1960 CHEVROLET IMPALA CONVERTIBLE

Space-Age Chevrolet

Pawel Litwinski, courtesy of Bonhams

You can almost imagine George Jetson blasting off with his family to a '60s-sleek Bob's Big Boy in one of these rockets

VIN: 01867A155463

by Tom Glatch

With just 16,200 miles and few devoted owners from new, this 1960 Impala convertible must be one of most original examples left.

Equipped with the high-output 348-ci engine, this exceptional Chevrolet has been a cornerstone of the current owner's exquisite Southern California collection for decades, and was purchased by him from the second owner, who had used the car sparingly for parades and other special occasions. "It took me about 12 years to purchase this unique Chevy," states the owner. "I was fascinated by the originality and how amazingly well it was preserved. I had to keep calling the guy for 12 years until he let me buy the car."

At the 1994 AACA fall meet in Hershey, PA, the Impala earned a 1st Junior Award. Well maintained and started and run regularly, this highly original Impala even retains the factory-optioned tissue box underneath the dash — still intact with a very old box of tissues — and an oil-change decal dating to 1963 is affixed to the door jamb.

ACC Analysis *This car, Lot 215, sold for $77,000, including buyer's premium, at Bonhams' Quail Lodge Auction, Carmel, CA, on August 15, 2014.*

High-flying fins

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first man-made satellite into orbit: Sputnik 1. The Jet Age was instantly old news. The Space Age was here!

By the time the first human orbited the earth in 1961, nearly a half million Americans had purchased a "spaceship" all their own: the 1959 and 1960 Chevrolets. Only the legendary Tom McCahill could describe this car properly. Writing of the '59 Impala in the November 1958 issue of Mechanix Illustrated, McCahill opined: "This is the Queen Mother of the camp and as wild a departure from earlier models as Santa Claus without a beard. The rear-deck treatment is pure Louis Armstrong... gone, man, gone! Instead of last year's neatly sculptured, somehow sort of foreign-looking backside, the view from the rear is strictly Spaceship 1989. It carries tremendous horizontal fins which hover over teardrop-shaped taillight clusters to give the whole thing a kind of two-story effect. My first reaction when I saw this rear flight deck, which curves downward from either side in a slow V, was, 'What a spot to land a Piper Cub!' It's crazy... but craziness in good taste."

The public seemed to want crazy, too. That timeless classic, the '57 Chevy, was actually out-sold by Ford that year. The unloved '58 Chevrolet model sold even less, but thanks to Ford's even more dismal sales in 1958, the Bowtie was back on top of the sales race. Still, GM wanted to fix the problem, and the 1959 Chevrolet was their solution to their decline in sales. It was an almost desperate reaction of design chief Harley Earl to Chrysler's very successful "Forward Look," directed by Virgil Exner. Sales climbed back, just missing 1957 numbers. But there had to be a feel-

ing within the hallowed halls of GM Design that the '59 cars really could have sold even better with a little less craziness. That would come in 1960.

A sharper design

"So start the '60s right with the finest Chevy ever. Strong. Silent. Sensibly new. The 1960 Impala convertible by Chevrolet." So gushed actor Eddie Albert in a commercial that aired in October 1959.

The year started a new decade — a new beginning, and the perfect time to break from the past. Bill Mitchell had taken the reins of GM Design upon Harley Earl's retirement, and he espoused the "London look" of cleaner, crisper forms.

> *It was too late for a completely new Chevy — that would have to wait until 1961 — but with relatively minor sheet metal and trim changes, the 1960 Chevrolets were an improvement, or as GM's marketing people called them, "fresh-minted models for every taste." Well, maybe every taste circa 1960, but today the 1959–60 Chevys have a definite Space Age kitsch. You can almost imagine George Jetson blasting off with his family to a '60s-sleek Bob's Big Boy in one of these rockets. There was even room for their dog, Astro, in the cavernous cockpit.*

But as with anything that exudes kitsch, some people will love it, and many won't.

This car

This '60 Impala has a lot going for it: A Roman Red convertible with 348 V8 power is about as good as it gets for this model. Of course, there is the incredibly low mileage and extraordinary showroom-fresh condition of this example, which few, if any, '60 Chevys on this planet can match.

But the 1959–60 Chevys have never had the following of the '55–'57 "Tri-Five" Chevys or the later '60s Impalas, and they probably never will, even though their values have taken off recently.

$77,000 is very good money for a '60 ragtop, but not top money. A few (all restored Roman Red convertibles, by the way) have sold for as much as $112k, which is a complete mystery to me — no amount of money can reproduce originality, and in the purely logical world of "Star Trek's" Mr. Spock, this time-traveling '60 must be at the top of the money list. But the market is rarely driven by logic, so that makes this Chevrolet a very unique find and a great bargain. Very well bought.

(Introductory description courtesy of Bonhams.)

Detailing

Years produced: 1960
Number produced: 79,903
Original list price: $2,954
Current ACC Valuation: $30,000–$65,000
Tune-up/major service: $150
Distributor cap: $6.67
VIN location: Plate on the left front body hinge pillar below the upper door hinge
Engine # location: Stamped on the block in front of the right hand cylinder head
Club: Vintage Chevrolet Club of America
More: www.vcca.org
Alternatives: 1960 Ford Galaxie convertible, 1960 Plymouth Belvedere convertible, 1960 Cadillac Series 62 convertible
ACC Investment Grade: C

Comps

1960 Chevrolet Impala convertible
Lot 163, VIN: 01867F212448
Condition: 2+
Sold at $90,750
RM Auctions, Fort Worth, TX, 4/27/2013
ACC# 216134

1960 Chevrolet Impala convertible
Lot 276, VIN: 01867S187289
Condition: 3
Sold at $85,250
RM Auctions, North Palm Beach, FL, 12/1/2012
ACC# 214332

1960 Chevrolet Impala convertible
Lot 175, VIN: 01867N170240
Condition: 2
Sold at $82,500
RM Auctions, Anaheim, CA, 6/27/2008
ACC# 117284