

of the future, while the 1982 Corvette still had a 350 small-block. All the V-8 needed was some good news on fuel price and maybe a bit of technology to help it reach the next millennium.

Both were forthcoming, leading to a veritable supernova of new V-8 designs and new homes for those designs. Lexus, Infiniti, BMW, Audi, Mercedes, Cadillac, and Lincoln all introduced new 32-valve, overhead-cam V-8s. Ford modernized its V-8 with the Modular overhead-cam engine, while Chevrolet reengineered the traditional small-block into the LS series. You could get a V-8 in everything from the Yamaha-engined, third-gen Ford Taurus SHO to the outrageous BMW Z8. The horsepower wars returned in earnest, and the V-8 led the charge.

Over the past few years, greater concern about CO₂ emissions and overall fleet fuel economy has seen the configuration fall from favor slightly.

Several of the cars that had gone to V-8 power after the turn of the century retreated to forced-induction six-cylinders, as did Formula 1 racing. Cadillac and Lincoln each have a brand-new full-size luxury car on showroom floors, but neither can be had with what many people still consider the only proper engine for either marque. Even that all-American icon the Ford F-150 now offers twin-turbo V-6s as low-fat alternatives—and they're selling like hotcakes.

There are solid reasons behind this move away from the V-8. Smaller-capacity sixes and fours take up less space, cost less to make, and burn less fuel in EPA fuel-economy tests. As was the case back in the days of the oil embargo, there's a gas-guzzler image to the engine's design no matter how much cylinder-deactivation or direct-injection technology you throw at it. In one new-car press conference after another, engineers and marketing people stand up and solemnly assure

us that we won't miss the antiquated V-8. After all, isn't the all-electric Tesla Model S quicker than but a scant handful of eight-cylinder cars?

The good news is, there are still plenty of brilliant V-8s on the market. On the exotic side, there's the Ferrari 488 GTB and every new McLaren supercar. Affordable V-8 choices exist in the form of both pickup trucks and pony cars from Ford, GM, and Chrysler.

Somewhere in the middle, you have the stunning 8250-rpm flat-crank 5.2-liter mill in the Shelby GT350 Mustang; the Corvette Stingray's stout-hearted, naturally aspirated LT1; and

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the almighty supercharged 707-horse Hemi from the Dodge Charger and Challenger SRT Hellcats. The latter engine is a testament to what can happen when modern technology is applied to a traditional formula. From its iron block to the single camshaft nestled in the bank between its cylinders, very little about the Hellcat's basic design would shock the men who designed the 135-hp Oldsmobile Rocket V-8 for the 1949 model year, but every aspect of that design has been painstakingly massaged and computer-engineered to a space-age level.

That's the good news. The bad news is that the V-8 engine will probably never again be America's default choice for affordable and accessible power. In that respect, Henry Ford's revolution of 1932 has finally come to a halt. If the internal-combustion engine has a future in mass-market transportation, it will probably be the humble inline-four doing the motivating, the same way it was in the days of the Model T and

Model A. The V-8 will return to its origins as an engine for the wealthy, the competitive, and the committed.

On the Clash's third album, *London Calling*, Joe Strummer sang "No man born with a living soul can be working for the clamp-down." So although the future might be filled with snail-stuffed small-displacement engines thrashing tunelessly through a CVT or assisted by an electric motor, you can consider us unconvinced. A boosted V-6 or inline-four might turn impressive numbers on the dyno or the drag strip, but the bent-eight remains the gold standard of internal-combustion engines. It sounds right. It feels right. And it looks stunning beneath the lifted hood of a Mustang or the glass engine cover of a Ferrari. We'll continue to cheer, and choose, the V-8 as long as we can. Even after the last small-block Chevy or flathead Ford or flat-crank Shelby GT350 is silenced forever. As long as that sound exists, even in our memories, the V-8 will continue to be the only engine that matters. ■

