

the enforcer!

WORDS JOHN WRIGHT PHOTOS NATHAN DUFF

BELONGING TO **V8 SUPERCAR HARD MAN RUSSELL INGALL**, THIS BLOWN 2011 CAMARO IS AS TOUGH AS ITS OWNER'S ON-TRACK REPUTATION

Chevrolet V8s have powered up-spec Holden Commodores since 1999, which means a big lump of US alloy in Australia's Own. V8 Supercar legend Russell Ingall, who owns this magnificent 2011 Camaro, reckons this might be the reason so many Commodore owners replace Holden lion badges with Chevy 'bow-ties'.

But there is plenty of GM-Holden in this Chevrolet because the latest Camaro, for all its rich bow-tie heritage, was developed in Australia and many enthusiasts believe it is the best-looking current US car on offer. The Camaro is also built on the same platform as our own VE Commodore, with extensive development work being undertaken at Holden's Lang Lang Proving Ground.

Ingall's Camaro is the first four-wheeled machine he has chosen himself in many years. One of the privileges of being a V8

Supercar driver is the free use of a road car. But therein lies a problem. When you are used to V8 Supercar levels of performance, even Ferraris and Porsches feel tame. "I've had bikes for years because that's the only way to get a real sense of speed on the road," he says.

When he saw the Camaro, though, he reckoned it would be worth having a drive. Sponsor and Camaro importer Performax – in Gympie, QLD – had a demonstrator and Ingall was hooked.

His car started out as the top-spec version, known somewhat mundanely as the 2SS. The lesser variants are the V6 LS, LT (1LT, 2LT) and the V8 1SS. In the US, prices range from \$22,805 for the base V6 to the flagship 2SS asking just under US\$40K. The 2SS is available from Performax, fully converted, for about \$140K. If you import your own car, the conversion will cost \$35K.

Ingall's most difficult choice was colour.

"I couldn't decide between black and red. In the end I went with my wife's favourite, which was red," he shrugs. "When you think about it, we should take notice of what women say about colour because they choose the clothes that will suit their bodies best." Different colours suit different shapes and, unusually for a 2012 car, Victory Red is a solid colour. "It's not too much blood-red, not too orange-y," says Ingall. "Black doesn't show off the lines as clearly."

It is a very subtle, beautifully sculptured coupe and the complex curves, especially around the 'Coke bottle' hip area, would be less evident under a coat of metallic black paint. "This car gets a lot of attention," Ingall says. "People don't know what it is. The other day I parked it near the beach. A woman with all the right clothes and gear pulled in in the latest Aston Martin convertible. When I came back after a few minutes, there was a





LEFT Styled by an Asian – Sang Yup Lee – and engineered by Australians, the Camaro is arguably the most successful of all the recent retro muscle car designs

RIGHT Leather-wrapped wheel mimics the '67 original and is a delight to use

BELOW Hennessey blower kit bolts straight onto the 6.2-litre LS3 V8 for an easy 400kW-plus at the wheels



crowd around my car and no-one was even looking at hers.”

The pronounced, muscular haunches combine with very short front and rear overhangs to deliver a don't-mess-with-me stance. This design seems to reference not only the original Camaro but also the Jaguar E-Type (a pioneer of the Coke-bottle hip style, although that term was never used to describe it). But the 21st-century interpretation means big diameter wheels that fill the wheelarches. By comparison,

to the standard engine and yields 369kW at the rear wheels, running 10psi of boost. “That’s about 600hp (447kW) at the flywheel,” Ingall grins. The standard car runs 0-100km/h in a whisker under five seconds, so there’s no question this one will threaten low fours.

Ingall was not interested in taking his Camaro’s power to the limit, though – he thinks the clutch is probably marginal. “To get much more, you’d really have to look at the bottom end, injectors, a whole lot of

up front, which Ingall says are surprisingly similar to his race car. “I can adjust the ride height and spring pre-loads,” he says. At the rear is a multi-link independent set-up.

From the factory, the top-line 2SS Camaro runs 20-inch alloys, with 21s a dealer-fit option. But they weren’t big enough for Ingall! He sourced a set of 22-inchers – 9.5 inches wide up front and 11.5 at the business end – with 265/30 and 315/25 Pirelli P Zero rubber respectively. Indeed, the rear boots leave as broad a fried

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even a '67 Camaro looks under-tired.

Unlike so many of today's retro Detroit designs, there is nothing of the caricature in the Camaro. Rather, Australian designers (headed by Mike Simcoe, architect of the VT Commodore, a 1997 masterpiece) have paid homage to the original muscle-car era by faithfully translating it for a new century.

You wouldn't expect the infamous 'Enforcer' to be content with the standard 317kW/569Nm from the same 6.2-litre V8 that powers current HSVs. Nope, he decided supercharging was the answer and the Hennessey unit (about \$7000 for the kit, plus fitting and tuning) bolts straight

stuff,” he says. Hennessey's HPE700 version puts out a claimed 563kW/1034Nm and 0-100km/h is said to waste just 3.3 seconds and the quarter mile 10.9, which is definitely V8 Supercar territory!

“The real point of the exercise was to extract more performance without compromising driveability, and tuning was the critical thing,” Ingall says. He entrusted this to Walkinshaw Performance. “It drives like a standard car [but] from 1500rpm, there is massive amounts of torque – more than I've ever experienced in a road car,” Ingall marvels. On the suspension side, the Camaro runs coil-over shock absorbers

rubber footprint as Ingall's Commodore V8 Supercar does but he limited tail-out passes for our photographer to two: “Pirellis are expensive,” he quipped.

The 2SS gets leather trim and the interior is well executed, including four ancillary gauges mounted about where the tachometer was on the first Holden to feature one, the HK Monaro GTS. You face the huge speedo and tachometer set into a cleverly retro fascia. The wheel is a leather-bound masterpiece, at once highly tactile and evocative of 1967.

Even the fastest road car can feel slow on a racetrack and at the Norwell driver training facility, south of Brisbane, the



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Low-mount ancillary gauges mimic a '69 Camaro; Ingall is one of Australia's finest drivers; 'X' marks the spot; Victory Red, a solid colour, shows off the Camaro's lines



supercharged Camaro didn't feel as rapid as it would on a public road. Nevertheless, it reached the upper echelons of third gear on quite a short straight so that's hauling!

The steering is beautifully weighted and direct and turns-in hard. The Chevy understeers modestly, but there is no body roll to speak of. Grip is brilliant and the Brembo stoppers are as good as you'll experience. My impression was that it handled and went better than a standard Z06 Corvette. It is difficult to evaluate the ride on a smooth surface but it was smoother than you'd expect given the state of suspension tune and the low-profile Pirellis. Russell says the suspension is a bit on the firm side but not too bad (for him).

Far and away the most impressive aspect of driving the car is its effortless, syrupy torque. As Ingall observed, you could lap the whole Norwell track in third gear. Equally, when given its considerable head, the 6.2-litre V8 revs with a sweetness unheard of in a US V8 of the 1960s.

With this Camaro, personable and quietly spoken Russell Ingall has created a car that is, in fact, closer to his 'Enforcer' nickname than the man himself. 🚗



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Only the Mustang carries a more evocative badge; top-spec Camaro a mere \$40K in the US; Performax create their own dash components for the RHD conversion; supercharged grunt and great balance make drifting a cinch

BOTTOM Huge wheels required for the ideal stance. Ingall has fitted 22 x 9.5s up front and 22 x 11.5s at the rear



Enforcer? Just doing the job...

RUSSELL INGALL began his racing career in karts at 12, initially in Adelaide before moving overseas to compete. Despite losing his right index finger from the first knuckle up in a karting accident, he graduated to Formula Ford and finished third in his second race – the support event at the 1988 Australian Grand Prix. He also won 10 out of 12 races in the New Zealand Formula Ford championship.

In 1995 he won the British Formula Renault Championship and then returned to Australia to join the Perkins Engineering V8 Supercar team. Driving with Larry Perkins, the duo won the Bathurst 1000 in 1995 and '97. Then in 2005, Ingall won the V8 Supercar Championship.

The 'Enforcer' name, he says, came about because he drove in Australia "the way everyone drives in Europe – if there's a gap, you go for it." He is still getting into trouble with the stewards.

At 47, he still probably has more years at the top level ahead of him but has made no plans yet for an alternative career. – JW



Fast Facts

2011 CHEVROLET CAMARO
ENGINE 6162cc V8, OHV, 16v, supercharger
POWER 445kW*
TORQUE 750Nm*
WEIGHT 1780kg
GEARBOX 6-speed manual
0-100KM/H 4.2sec*
PRICE \$140,000 (Camaro 2SS)
* estimated

