

# Viper Fans Enthuse Over Hot 2013 Model

by Jim Stickford

Fans of the Dodge Viper got to meet some of their heroes – the engineers and designers who helped make that vehicle a classic – last week when Maurice Liang, author of “SRT Viper: America’s Super Car Returns,” visited a local meeting place for car enthusiasts at Auto Zone of Birmingham.

Several men who worked on the Viper over the years were also at the store, which sells auto memorabilia. Many who purchased Liang’s book asked the designers and engineers to sign their copies of the book and of scale models of the Viper.

Among those at the store was Scott Krugger, senior design manager for the Chrysler Design Institute. He worked as lead exterior designer for the 2013 Viper SRT.

“I decided to come to Maurice’s book signing with a couple of other key engineers,” Krugger said. “The Viper is really an iconic vehicle. So we tried to keep the form of the new one sexy and make sure the car was beautiful and styled true to its iconic heritage.”

Mark Trostle, head of Design for the 2013 SRT Viper, said he came to the Jan. 19 book signing to show his support for Liang.

“Our customers are passionate about the Viper,” Trostle said. “The new SRT was designed so it was something customers would enjoy washing in their driveways. You want to touch it, dry it. It becomes an emotional experience. That’s how I look at cars, being connected to them, being a designer. I enjoy looking at the shape of the car as much as driving the car. This Viper is the most refined one yet. It has a refined fit and finish and it has traction control.”

The government made Chrysler put in traction control, Trostle said. But many Viper customers love the raw feeling of power they get from driving one, so Dodge made it possible for drivers to turn off traction con-

trol if that’s what they wanted.

Dick Winkles, chief engineer of the Viper powertrain, said the 2013’s powertrain is more refined. Its 640 horsepower is up 40 hp over the last model.

“Because we have electronic stability control, our customers can drive with more confidence,” Winkles said. “The system is very transparent. Most people who drive it don’t know it’s even there. So we can now make the engine much more responsive, much quicker.”

“I’ve been with the Viper since the day it started, back in April of 1989. It was always a ‘back to basics’ car. I like muscle cars and their power; I have three of them myself. So when they talked about adding these traction control features, I wasn’t so sure. But it’s worked out well.”

Jay Herbert, co-founder of the Viper Club, came out from California to support his friend, Liang, who was the other co-founder of the club.

“I live in Sunnydale, California,” Herbert said. “We started the club back in 1993. My Viper is the RT-10, and I am pondering getting a new one. I also run the International Viper Registry. I got my first Viper because I was a Cobra fan and this vehicle was the Cobra I never got to own. I fell in love with the Viper in 1989 at the Chicago Auto Show. I became a ‘Viper prospect’ then and there. I’ve driven the new one and it’s phenomenal. It’s everything a Viper can be and more.”

Liang said he was asked to write the book on the develop-

ment of the 2013 SRT Viper because of his long association with the Viper as both an owner of several models – the 1993 RT-10, the 1996 GTS and the 2008 SRT-10 Coupe – and as the co-founder of the Viper Club.

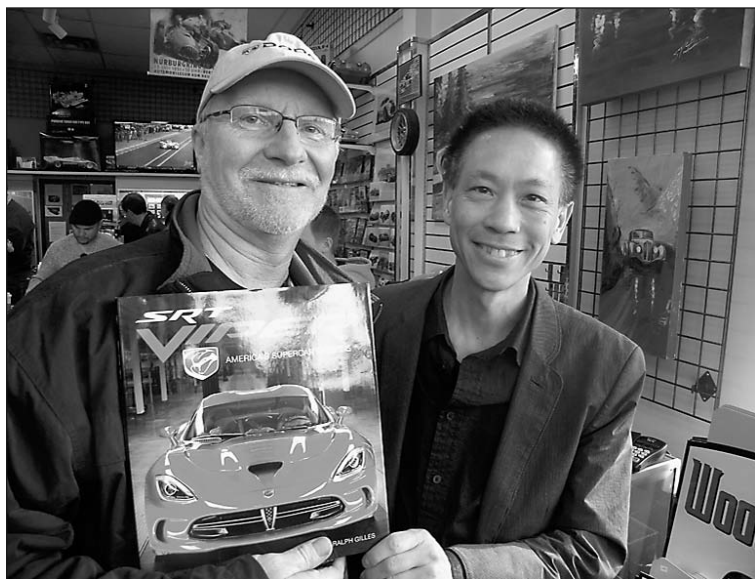
Liang said he worked for 17 years as an engineer for Hewlett-Packard and even wrote the Viper’s Buyers Guide, so when Ralph Gilles said that he recognized Liang’s passion for the car and “asked me if I wanted to document the development process of the 2013 SRT, I said yes.”

The company covered his travel expenses. He visited Detroit from California every couple of months and got to attend some Viper events nationally.

“I like the new car,” Liang said. “They did a nice job of making the car sleeker and more voluptuous and faster. We Viper drivers love the whole ‘king of the hill’ aspect of driving a car with such raw power. This car has that while being more refined than previous models.”

Herb Helbig was at the book signing and said the raw power aspect of the Viper was always a part of the car’s DNA.

“I’m an engineer who has been with the Viper since 1989,” Helbig said. “The design team really started as a collection of engineers who thought of themselves



Maurice Liang, right, shows off his book on the development of the 2013 SRT Viper to “Grailkeeper” and Viper engineer Herb Helbig.

as guys working on a lot of cool stuff. We didn’t have a lot of resources at the time and didn’t even know if the car would get built.”

Helbig said that his knowledge of the Viper’s history from its beginning has resulted in his being

known in the “Viper Nation” as the “Grailkeeper.” He said that when the first Vipers were sold, they found that customers were people from all over the income spectrum buying the car, adding, “It had so much charisma that all sorts of people were buying it.”

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