is so focused on track handling that the Z/28 will be harsh on public roads and jittery on the freeway, and the wide front tires will likely follow any line they encounter on the highway.

The Hellcat, on the other hand, is surprisingly comfortable on the street. It does get jiggly on the

highway when the adjustable shocks are set to Track mode, but this car would be easy to live with every day.

The Hellcat rides a shortened version of a full-size car platform, and it weighs about 600 pounds more than the Z/28, so track handling isn't nearly as accomplished as its General Motors rival. Still, it is capable on a road course. The brakes are big enough to handle all the power and weight, and the car nicely rotates through turns, provided that you slow it enough to take them.

Scoring: For track duty, the Z/28; for real-world driving, the Hellcat.

Round 3: Interior

The Challenger's greatest shortcoming is its greatest advantage. Its size gives it a hospitable interior, seating up to five in comfort; the Camaro accommodates only four, and the back-seat passengers are cramped.

The Hellcat boasts better sightlines, much-higher-quality materials, and the latest in infotainment systems, including an 8.4-inch touch screen and Chrysler's Performance Pages software that shows real-time performance figures. The Camaro has no navigation system and one of the least impressive, overly plastic interiors on the market.

Scoring: This is a slam dunk for the Hellcat.

The verdict

The Hellcat comes out on top as the ultimate muscle car to drive daily. Not only is it more powerful, but it's roomier, more refined and more comfortable.

It's also cheaper, with pricing that starts at \$59,995 versus \$75,000 for the Z/28. But if ultimate track-ready performance is your main concern, you can't beat the Z/28.

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