It's kind of a pain to get a C5 Corvette in the air with a floor jack. So to maximize our work space for the exhaust installation, we drove south a bit to take advantage of the lift and the competent help at Redline BMW. The MagnaFlow exhaust cans fit snugly in the rear haunches of the Vette.

power, fuel economy and so on, Johan likes a slightly thinner mix for the LS1.

Chasing the Dragon

As we mentioned before, we didn't have a lot of options when it came to performance parts. We would, however, take advantage of what we could, and that included an aftermarket exhaust.

We chose a MagnaFlow 15660 system which is a complete, stainless steel affair that goes from the catalytic converters to the final tips. The system replaces the stock H-pipe with an X-pipe and also includes mufflers. Basically, it's a soup-to-nuts system, and its factory routing and stock diameter makes it legal for NCCC Group 1. (The system is also SCCA Stock class-compliant.)

We installed our exhaust at Redline BMW—after having lunch with big cheese Rennie Bryant and fielding requests from some of his friends and employees as to why we no longer run pictures of his butt crack—and found the whole operation to be pretty straightforward and simple. The home hobbyist could handle this project, but we'd highly recommend using a lift as snaking some of the bent pieces up into the car's underbody requires some extra space. You'll also need a reciprocating saw or pipe cutter to chop the stock exhaust just behind the cats—the instructions tell you exactly where—so please try to not remove your arm or any fingers during this step.

Speaking of reciprocating saws, while we had the Sawzall out and the stock exhaust on the ground, we cut apart the stock H-pipe to get a better look at the crossover. Crossover pipes are often used in engines with multiple cylinder banks in order to get the low pressure from one exhaust pipe to help evacuate the other, thereby reducing overall back pressure.

When we cut the H-pipe open we were shocked at what we found. The stock H-pipe was probably 1.5 inches in diameter, but the holes in the primary pipes were maybe one-half to three-quarters of an inch in diameter. And they looked like they had just been quickly blasted open with a cutting torch before the crossover was welded in place.

In contrast, the MagnaFlow X-pipe was a TIG-welded work of art in stainless steel. The complete MagnaFlow system is not exactly cheap—street prices are around $1300—but it's an excellent example of getting what you pay for. Welds are beautiful, bends are smooth and precise, and the whole thing fit perfectly and installed according to instructions.

When installing an exhaust system like this, we recommend you not tighten any bolts until all components are in place. Finger-install the connections first, and that will give you some wiggle room to make those tricky connections. Then you can run down the system from front to

Keeping Your Kool

It's hard not to look cool in a Corvette, but sometimes it's not so easy to stay cool. Even stock cars like ours radiate a lot of heat into the interior through the center console. Part of the reason is that the catalytic converters sit right under the driver's elbow, and those suckers get hot.

Our relief came from KoolMat, a company that offers a specially designed thermal barrier shaped precisely for the C5 Corvette's center tunnel. The barrier weighs less than two pounds and installs in less than two hours of relatively easy work. (If that seems long, it's because we're including the time spent jacking up and lowering the car, which is kind of a pain with a Corvette.)

Before we installed the piece, we used an a/c thermometer to take some temperature readings at the center console. We tucked it under the shift boot and drove around until the temperature stabilized. We weren't surprised when we saw the digital gauge hit 120 degrees Fahrenheit. After seeing how fast Slurpees melt in the cup holder, this was not news to us.

Installing the $350 KoolMat shield is straightforward. First, remove the exhaust from the downpipes and the rear connections. (This is actually easier if you have an aftermarket exhaust because the chunk you take out will be smaller and lighter.) Make sure you disconnect the oxygen sensors or at least remove the clips holding the wires in place to give them plenty of slack. If you do disconnect them, mark them first so you get them hooked back up correctly.

Once the exhaust is out of the way, the shield bolts in place using 12 factory screws that secure the underbody cladding. It's that simple.

And it works, too. In our follow-up testing, which was performed under similar conditions to our initial run, the temperature at the shifter barely cracked 100 degrees.

Future Slurpees can rest easy.

Upon seeing the location of the catalytic converters, it's not hard to understand why the center console gets so hot.