

THUNDER RACING: PUTTING YOU ON THE MAP

Louisiana-based Thunder Racing is one of the country's larger retailers of aftermarket parts for late model domestic performance vehicles. These folks carry virtually any part from any manufacturer that you'd want for your late-model GM ride, including most of what we've used in this engine build. Thunder obviously knows its customers like to buy go-fast goodies, and so its computer tuning service is the perfect complement to the company's extensive retail product line.

Available for virtually any 1994-later GM V8-powered ride, Thunder sells basic tuning for mild mods, which includes adjustments to the rev limiter, shift points, speedometer recalibration, torque management deletion, and performance fuel and timing curves, among other things. This service can be had for \$150. If your ride steps beyond what this basic tuning service can address, don't fret: Thunder offers a custom tuning service for vehicles with more serious hop-ups. Designed for heavily-modded engines with goodies like an aftermarket cam and

heads, the custom tuning service (which goes for \$450) includes all of the features of the basic service, but adds highly customized spark and fuel tables tailored to a customer's specific combination of parts—optimizing power and drivability. This is the service we've selected for this project.

Though the company's personnel are extremely experienced in their tuning capabilities, having tuned many vehicles on its in-house dynamometer, Thunder's Geoff Skinner had some honest commentary for us regarding not only his capabilities, but the capabilities of mail order tuning in general. "Some mail-order tuners claim to be able to wave a magic wand and send off a perfect tune to a customer for every possible engine combination," says Skinner. "While we're able to get at least 90 percent close to an ideal tune for engines with known parts combos that we've also built in-house in the past, the huge variety of aftermarket parts available on the market means that being able to get



a completely perfect tune in every single scenario for everyone is simply not possible. The simple fact is that every car is different, even two cars that have the exact same aftermarket parts installed on them. So a good portion of the time, our custom tuning service will not be an end-all solution, but we can at the very least get you in the ballpark of your ideal PCM calibration."

That said, would the PCM tune Thunder provided for our 383 LS1 prove adequate? You'll see in the main text how pleasantly surprised we were at how well our vehicle drove and performed—not wanting to leave well enough alone, however, we decided to try and evaluate and further dial in this tune. I'll also show you some of the things I learned in playing with our EFLive tuning software (unlike some other GMHTP staffers, this author is not an expert tuner), as well as pointers from Thunder Racing and buddies more knowledgeable than I. See the main text for this information.

Application-specific PCM tuning really can be had at an affordable price, and getting a hold of it is a simple matter of packing up your PCM and shipping it to Thunder Racing's Baton Rouge headquarters. Based on the information you provide on the company's Custom Tune Worksheet, which contains detailed questions to answer about your vehicle's