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1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

BY KEN JURAN

Owner: David Heth—Dallas, Texas

Published in the January 1997 issue.



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Hey, wait a minute. A COPO Camaro in '68? No way. It didn't exist. Wrong. It did exist. One did, anyway, and this is it.

But General Motors had a policy. No more than 400 cubic inches in intermediate and compact cars. And that included the soon-to-be-introduced 1967 Chevrolet Camaro. So at the Camaro's introduction, the biggest engine available as a regular production option was the 375-hp 396-cid V8 (RPO L78). The 396/375 was a monster engine. In fact, the same engine had been rated at 425 horsepower in the '65 Corvette, and that year's full-size models. A '67 Camaro equipped with the L78 easily ran thirteens on the dragstrip and could run with anything on the street.

But sometimes in the 1960s car business, actual performance wasn't enough. Perceived performance was just as--if not more--important than what actually happened out there on the street from light to light. And the guy who could lay the longest patch of rubber got the girls. This was the situation in '67 at the height of the muscle car wars. You could buy any number of Mopars with 426 Hemi or 440 wedge motors. Fords were popping up all over the place with dual-quad 427s. It soon became obvious that more power was needed--or at least perceived to be needed--under the Camaro's hood. If the Camaro was to be marketed successfully against the Mustang, Barracuda, Firebird and the rest of the muscle car pack, Chevrolet was going to have to level the playing field.

Enter Don Yenko, noted Corvette road racer and Chevy dealer in Cannonsburg, Pennsylvania. He began retrofitting Camaros with the direct-swap Chevy L72 427 motor factory-rated at 425 horsepower (optional on full-size Chevys and Corvettes) and selling them at his dealership as Yenko 427 Camaros. Yenko started with L78-equipped cars from the factory so that all the components were already heavy duty, then merely dropped the L72 motor onto the original motor mounts. Everything was dimensionally identical. There were 54 built in '67, and he continued into '68 with 64 more.

Then, tired of doing double work, Yenko convinced Chevy to do his 427 installation right on the assembly line. This, he argued, would add a factory warranty to the cars and make them more sellable. With help from heavyweight contacts in Chevy management and engineering, the Excalibur factory 427 program was born. To avoid scrutiny at the corporate level, the project was administered under a Central Office Production Order (COPO) and the engine was coded "MV 427" on all the paperwork.

For the 1969 model year, these Camaros could be ordered through Yenko's showroom and about 25 other high-performance Chevy dealers as COPO 9560 and 9561 cars. The 9560 version came with a very expensive and exotic all-aluminum ZL1 427 engine fed by a huge single Holley 4-barrel. The rating was a ridiculously low 430 horsepower. Actual output was something like 565. Alas, just 69 were produced. COPO 9561 came with a more-attainable L72 425-hp 4-barrel cast-iron engine. And until a couple of years ago, most everyone thought that was the whole COPO Camaro story.

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story.

But then, Texan David Heth found this '68 for sale in Hemmings Motor News. Heth, thinking he had found one of the 64 Yenko-retrofitted cars, bought it sight unseen, accompanied by the original factory build sheet. After having the paperwork authenticated and the build codes cross-referenced to Chevy's old files, he realized the car he bought was actually a COPO. Yup! This is the lone '68 prototype built to test-fit all the '69 COPOs that followed. Its VIN, COPO 9737 1001 (Yenko serial number 8008), makes it possibly the rarest muscle car ever.

Under the unique Yenko-only fiberglass hood sits the original cast-iron L72 V8. Other than the hood's twin nostrils, only a few badges and a red "Y" on each spindle cap identify the rather plain exterior as a Yenko. In fact, this Fathom Blue coupe rolled out of the factory on its Wide-Oval tires as a nose stripe-delete car. The racy white mustache was added later at Yenko Chevrolet in Cannonsburg because the car looked too plain. Then it was shipped to Jay Kline Chevrolet in Minneapolis where, ironically, the first COPO was eventually sold as a leftover in December of '68 to Michael Fell, a recently returned Vietnam jet fighter pilot.

The other unique feature on this car is the Pontiac Rally II wheels, which were optional on Firebirds, GTOs and other Pontiacs but certainly not Chevrolet Camaros. They were also installed by Yenko to give the car a distinctive look from other Camaros.

David Heth's Yenko Motorsports in Vista, California, is dedicated to keeping this COPO Camaro alive. And some lucky car nut is going to take it home in October 1997 as the winner of the "One And Only On The Planet" Sweepstakes. For more information on the contest, contact Larry Weiner at Yenko Motorsports, 914 S. Santa Fe, Suite 101, Vista, California, 888-689-3656, fax: 619-630-3085.

Reader Comments (18)

18. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

To comment # 5, what are you going to do with this car, that is a tough statement to back up ! although I believe you the rest of the camaro people would have question of that car, there are many 3s to check out including your partial vins on pass side , some have 2, one on top offirewall under the cowl panel and one under the heater box on firewall, at leasts my 68 SS 396 convert has them there, is still in pieces, found it in a Detroit Garage never been apart before me doing it. I would like to get what ever info you have so I may compare, i have no documentation, I am the 3rd owner, the guy I bought it from said he bought it from a GM Executive in 1969-70, but all numbers match from rear axle to trans to engine to fisher body, I have never known of a Yenko or COPO convertible ever produced.

17. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

<http://www.holisticpage.com/camaro/camaros/copo.htm> has a decent description of all the 427 motors made in 67 and 68...

16. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

When I got out of the army I ordered what I will call a "plain jane" 1968 camaro from Fort Sumpter Chevrolet in Charleston, SC. I specified 427 cu. in., M22 trans and a 410 posi 12 bolt. No extras. When the car came in, I almost did not take it due to the fact it had the rally sport front grill with hidden hesdlights and had the egg crate grill, 396 and SS emblems. After some arguing and proof with numbers that it was actually a 427, 425 hp motor I bought the car for \$2886.00. I have had people over the years tell me that only Baldwin or Yenko had 427 camaros. I had never heard of a COPO camaro untill a few years back. All I have to say is that I know what I bought. The car was in an accident and totaled in late 1969.

15. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

My cousin bought a 68 RS with a counter 427 in it, I believe it was an original 375 car and am going to search the title, maybe it's one probly not

14. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

Whats the going price for an original 427 3983512? These days AND where can I find one? Thanks

13. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

1968 camaro,late in life i need to experience a big block,sure ive got a BUTLER-ARNTZ SHELBY,347 C.I. FORD WINDSOR 443HP,427FTLB,and when i get traction it does 12.8/112mph,but i want 1968 L78 CAMARO-----please

12. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

In the early "70s" I bought a 68 Camaro from a insurance co.It had the front end stolen.After getting it put together we realized it was a Yenko,but at the time and my youth I did not realize what a Yenko was.I sold the car in 1973 to a guy in North Dakota,it is rumored that he sold it to guy that wanted just the TAGS off it.(car was rusted bad)Also rumored that this guy was arrested for selling fraud autos by the F.B.I..Does any body have any knowledge on this I would like to know?

11. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

I was checking out your web site and was curious if the late 60's yenko's come with aluminum big blocks. The reason I ask is, an older gentleman I know said he use to race drag boats in the late 70's and had an all aluminum Yenko big block complete with heads that he used in his drag boat. If they were produced, how many were and what is the value of it. He has offered to sell it to me, but I want to make sure it is what he says it is and make sure I get a deal on it. HOW can I tell what year model the block and heads are? Thanks, John Jones

10. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro

sorry my necie needed some thing and i hit enter the first time but i have a 427 from a truck what is the stock hp from the engine it is stock iam plaining on building it but i wanted 2 now what is the difference between a truck 427 and a nova,etc 427?

9. RE: 1968 Chevrolet 427 Yenko COPO Camaro



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