

Judging Outline 1955, 1956, 1957 Chevrolet

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VIN PLATE

The VIN Plate gives the car serial number, as well as other important data. It is found on the driver-side "A" pillar, where the windshield meets the front door. It gives the Engine type, the Model series, the Model year, and the Assembly plant, as well as the Serial number. If the car happens to be a V-8 there will be a "V" in the first place of the number. A 6 cylinder will NOT have a "V" in the first place in the number. Obviously a 1955 will have "55" in the plate (between the series and plant letters), and so forth.

VIN plate details:

- A. "V" = V8, blank = 6 cylinder
- B. "55" = 1955, "56" = 1956, "57" = 1957
- C. "A" = 150 model, "B" = 210 model, "C" = Bel Air model
- D. Valid Assembly codes = "A","B","F","J","K","N","O","S","T"

COWL TAG

The Cowl tag gives the Model series, the Body number, the Interior Trim combination, the Paint combination, and certain Factory Accessories. For the 1955 and 1956 cars, the Cowl tag is located on the passenger side cowl, and if the car has factory Air Conditioning, it will be on the driverside cowl. The early 1957 cars had the tag in the center of the cowl, behind the distributor. Later cars moved it to under the heater hose inlet. As there is a lot of controversy as to reproduction (read that as bogus) cowl tags, a through description of the information is not in order here. Suffice to say that the Cowl tag should be intact.

OTHER VISUAL CLUES TO AUTHENTICITY OF CAR

Radiators

All radiators have a Date Code on the top tank. It consists of a letter (the month) and 2 numbers (the year):

A. "A" THROUGH "M" (NO LETTER "I") = MONTH

B. "54" THROUGH "57" = YEAR

(The model year ran from about October ("K") to August ("H")).

Headlamps

An original car will have headlamps with a "T-3" emblem in a triangle in the center of the outer glass. On 1956 cars the words "SEALED BEAM" will be larger than on 1957 cars. Also, the "T-3" emblem will have a 'pebbly' background.

(EXCEPTION: Early 1955 cars did not have the T-3, but the bulbs will say "GUIDE" on them, and will NOT have the 3 aiming lugs found on the newer headlights used since 1956.)

Turn Signals

Amber turn signal lenses are a modern day replacement.

Generators

All cars had Delco GENERATORS, with the main housing, fan, and pulley all painted SEMI GLOSS BLACK, and the end plates are left a NATURAL ALUMINUM color. A red, metal, "Delco-Remy" tag should be riveted to the unit. This tag also has a date code - the first digit is the year (4,5,6,or 7) the second is the month, in lettercode (A-M), the last is the day of the month. The upper generator brace is painted ENGINE COLOR. Also, the generator support arm should be painted ENGINE COLOR.

Power Steering Pumps

Original POWER STEERING PUMPS were mounted to the back of the generator.

Alternators

ALTERNATORS are modern day modifications.

(EXCEPTION 1: Some power steering generators had black cast iron end plates.)

(EXCEPTION 2: A very rare Police option was a 60 amp 'generator', which actually was an alternator! There would then also be a SELENIUM RECTIFIER, with metal cooling fins, mounted in the engine compartment.)

Master Cylinders

Original cars had single reservoir master cylinders stamped DELCO on the side. They were not painted, but were left NATURAL CAST METAL color. They all had metal caps.

Air Cleaners

All 2 bbl V8s had air cleaners with no 'snout', having 2 horizontal slots in the lid instead. Only the single 4 bbl units had the 'snout', and the shape of the snout on all 3 years air cleaners are slightly different. Dual 4bbl (1956 and 1957 ONLY) units have a "batwing", or triangular air cleaner cover with 2 round elements on the underside. ALL air cleaners are painted SEMI GLOSS BLACK.

Motors

All 1955 V8 motors are CHEVY ORANGE with BLACK valve cover stencils. All 1956 V8 motors are CHEVY RED, with BLACK valve stencils. A few EARLY 1957 265 V8 engines (standard transmission ONLY) were painted chartreuse (lime green) by Chevrolet, and they had BLACK stencils on the valve covers. After about November 1956, all 265 engines were CHEVY ORANGE (as are the 283 motors), and the valve cover scripts were SILVER.

Spark Plugs

Spark plug wires were black, and so were all boots and nipples.
(EXCEPTION: 1957 dual 4 bbl and Fuel Injection wires had red spark plug boots.)

Engine Compartment

No parts of the engine compartment were originally chromed, and this includes the hardware.

Exhaust Manifolds

All exhaust manifolds may have some ENGINE COLOR paint overspray, but no manifolds were ever painted FLAT SILVER, and new cast iron does NOT appear as flat silver! (They probably had a coating of natural rust on them before they were out of the factory!)

Radiator Clamps

All radiator clamps are the 'spring' type. Original hoses and belts were black, with GM markings. Original radiator caps did NOT say "Never Open While Hot", nor had pressure release levers.

Batteries

All batteries had 6 REMOVABLE (threaded) yellow caps and were top post type, with BLACK cases. Original batteries were made by DELCO, and had tar tops, (not plastic). All battery cables were black, except the 1955 and 1956 negative cables, which were tinned copper braid), and had bolt type terminals.

Firewall

The firewall is body color, and the inner fenders and hood underside is SEMI-GLOSS BLACK. (Although some dealers did undercoat the underside of the hood; remember that undercoating is NOT glossy black!) Hood springs are GLOSS BLACK. Hood hinges are CAD PLATED. All "push-in", and bolt on wire clips are either black, green or red oxide. Also, no nylon "zip-ties" were used. Bundles were held together with flat brass straps.

Steering Box

The steering box is NATURAL METAL color, and LOW MILE original cars may have various colored "inspection marks" on the adjusting screw and other areas.

Oil Filters

"Spin-on" oil filters are modern replacement. Original 1956 and 1957 V8 units were of the canister type, and had silk-screened data, not stick on decals. Accessory 6 cylinder units were canister type hanging near the carburetor, with rubber hoses going to the engine block. 1955 Accessory units were mounted at the front of the engine, opposite the generator.

Rear Mirrors

All outside rear mirrors are round, and were accessories.

NOTE: A few EARLY 1957 4 door hardtops had the inside rear view mirror mounted on the dash. Due to vibration, these were replaced on many of these cars, and were then also factory supplied, with a special long bracket, mounted from above as on other models.

Emblems

All cars had either "Chevrolet" trim or a Chevrolet emblem on both the hood and trunk.

Tires

Tire sizes: 1955 and 1956 = 6.70 x 15 or 7.10 x 15, 1957 = 7.50 x 14 or 8.00 x 14, (G78-14 or VR215-14 are modern replacements).

Overdrive Nuts

Borg-Warner overdrive units were available options on 3 speed cars. The lockout handle should be chrome, and mounted under dash. Confirm kick-down switch mounted to carburetor, and overdrive harness fuse near ballast resistor.

Parking Brake Handle

Original parking brake handle should be black. Late model replacement parts are chrome plated.

Dual Exhausts

Dual exhausts were NOT used with 6 cylinder or 2bbl V8 engines. Exhaust pipes were not welded to hangars, nor were "generic" hangars used. Mufflers were either NATURAL, SEMI GLOSS BLACK, or GALVANIZED. No cars had side pipes, headers, glasspacks, etc. Original 1955 and 1956 dual exhaust had oval exhaust extensions (with the "powerpack" V8). Chevrolet script exhaust deflectors were 1955 and 1956 accessories.

(EXCEPTION 1: In 1956 Chevrolet offered an Accessory Dual Exhaust kit . This could be mounted on a 6 cylinder or 2bbl V8 car, but all fuel/brake lines must have been moved to outside frame.)

(EXCEPTION 2: A few Chevrolet "race car" 1957's had pipes exiting in front of rear wheels. These were 150 model, dual-four or Fuel Injected cars. Owner would certainly have supporting documentation, since only about 2 or 3 of these cars are left!)

Fuel And Brake Lines

Fuel and brake lines were all metal (except flexible couplings at wheel cylinders and fuel pumps). No rubber hoses should go to carburetor, or distributor. Only glass bowl fuel filters were used (original units use a bronze element, later replacements use a paper element), and they were an option.

... ADDITIONALLY, All 6 cylinder and 2 bbl V8 cars had fuel and brake lines on the inside of the frame (toward driveshaft). Any car so equipped must have single exhaust only. All others ("powerpak" and 1957 Fuel Injection) were on the outside of the frame (visible from passenger side, away from muffler).

Floor Shifters

No cars had floor shifter units, bucket seats, "Mag" wheels, fat tires, 'big block' engines, or superchargers.

(EXCEPTION: Unconfirmed reports are that a few late 1957 cars had dealer installed Corvette 4-speeds.)

Air Conditioning

Genuine Chevrolet air conditioning, either factory or dealer installed, was an "in-dash" installation. Look for the fast idle speed control under dash (a hard to find part) in original installations.

Seatbelts

Genuine Chevrolet seatbelts, a RARE accessory, have silver-gray nylon webbing and chrome buckles. ANY other colors or styles are aftermarket replacements. Original installations will use coat hooks on the pillar near the front seat back to hang unused front outer belt ends.

NO company currently makes any belt that is an original reproduction, since that design will not meet today's D.O.T. standards.

Floor Mats

Original floor mats are single color rubber, with small Chevrolet emblems in them. No mats were carpeted.

Gauges

All 1957 gauges have fluorescent orange needles.

(EXCEPTION: AC tachometers used in the aforementioned Chevrolet "race-car" applications.)

Trim

Bel Air models had (among many other differences) stainless steel trim framing the roofline to the "C" pillar, aluminum trim panels on the dashboard, and carpeting.

(EXCEPTION: 210 Del Ray Club Coupes also had carpeting.)

Radio

All radios were AM only and were supplied by Chevrolet. 1955 antennas had a pointed tip. Any car with an original radio should have a suppresser capacitor mounted on the generator and the coil, as well as braided copper ground straps from the valve covers to the firewall. 1956 cars had an optional straight antenna on 1 rear fender, and 1957 had 1 or 2 angled rear antennas mounted near the trunk corners. The lower part of the 1957 rears will be visible from inside the trunk.

Antenna

An optional electric rear antenna was available for 1957, with the control mounted on the dash under the rolled edge, above the radio.

Rear Speaker

If the optional rear speaker control is present on the dash, there will be ONE 6 x 9 speaker, with a coordinating color, perforated metal grille, in the parcel shelf. Otherwise there will be NONE.

Parcel Shelf

The parcel shelf is fiberboard, not carpeted.

Shock Absorbers

All shock absorbers are either GREY or SEMI GLOSS BLACK. Original Delco units would have a "spiral" embossing in their lower part.

Undercoating

Undercoating was a dealer applied accessory. Some dealerships used a lot, and sprayed it EVERYWHERE on the underside, and some used none at all (GM undercoated a few specific areas at the factory - how was the customer to know?) It should be roughly textured, with an even appearance, and clean. Obviously, it would NOT have body color overspray like non-undercoated cars MAY have!

Trunks

All trunks had black rubber mats, a matching spare tire (visible side of the wheel painted SEMI GLOSS black), and a jack. The trunk walls and lids are body color, and overspray will be found on the fiberglass pads on the lid.

Tail Lamps

Blue Dot tail lamps, fender skirts, (...yes, fender skirts are NOT Genuine Chevrolet Accessories...) chrome pedal pads, pinstriping, and "Moon" wheel covers, are NOT genuine Chevrolet Accessories. (Neither were "fuzzy dice" on the rear-view mirror...)

DISCLAIMER: This guide was originally intended to assist the novice judge, or the judges who may not be familiar with these new, popular models. While it is certainly the owner's choice whether to keep their car stock or customize it, I hope to make the task of judging these cars simpler by identifying some of the differences between stock and custom. I have used as many sources as possible to verify correctness. But, as these cars were mass-produced (over 5 million produced!) at many plants with many more multiple suppliers of parts, some items may not agree with this. In that case it is the responsibility of the owner of the car to provide whatever data is necessary to prove the disputed area. If there is any doubt as to something about the car, ASK THE OWNER!

One final consideration is to be aware of "OVER RESTORATION". GM did NOT put 20 coats of hand rubbed lacquer on these cars, nor did they roll ball bearings down every seam. If it looks "too good to be true", it almost surely is!

4. ADDITIONAL JUDGING REMINDERS:

A. EXTERIOR - Alignment of panels, evidence of body filler, paint (should not be clear coated), grille area, chrome, stainless, aluminum trim, painted areas on trim, weather-strips, glass (correct with LOF shield emblem), lights and lenses (lenses should say "GUIDE, original headlamps had "GUIDE", and 1956 and 1957 had a "T3" in a triangular emblem on them), tires (inch measured sizes), wheelcovers (originally had painted details, not self-stick decals!).

B. INTERIOR - Door panel fit, carpet/rubber mat fit, headliner/convertible top and boot, cardboards (kick panel, parcel shelf), instruments, radio, clock (is it ticking?; is

battery connected?), steering wheel, knobs, sill plates (should say "Body by Fisher"), underdash area, pedal pads, condition of wiring underdash.

C. ENGINE - Air cleaner, carburetor, fuel lines, vacuum lines, battery, battery cables (black/braid), hose clamps, hose markings, correct decals, wiring, hood hinges, underhood lights (working?; disconnected?), DELCO master cylinder, radiator, hardware (Isn't always EXACTLY the same from car-to-car!), firewall.

D. UNDERBODY - (Note, some paint overspray is correct, but not on undercoated areas.) Rocker panels, transmission, linkages, muffler(s), clamps, hangars, body mounts, fuel and brake lines, shocks (Black or Gray), gas tank and straps.

E. TRUNK - Spare tire (SEMI GLOSS BLACK on inside of wheel), jack, mat, sound deadener pads on lid (may have paint overspray).

5. ORIGINAL ACCESSORIES POTENTIALLY INSTALLED ON 1955 TO 1957 CARS:

1955, 1956 & 1957: metal bumper guards, Continental wheel carrier, license plate frame, door edge guards, heater, tool kit, back-up lamps, floor mats, outside rear view mirror, radios (manual, push-button, or Wonderbar signal seeker), spotlamps, dash mount compass, accelerator pedal cover, tissue dispenser, vanity visor mirror, electric shaver, parking brake warning lamp, door handle shields, rear seat speaker, non-glare ("day/night") inside mirror, ventshades, outside sunvisor, (look for 2 screws where unit attaches to drip rails - safety item!) traffic lamp viewer (dash mounded clear prism), plastic glareshade, Kool Kooshion seat pad, power brakes, power steering (with pump on generator), power windows, power seat, windshield washer (foot operated or automatic), Autronic Eye headlamp dimmer, air conditioning, seat belts, underhood lamp, locking gas cap, radiator insect screen (with Chevrolet tag).

1955 and 1956 only: wire wheel covers, self de-icing windshield wiper blades (covered with rubber boot), exhaust extension, front fender stone guards, gasoline filler guard, remote outside mirror.

1957 only: wheel cover spinners, rubber front bumper guards, dual rear antennas, electric rear antenna, trunk lid lower edge molding (aluminum), deluxe outside mirrors (with ring around mirror - can be mounted on doors or front fenders), vacuum reserve tank (for windshield washer)