

Chevrolet has built a pocket-rocket tuner car of its own in the 2006 Cobalt SS Supercharged Coupe that comes with a model-specific supercharged engine with an audio system to match.



Chevy gets in tune with the tuner craze

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Road Worthy

Ask anyone under 25 what kind of car they want and chances are it will be a compact coupe with tens of thousands of dollars in aftermarket parts.

The people who own these "tuner" cars take great care in building them and even greater pride in owning them.

The carmakers have started to realize, that instead of supplying a base upon which these people can build, it's smarter, (and more profitable), to build their own factory tuner cars.

Honda has certainly seen the light as has Chevrolet which now offers a supercharged coupe version of the popular Cobalt. Called the SS Supercharged Coupe (SS-SC), the "SS" stands for Super Sport that is a Chevy moniker that goes back to the 1960s and it has been traditionally applied to its most formidable performance cars.

While the Cobalt is available with a base 2.2-litre, four-cylinder engine producing 145 hp and 155 lb/ft of torque, the two SS versions are mechanically quite different. The SS coupe and sedan have a 2.4-litre, four-cylinder this time with variable valve timing to produce 171 hp and 163 lb/ft of torque driving the front wheels with either a standard five-speed manual transmission made by Getrag (the same people who supply manuals to BMW) or an optional four-speed automatic.

And then there is the SS Supercharge Coupe as tested here. It comes with yet another four-cylinder, but this time a 2.0-litre unit beefed up to take a huge supercharger mounted transversely at the nose of the car and producing 205 hp and 200 lb/ft of torque. There is one transmission, a five-speed manual that is strengthened to take the wallop of power that can rocket the SS-SC forward from rest if you're not judicious when letting in the clutch.

Brakes are upgraded on both SS versions from discs/drums front/rear on the standard Cobalt to four-wheel discs with ABS. While the SS gets a sport-tuned suspension it is beefed up even further on the SS-SC. Wheels are increased to 18-inch on special five-blade alloy rims with a set of high performance tires, in the case of my tester, Pirelli P-Zeros which are just about as high performance as you can get.

The resulting suspension is very stiff. With fat rubber and a rock-solid chassis that are definitely tuned for brisk handling this coupe is surprisingly nimble and is easy to point into any corner.

The front spoiler is lowered with fog lamps while the rear valance panel is also lowered to compliment the dropped down rocker panels along the sides. And then there is the rear wing that is as functional as it is dramatic.

To make this wing work, it had to be lifted clear of the rear deck and out of the "dirty" air cascading and swirling over the roof. As you start to increase speed, you can see the wing start to flex, such is the effectiveness of the downforce created. The downside is that the wing runs directly across the line of sight and partially blocks rearward vision.

For the base price of \$24,195, the SS-SC comes with a host of things you might not expect in a car in this category like air conditioning, cruise control, titanium faced gauges, power locks/windows/mirrors, satin-nickel instrument panel and leather-wrapped steering wheel with audio controls. And then there are a few things you might not expect like the Pioneer 228-watt audio system with a great, honking 10-inch sub-woofer mounted in the trunk.

My tester had one option, the Recaro Performance Package. At \$2,365 it consists of leather sports seats made by Recaro, one of the world's leaders, in automotive performance seating. The Recaros grip the driver like a catcher's mitt. It's not like simply being plunked down between a set of thigh-high bolsters. The seats allow complete freedom of movement while being supportive at the same time.

Once seated, the core instruments are placed directly in front of the driver's eyes with a little boost gauge sunk into the A-pillar to the left. The boost gauge is small with lots of plus and minus gradient marks on the face. You have to have good eyesight to read it and the red pointer darts up and down depending on the load. It's entertaining but a bit too out of the direct line of sight ahead where, in a car like this, attention is demanded.

It's more important to keep an eye on the tach, however. Once the supercharger starts doing its thing, the tach needle swings up the redline quickly. Similarly, you better watch the speedo as 100 km/h is achieved within metres under full boost when joining traffic from an on-ramp.

Fitted out in Rally Yellow (as tested) or Victory Red, the SS-SC is sure to attract the attention of the police as well as the public. It also acts as a magnet to "tuner" car owners who come buzzing up looking for a little highway tussle. Respect the first and ignore the latter and the SS-SC can be an enjoyable ride.

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