

THE NICKEY 427 SUPER CAMARO IS BACK!

ONE OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN CHEVROLET HIGH PERFORMANCE RETURNS WITH A VENGEANCE.

By **Bob McClurg**

Photos by **the author**

The name Nickey—spelled with a backwards “k”—was synonymous with high performance Chevrolet products in the ‘60s. Established in 1925, Chicago-based Nickey Chevrolet backed some of the most famous names in motorsports, especially from the late ‘50s throughout the ‘60s. It started with the Harley Earl-designed ‘57 Corvette SR2, which Nickey purchased for road racing. That project led to the Bill Thomas-powered “Purple People Eater” championship Corvette in ‘58 driven by Jim Jeffords.

Then there was the Nickey-sponsored Chevrolet stock car driven by Fred Lorenzen; the A.J. Foyt-driven/Nickey Chevrolet-sponsored American Challenge Cup ‘63 Corvette road racer; Dick Harrell and Hayden Profit’s Nickey-sponsored Chevrolet Nova and Corvair-bodied match race Stockers, and Ron Colson’s phenomenally successful Nickey Top Gas dragster. Suffice to say, Nickey Chevrolet’s name was everywhere that GM’s finest gathered in the name of speed.

The alter ego to Nickey Chevrolet’s racing programs were the dealer’s lightning-fast high performance street machines and the Nickey-Bill Thomas-engineered 427 Super Camaro project was the highest profile program of them all. Historically, Nickey and Thomas were responsible—with Chevrolet Division’s Vince Piggins blessing—for the first 427 engine conversion into the all-new ‘67 Camaro introduced late ‘66; developing an engine swap kit in the process. This hot rod-inspired technology enabled two dealerships, one being Southgate, California’s Dana Chevrolet out on the West Coast and Nickey Chevrolet in the Midwest to produce limited edition 427 Camaro supercars.

Nickey Chevrolet’s original plan was to build at least 50 of these L72-powered Super Camaros to homologate them for AHRA Formula Stock, and NHRA Super Stock class racing. Unfortunately, after a serious financial restructuring of Nickey Chevrolet

that same year, the Nickey 427 Super Camaro program was history with the swipe of an accountant’s pen. Dick Harrell had also been terminated as a sponsored driver early in the ‘67 racing season. Nickey Chevrolet would eventually phase out of new car sales, but would continue to run its performance center under the “Nickey Chicago Speed Shop” banner until 1977, when tough economic times forced them to close their doors.

But what’s this? The Nickey name is back, and building high performance Camaros once again.

“I’ve spent most of my life in the retail automotive business,” says Nickey Chicago CEO Stefano Bimbi. “Prior to starting up Nickey Chicago, Inc., I was the director for a Fortune 100 company called “Auto Nation.” I was also involved in a couple of niche market businesses, one which was a muscle car sales organization known as Bimbi’s Car Craft. We established a reputation for finding our clients the finest muscle cars available: COPOs, Yenkos, Baldwin-Motion cars, and, of course, Nicksys. When I found out that the rights to the Nickey name were available, that provided me with the impetus to formally resign my position with Auto Nation, and set out to bring back the Nickey marque.

In 2004, Nickey Chicago, Inc. opened its doors not far from the original Nickey dealership and pretty much picked up where Bimbi’s Car Craft had left off. With the actual release date set for the ‘10 Camaro, Nickey Chicago started laying the groundwork for its Gen V ‘10 Nickey 427 Camaro SS project. “These cars are true supercars in the Nickey Chevrolet tradition, and just like the originals, are available in Stage I, Stage II, and Stage III configurations. In fact, we actually used one of Nickey’s original ads and plugged in all the modern components, and it just fit right.”

Stage I is Nickey Chicago’s entry level package, and consists of a distinctive Nickey L88-type hood,

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WE'RE MOST EXCITED ABOUT THE STAGE III NICKEY 427 SUPER CAMARO SS WHICH IS POWERED BY A 707HP CARL WEGNER MOTORSPORTS-PREPARED GM LS7 ENGINE

graphics and emblem package, along with a bolt on cold air induction system feeding a FAST intake, a custom tune, and custom exhaust. The factory 376cid, LS3 engine is power rated at 426 hp, while Stage I is rated at 500."

The Stage II package consists of all the previously mentioned upgrades, along with CNC-ported LS3 cylinder heads, a Nickey-spec cam ground by

Competition Cams, a FAST intake, and exhaust system. That car is rated at 600 hp.

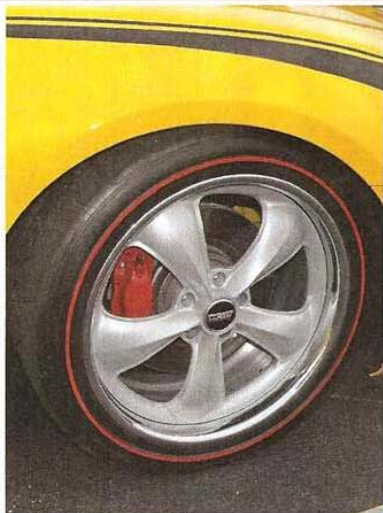
"Or we can get there with power adders like the addition of an either a Procharger or Magnusen supercharger to the factory LS3 engine, aka "Stage IIS." We are also currently in the process of developing a turbocharged package with our strategic partners from Naperville, Illinois' Finish Line Performance (FLP), which will be known as the Stage II-T," Bimbi explained.

"Of course, we're most excited about the Stage III Nickey 427 Super Camaro SS which is powered by a 707hp Carl Wegner Motorsports-prepared GM LS7 engine, the same engine as used in the Corvette Z06. Internally, it features a cast-aluminum block with steel six-bolt-main bearing caps and a Calles forged-steel crank. Bore size is 4.125 inches and the stroke is 4.00 inches. The Nickey 427 Camaro SS also makes use of a set of Howard's connecting rods, while a set of 11.0:1 compression forged aluminum JE pistons are used. A proprietary grind Competition Cams roller cam is also an integral part of this combination.

The LS7's Wegner/CNC-ported "specific pattern

"cylinder heads feature 70 cc combustion chambers with 2.20-inch diameter Del West titanium intake and 1.61-inch diameter Del West titanium exhaust valves. The valvetrain on these engines consists of CHR 1.75-ratio roller rocker arms, Manley Performance springs and keepers, and a set of CNC billet-aluminum "NICKEY CHICAGO" valve covers complete with Nickey coil pack "stands."

At this writing, it should also be noted that Nickey Chicago is currently in the developmental stages of both a supercharger and turbocharger option for the 427 Stage III, with the goal being no less than 1,000 hp.





Backing up Nickey Chicago's prototype—serial number 001—is a Viper-style Finish Line Performance Tremec T56 six-speed Hurst shifted transmission utilizing a Ram Automotive dual-disc clutch. A high performance six-speed automatic version is also available and in the development process.

Rear end gearing in the '10 Nickey 427 Super Camaro SS fully independent coilover strut rear suspension is the stock 3.45:1 (stick), or 3.42:1 (automatic) although with the 427 engine plans call for the substitution of a set of 4.10s once available.

And speaking of suspensions, a special Pedders-Nickey coilover strut high performance suspension system is another one of the much-desired Nickey options. Those "Nickey Specific" 20x10 front/20x11 rear five-spoke wheels are from MHT Wheels—complete with "Nickey Chicago" centercaps. Tires come in the form of set 275/40 front, and 305/35 rear Nitto Invo high-performance radials. Bimbi claims a Pedders-equipped car will better a stock SS around the track at Autobahn Raceway in Illinois by over seven seconds per lap and pull over 1g on the skidpad. These are heady claims that we hope to be able to verify via instrumented testing. The 427 car on these pages was hampered by clutch/driveline issues and only ran a 12.57/112.50 at the strip, hardly indicative of its potential. Once fully developed, Bimbi expects the Nickey 427 Super Camaro SS to be a bona fide 10-second machine.

The interiors inside the '10 Nickey 427 Super Camaro SS are also indicative to the breed. Nickey Super Camaro 001 happens to feature yellow leather inserts and specially embroidered "Nickey" insignia leather headrests and special embroidered floor mats. Rounding out the package are distinctive Nickey stripe graphics and Corvette-style "Stinger" composite hoods, with all paint work done by Route 66 Motorsports (New Lenox, Illinois) of Project American Heroes II and III fame. Every car will be serialized and entered in the Nickey Registry.

"One of the coolest aspects about this project is that we actually have key people in our organization that originally helped create the Nickey legend. Don Swiatek was the one and only high performance manager for the original Nickey Chevrolet. He and his team of master technicians were responsible for all the Nickey conversion cars.

"Through our contacts in the industry, we've established a network of approximately 10 dealerships, and we have even more calling us wanting to become involved with this program as we speak."

And what might you expect to pay for one of these '10 Nickey Camaros? They start somewhere in the neighborhood of around \$12,000 for a Stage I and can run up to \$40K-\$60K for the 427 model shown here, and beyond the \$32,730 price tag being commanded for the actual '10 Camaro RS/SS package itself. 