



LEADING THE PACK

Tom Russo and George Stradlater team up to examine the next gen in Indy pace cars.

Photography courtesy General Motors.

Pace Car enthusiasts may adore their '78s, but no Corvette from this era gets a lot of respect from the hobby in general. Forever overshadowed by earlier C3s with screaming engines and later C4s of more sophistication, late-'70s cars appear doomed to fall through the cracks.

Chevrolet would probably agree. It's fair to say the first Corvette Pace Car was born out of desperation. The Corvette was still selling well, but Chevy desperately wanted more profit and publicity out of the fast-aging model. What its marketers created was the idea of a turnkey collectible—a notion that fired the public's emotions both for the Pace Car's look and its unspoken promise of finan-

cial return. So does the recent introduction of a 30th Anniversary model honoring the original Pace Car—an '08 whose black-and-silver exterior pays homage to the groundbreaking '78 special—mean Chevy is at last giving the original Corvette Pace Car its due?

Yes. And no. Technically, the 2008 Indy 500—Corvette's fifth pace-car gig in a row and the tenth time this model has taken the duty—will be paced by a color-shifting green Z06 running E85 ethanol. The one-off concept car will be driven by former F1 champ (and two-time Indy winner) Emerson Fittipaldi, who also just happens to be heavily invested in the ethanol business back home in Brazil. The 500-unit run of MY '08 Corvette

Pace Car Replicas, however, will be totally different cars: black-and-silver LS3 coupes and convertibles with silver upholstery, chrome wheels, special badges, dual-mode exhaust, and Fittipaldi's handwritten signature.

Why the disparity? Well, let's cover the Replica—for lack of a better term—first. Back in 1976, when Chevrolet was just starting to think about the Corvette's upcoming 25th anniversary, it seemed to have nothing to work with. Most of the model's always-tight engineering resources had already been reassigned to new emissions, economy, and safety tasks, and what little remained was supposed to be used for updating the cabin and body. Nor was any additional capital likely to be com-

