

Mike Caplan - And Those Great American Sports Cars

“**E**ven before I could read, my parents said I was fascinated by the cars going by,” says Mike Caplan. “Of course in the early 1960s there weren’t that many cars, but I could tell whether it was a Chevy, a Dodge, or a Ford from a mile away. The first car I owned was a ’78 Pontiac Firebird, and at the age of 16 I was fortunate to have had it. In my memory from 30 years ago, it was an orangey dark-brown color and had a 305 cubic inch engine. It was a good high school car that served me well; I loved it.”

Through the years Mike’s fascination for cars – especially sports cars – led him to an interesting assortment of vehicles. Today he and his wife Laura have a ’08 Z06 (it won Best Paint in CNCC’s Third Annual All-Corvette Show) in addition to a Dodge STR-8 Charger and a Dodge Viper SRT-10. And when he is not cruising along an open highway in one of them, you can see another side of Mike on WLS-TV news, as a highly professional member of ABC 7’s weather team.

As for that ’78 Pontiac of years ago, Mike recalls that one Saturday he and a



Laura and Mike at CNCC’s All-Corvette Show, August 10, where their ’08 Z06 in stunning Crystal Metallic Red won Best Paint.

friend, Patrick Johnson, now a movie director, attempted to upgrade the standard am/fm radio that came with the car by installing a Clarion cassette radio. “We spent a good chunk of the afternoon getting this thing in – we thought we knew what we were doing – because we had a double-date that night with two young ladies. Once we put the thing together, it worked fine.

“That night we went out with our dates. We were listening to the newly installed radio, but the minute I turned on the car’s headlights, the radio stopped function-

ing. Somehow we wired the radio to work only when the headlights were off. We had no music that evening because the headlights were more important than the music. That is a vivid memory that I have of that car. The following day we found a slightly older kid who knew what he was doing and showed us the error of our ways. He made it work.”

Mike says he likes different cars for different reasons and doesn’t have a favorite. “I use the Charger as my daily driver. I would never take the Viper or the Corvette downtown to the parking garage I use. By far I drive the SRT the most, but is it my favorite car? No. I like each car for different reasons.

“The Viper has a certain cachet of exclusivity that the Corvette does not have, because there are simply more Vettes on the road than there are Vipers. The Corvette is a more user-friendly car than the Viper. When I’ve gone to Viper events and to Corvette functions, corresponding members of those organizations always ask which I like better. Does one drive better than the other?

“I’m always left with the following comparison: the Viper is a more intense car to drive; you really have to pay attention to it. If you are a good, competent driver it will reward you at the track. The Corvette has such an easy-going style. The speed comes, the handling comes, and you are not required to put as much driver input in the car to make it excel.

“On the weekends I drive both cars, and my wife drives them both and enjoys them, so I’m not being coy when I say I don’t have a favorite. I’m really happy to have both. I’ve gone back and forth with Vipers and Corvettes for many years, and enjoy them both.”



The Caplans’ Winning 427 Will Cook ’08 Z06

Mike's Viper is a 2005 Copperhead Limited Edition with 510 horsepower. The only modification he has made is a cold-air intake and the exhaust. "I don't think I would do anything else to ramp that up. Technically it has five more horsepower than the Corvette, and it is also slightly heavier. The performance in a straight line is going to be very similar to a Corvette in a drag race."

Just how the Caplans ended up with the '08 Z06 is an intriguing story that includes a few other cars. It is a tale that begins with a '98 Midnight Blue standard C5 Mike had for several years before he upgraded to a C5 Silver Z06 (it was either a 2000 or a 2001, he says). He traded the C5 for a Silver Viper and then bought a Black Viper, "so at one time I had both silver and a black Viper. I wasn't using the Black Viper at all; in a year-and-a-half I put only 900 miles on the car. So when the C6 Z06 came out, I traded it for a Le Mans Blue C6 Z06 and kept it for about a year. When I missed my involvement with the Viper club, I traded it on the Copperhead Viper.

"Since we had the Viper, I wanted to add another car to the garage. I had driven a Lotus and found I really didn't want to do that; I looked at the BMWs, and didn't want to do that. I really wanted to get back into a Corvette. I found some decent deals on '08s.

"At first I didn't know if I wanted a coupe and modify it or go ahead and get a

Z06. I thought the Limited Edition 427 was just awesome. My wife met me the second time I went out to Stasek, and that was the one she liked the best. She gave a green light to the deal so it was a no brainer, and that is how we ended up with our Z06.

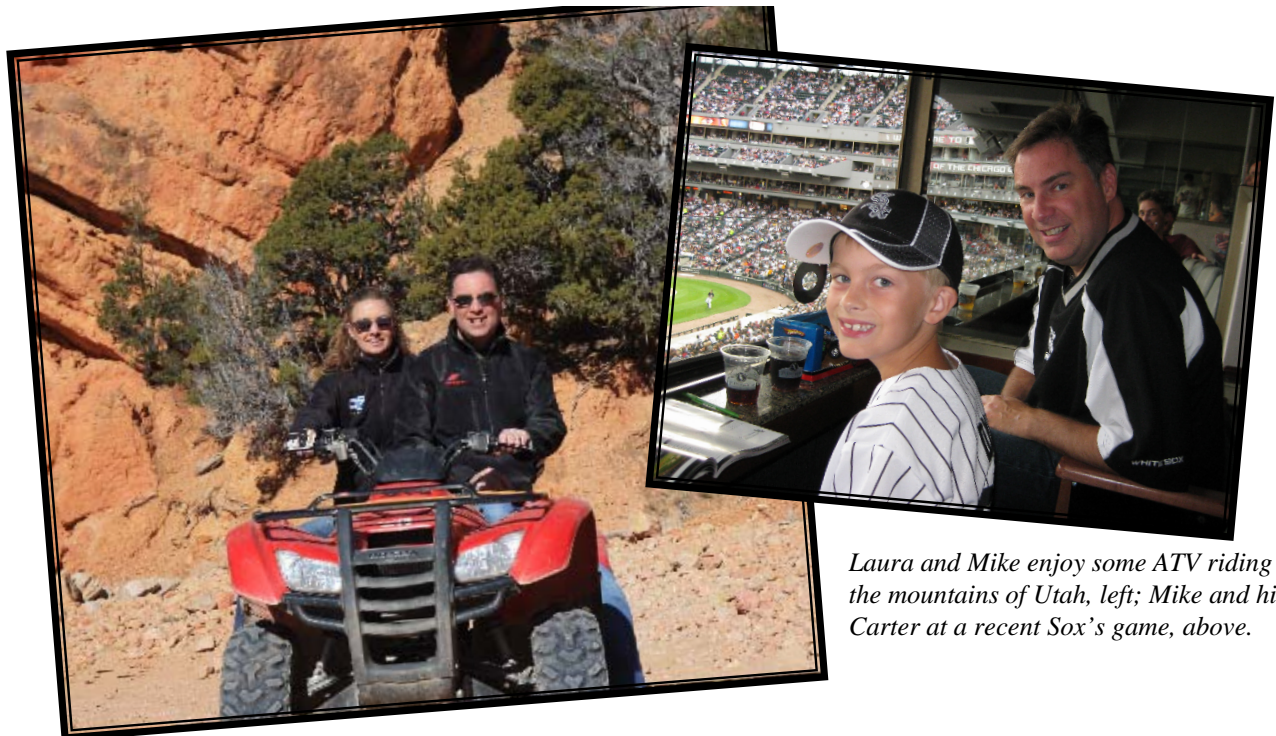
"We've had so many positive comments about the color of that car – Crystal Red Metallic. It is one of the best-looking special-edition cars I have seen come out of Corvette in a long time. There is such rivalry between Corvette and Viper owners. I think the two manufacturers have done such a good job of making really high-quality performance-per-dollar on both cars, with nothing coming out of Europe that can touch them."

Does Mike have any special thoughts about Corvettes to pass along? Even with the current poor economy, he says, "Who knows for how long we are going to be able to drive gas-powered vehicles with 500 and 600 horsepower. The time is right. The economy is not great for everyone, but it is also a buyer's market for many things. While I don't suggest stretching things to the point where you can't put food on the table for your family, for someone who is sitting on the fence and has always wanted to have a sports car, I urge them to make the stretch, get into it, and start enjoying a Corvette."

In addition to the thrill of driving sports cars, Mike is involved with a special project that is as close to his heart as a Z06. It is a segment he presents on ABC news featuring pets that are available for adoption through Chicago's Anti-Cruelty Society. Many years ago he began an adopt-a-pet program for a television station in North Carolina that worked out so well, he suggested the idea to ABC. "We get involved with an animal shelter and each week we feature a dog and cat that is available for adoption. We've had good success placing animals. The minute we put them on TV people flood the shelter with calls asking to adopt them.

"That is literally and figuratively a pet project of mine. There is a tremendous amount of abuse that goes on with animals. We often see some of the more horrific cases with Michael Vick and dog fighting rings, and there are a sad number of cases where a pet owner ties a dog to a tree on a hot summer day with no water. The Anti-Cruelty Society is doing something valuable for society by finding homes for neglected animals, and we are happy to help through ABC."

By the way in case you are wondering, in addition to fine sports cars, Mike and Laura are proud owners of a chocolate Labrador retriever and a cat, Apollo and Ajax, respectively. "I'm more of a dog person than a cat person," Mike explains. "But our cat thinks he is a dog, so it has worked out very well." ●



Laura and Mike enjoy some ATV riding in the mountains of Utah, left; Mike and his son Carter at a recent Sox's game, above.