

The 1959 & 1960 batwing Impalas



In 1959, Chevrolet advertising boasted that “Chevy’s Got a Car That Leads Your Kind of Life” and, looking at this Impala, many buyers would have loved to have had that kind of life. With all-new body styling, all-new frame, a longer 119in wheelbase, and another 2in longer in overall length, the new full-size Chevrolet was now the longest car in its price range (in 1957 it had been the shortest). On the outside, the Impala was 5in wider than in '58, and the interior 3in wider. The Del Ray line was dropped, and the Impala Series became the top-of-the line with a full range of models. (Courtesy LMC)

Despite the fact that the full-size Chevrolet was all-new in 1958, the 1959 was totally different. As a separate series now, the new top-of-the-line Impala also included a four-door hardtop and sedan. (Chrysler made a similar move making the Fury its new high-priced Plymouth, and demoting the Belvedere in status.)

As a cost-cutting exercise, Chevrolet would share the same unit construction bodyshell with Pontiac,



Proclaiming 'Body by Fisher' was still a big selling point in 1959 as far as General Motors was concerned, yet to most buyers by then, it was just a nice emblem always placed on the threshold plate when the door was opened. In 1959 the Impala line-up included the two-door Sport Coupe, a convertible, and had added a four-door hardtop and sedan. There was no two-door sedan or station wagon Impala. Chevrolet called its rear batwing shape a “saucy rear deck.” Although industry distinctive, the ‘cat’s eyes’ rear lights were not an embraced design feature and were gone in 1960.

Oldsmobile, and Buick in 1959. All four cars would feature unique styling, but share the majority of the engineering design and mechanical features cloaked from the view of the buyer.

In 1959 the full-size Chevrolets bore the expansive, batwing rear fender and trunk styling. The fins were horizontal, which led famed auto tester Tom McCahill to declare there was, “... enough room to land a Piper Cub.”

Longer, lower, wider, and roomier also came with extensive changes to the chassis, suspension, and

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The 3580lb 1959 Sport Coupe (two-door hardtop), was sleek and modern, with many interesting styling cues, such as its practical, though 'jet age'-looking, vent design over the rear window. The Impala Sport Coupe had a basic price of \$2717US, and a production run of 157,100 out of the 473,000 Impalas sold in 1959. The gas filler cap was now hidden behind the rear licence plate. E-Z-Eye tinted rear glass was a popular option in the sunshine states. About the only thing the 1958 and '59 Chevys had in common was the wide side trim in a contrasting color.

engines. Although reduced 1in in overall height, the headroom actually increased by 1.5in.

An enhanced rear suspension helped offset the size and weight increases, while also improving the handling and reducing sway. Larger brake areas with better cooling aided stopping, and the optional Turboglide transmission was improved. The standard 3-speed shift could be had with optional overdrive (\$108.00US). The Corvette four-speed was also optional.

There was a choice of eight different V8s, plus the new, de-tuned six. The most powerful was, at first, the 315hp, 348ci, but later a 320hp, and 335hp would appear; in total there were six other power levels offered in '59! Still, hot rodders loved the fuel-injected 283ci V8.

Overall V8 performance was up slightly, as were the rather dismal fuel economy numbers.

The 10hp less six improved economy by 10 per cent, lesser so on the upgraded V8s.

The longer 119in wheelbase was standard on all four, full-size series and wouldn't increase again until 1971.

A four-door hardtop and sedan were added to the new top-of-the-line Impala model range, while the two-door hardtop and convertible remained exclusive to the Impala.

Motor Trend (1/59) noted, "Driving ease has been



improved by relocating the front seat and steering wheel for better visibility. A 74 per cent increase in rear glass area makes for easier parking and maneuvering in heavy traffic." And, although the steering was lighter, it was still described as a "bit slow."

Sports Cars Illustrated magazine (7/59) tested a lesser Chevrolet Bel Air sedan with just the \$44.15US chassis options added. It was dubbed, "A Family Man's Corvette," by accomplishing a 0-60mph time of 8.4 seconds with a ¼-mile run accomplished in 16.7-seconds at 94mph.

The W-348 powered Chevy had fallen under the direction of famed Zora Arkus-Duntov, who credited General Manager Ed Cole with the improvements in handling. In an interview Duntov openly stated Cole was interested as much in driving as he was in making cars.

Motor Trend (12/58) discovered that the Chevrolet '59 'Police Pursuit,' with a 3.36 rear axle ratio, could top 135mph.

The American Dream – The Chevrolet Impala 1958-1970



The interior of the 1963 Impala was, once again, quite distinctive. As usual, the Impala was equipped with all the features found in the Bel Air series, plus such added delights as patterned upholstery and a grained, leather-like finish to its vinyl surfaces, added polished aluminum side seat trim, foam seat cushions, matching tufted vinyl door panels with different armrests, a sport steering wheel, a clock, and extra warning lights, courtesy lights, and supplementary trim.

Still, *Car Life* concluded, "... while we criticize some of the minor things about the car, we can enthuse over its general concept. Big and strong, with a smooth transmission and plenty of muscular draft horses up front, it begins to approach the ultimate in US performance cars."



And, in an earlier *Canada Track & Traffic Car Council Awards* issue (1/63) the magazine chose the full-size Chevrolet for many practical reasons, but focused on the ease of service, parts availability, reliability with little attention, and engineering.

Bigger dreams, higher performance – 1963-1964 Chevrolet Impala



From the rear, the aluminum panel and twin set of triple taillights continued to immediately convey the message that you were behind an Impala. Other telltale features included the distinctive Impala insignias, script, front fender trim, added wide stainless side spear trim and dressier, full wheel discs. The faithful, aging base 283ci V8 featured a power increase to 195hp. The 250hp or 300hp, 327ci V8 engine with the Powerglide automatic transmission were the most commonly ordered options.

(Jason Brant, photographer, courtesy Mecum Auctions)

The American Dream – The Chevrolet Impala 1958-1970

These super talented individuals approach customizing as any other artist would approach a painting or sculpture. Within their artistry they have a totally different interpretation – their life philosophy can influence their work, and cultural symbols can also be

seen in the paintwork. The result is an artistic statement or mobile sculpture. Beauty is truly in the eye of the beholder: while some car enthusiasts see the cultural and social implications being conveyed, others just appreciate the artist's work because it's 'cool.'

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'El Rey' was created in 2011 by Albert De Alba Sr of Pomona, California. His 1963 Chevrolet Impala lowrider captured top awards and recognition in such respected shows as SEMA and the Grand National Roadster Show in the US. This highly acclaimed Impala was also named 'Lowrider of the Year' by *Lowrider Magazine* for 2011, 2012 and 2013.

(Courtesy Petersen Museum & the Elite Car Club)

Through carefully planned and executed geometric paintwork, the Chevrolet Impala's bodylines were accentuated as the images and paint flow over the entire body, into the engine compartment, through the interior, spilling into the trunk, and sweeping over the undercarriage to fully encapsulate its fully functional form. *(Courtesy Petersen Museum & the Elite Car Club)*

