

My 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air 4-door Sedan

By Jim Batchelder

In September, 1956, Chevrolet introduced its 1957 models, the third and final year for the iconic Tri-Five series. An all-new design would appear in 1958.

My top-of-the-line Bel Air 4-door was built at the Baltimore plant in July, 1957. It was production number 234,457 out of 254,331. And, yes, the Colonial Cream/Laurel Greencolor combination it wears now is the same as when new and is the rarest of all 57 Chevy color combinations.

The car was sold new in the Philadelphia area. My uncle bought it used some years later. He gave me the car in 1973. At that time, it looked pretty good and even won some awards. But in 2000, Sally and I decided to have Tom Aubrey* do a frame-off restoration to bring it to show-winning condition. For the next two years, all my free time was spent at Tom's house helping do the work.

Early in the process, after tearing the car down, we discovered extensive rust and decided another body was needed. We had one shipped in from the west, only to find that it, too, needed much metal work. So much for California rust-free cars! But we prevailed. And the replacement body served its purpose.

My wife, Sally, and I have enjoyed car shows for many years, and we remember taking our only child, Kelly, to her first show when she was just two-months old. Kelly is now 26 and has been around old cars all her life. Following its restoration, our Bel Air has traveled with the family to

many shows and has competed very well.

Awards received with this classic include the AACA First Junior earned at the 2002 Fall Hershey AACA meet where it was shown for the first time. The judges, having never seen this color combination before, were dubious and had to be shown documentation to prove its authenticity. The following year, the car earned its First Senior in Orlando, Florida.



In 2010, it was awarded the Grand National in New Bern, NC. Then, in 2014, at Lebanon, TN, it got the top AACA award, the Senior Grand National.

Last year, it received a Senior Vintage Chevrolet Club of America award at an indoor show in Gettysburg, PA. At a recent indoor show in Washington, DC, to benefit the Wounded Warrior Project, it was declared best classic out of 300 cars.



In February 2015, Sally, Kelly, and I took the Bel Air on the AutoTrain from Lorton, VA, to Florida for a Chevy International car show. With close to 3,000 Chevrolets on the field, our 57 won a platinum award with 997 points scored out of 1,000. It was also voted best paint and best interior. The interior is silver vinyl with black and silver cloth.



(The trip on the AutoTrain went well. Amtrak does make you sign a waiver for classic cars, denying any responsibility for damage. Amtrak employees load and unload all cars, and they may not always have someone who can drive a stick shift. So, be sure to check with your insurance company.)

My car's power comes from the very dependable six-cylinder, 235 cubic-inch, 140 h.p. engine coupled to a 3-speed standard transmission. The base price for this model was \$2390. In an ad, Chevy described the 57 as "Sweet, Smooth and Sassy." For the collector, the 57 Chevrolet, with its appealing good looks, is highly desirable, and increasing values make them eminently collectible.

Recently, both our 57 Bel Air and 64 Impala were featured in the filming of the movie "Jackie", the story of Jacqueline Kennedy, which will be released in 2017. Jackie is portrayed by actress Natalie Portman. Our cars were used in the scene after President Kennedy is shot and they are taking him to Parkland Hospital. The Presidential limousine passes our 57 and our 64 is seen coming from the other direction.

*Tom Aubrey was a Bull Region member who restored only his own cars until I asked him to do mine. Since then he has restored Joe White's truck and Ken Farley's wagon. Tom and his wife, Julie, now reside in Wyoming.

Commentary: I recently learned that Chevrolet had planned a major redesign for its 57 models, but development fell behind schedule. Had this plan materialized, the 57 as we know it would not have been. And that would have been a shame.

The planned makeover was finally realized for the 58 models, which were received to great public acclaim. At age 20, I, like most, I thought the 58s were really cool. In fact, what could possibly be cooler than a black Impala hardtop? Yet, after all these years, my preference, like many, has reverted to the Tri-Fives and the smooth classic lines that have withstood the test of time. – Steve White