UP IN SMOKE

TRACK TESTING LSR PERFORMANCE'S '10 CAMARO SS

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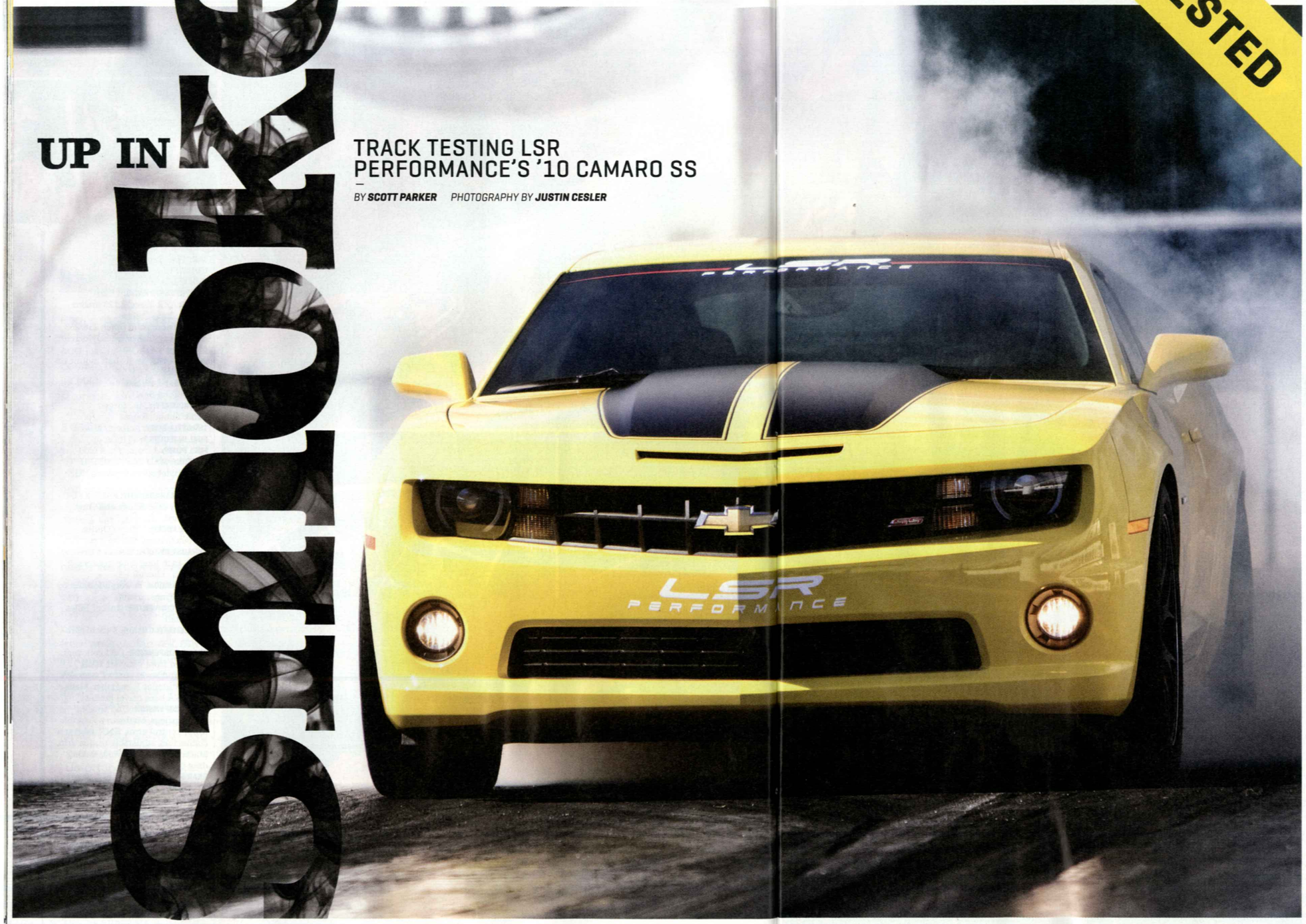

TESTED

Admittedly, yellow is not my favorite color. But when LSR Performance backed their Rally Yellow '10 SS off the trailer at Gainesville Raceway, I was smitten—black BBS wheels, aggressive stance, and a hint of snarl at start-up. I would definitely take this home. Everything about the car felt OEM, but slightly better. The throttle response was just a touch crisper, and the LS3 seemed to zing through the RPM band a bit easier. As we opened the hood it was immediately apparent how, in fact, this was possible. LSR's dyno tested Cold Air Intake Kit was a clear departure from stock, with an open element, high flow filter contained in an airbox that seals against the hood and uses the factory lower intake tube to grab fresh air. A billet velocity stack and mass air sensor is also incorporated into the design, just aft the filter and before it takes a near 90-degree turn into the throttle body. Combine this with a Borla exhaust system and an SCT tune, also out of LSR's catalogue, and the LS3 is more crisp yet not radically different from its tame OEM characteristics.

As LSR's forte is high quality suspension parts, expectations were high for some quick lap times. However, first things first. We tried to take advantage of the cool morning air at the dragstrip in the hopes of besting the car's previous best of 12.61 at 111 mph by LSR's own hotshoe Scott Boda. Having drag raced fifth-gens before with great difficulty, I was a bit hesitant to just put it to the wood. But LSR encouraged me to leave harder and harder as Scott had to produce the impressive ET. There seemed nearly no end to the grip of the 315mm Nitto NT05R

drag radials, despite that they were on 20-inch wheels. Unfortunately, all that grip eventually did the stock clutch and posi unit in, as we had seen all day long at the Camaro5 Fest, before I could break out of the high 12s. It was clear that burnouts and hard launches were not in this '10's near future, but with a significant cool-down the clutch seemed to hold well enough to drive even fairly spirited. At this point we limped over to the road course, in the hopes that it would not be a problem. And thankfully it wasn't.

Having recently driven Gainesville's 1.6-mile test track with a '10 Camaro on stock Pirellis as well as my own C6 Z51 on stock sized Nitto Invos, it was nice to finally have a meaty and sticky set of front tires to plant during the many tight, low-speed turns on this track. Unfortunately, near 4,000-pounds of mass equalized most of the 275/35R20 NT05s, and the stickier drag radials on the rear really made me wish that there were NT01s on the front. The car really seemed to crave a stickier front tire and more aggressive alignment to help turn-in, which was perhaps the only sluggish part of the vastly revamped handling characteristics. LSR's hollow, chromoly front and rear sway bars provided an optimum balance, and flat cornering compared to the hefty stocker—that really shows its weight around the long S-turn that leads to the back straight of the course. LSR says the front bar adds 159-285 percent stiffness (depending on the settings) and the rear adds 204-495 percent (both set at full stiff for testing), while also working with the lowering springs to improve road feel and contact. Replacing the factory toe links and trailing arms with billet aluminum variants also seemed to give greater driver feedback and predictability from the chassis, while improving traction at corner exit. Overall the LSR Camaro was considerably easier and more rewarding to drive than stock. The only issue I had all afternoon was trying to stay in the seat as the extra G-forces were tossing me around at will.

A few other notable improvements to the LSR Camaro included a chromoly Front Subframe Brace and Billet Floorpan Brace, which is a direct replacement for the stock piece. Both parts add chassis stiffness, which is perhaps not very crucial with a bone stock car, but with stickier tires and increased cornering loads the unibody could definitely use some help. With

the help of some high-temp Hawk HPS pads and DBA rotors, the LSR Camaro felt like it could do hot laps all day—an impressive feat on this course, which eats brake pads for breakfast. Towards the end of the day I lost some brake pedal pressure at the end of the cool-down run, but a few pumps of the pedal and it was back to normal. It is worth mentioning that the stock Brembo calipers on this course feel about adequate at stock power levels, though quite unremarkable given the vehicle weight and how much speed you need to shed at some of the turns. Thankfully LSR has a few upgrades in its catalogue if you should feel so inclined. Speaking of LSR's catalogue, the Tri-Ax shifter is light-years ahead of the sloppy stock unit and made grabbing gears substantially more enjoyable.

I could have done laps all day and night. To date, the LSR Camaro is easily one of the most fun vehicles I have driven on this track. A surprising statement given that it only has a handful of (well chosen) upgrades. The LSR Camaro clicked off a 1:08.47 on our test track, easily 2 seconds faster than typical stock suspension '10 Camaros and within 2-tenths of my own lightly modified '05 Corvette Z51. Not to beat a dead horse, but on a small, tight track this is impressive stuff since there isn't enough room for a heavier, more powerful car to gain any ground on the straight-aways or high-speed, long sweeping turns. On our 300-foot skidpad the Camaro's grip was immediately apparent, and the numbers don't lie—.976 Gs!

For your average Joe, LSR's litney of upgrades are more than enough to provide vast improvement to the handling characteristics while being completely liveable and affordable. Even though it probably wouldn't have been as road course friendly, we would have loved some boost to get the heavy beast moving a little better off the line. But all in all, we can see that the LSR Performance Camaro is as enjoyable as any car you could have at an open track day, and not at all bad for street driving—though that was a little beyond the scope of our test. Simply put, the LSR Camaro is reliable, fast, and easy to drive. ■

LSR PERFORMANCE '10 CAMARO SS UPGRADES
ENGINE: LSR cold air intake, SCT tune, Borla exhaust
DRIVETRAIN: LSR Tri-Ax shifter*
CHASSIS: LSR billet floorpan brace, chomoly (front) sub-frame brace
SUSPENSION: LSR billet toe links, trailing arms, front and rear sway bars, Energy Suspension polyurethane bushings (front and rear)
WHEELS: BBS 20x9.5 front, 20x10 rear
TIRES: Nitto NT05 275/35R20 front, NT05R 315/35R20 rear
*EXEDY TWIN-DISC CLUTCH INSTALL AFTER TEST