

1957 DESOTO ADVENTURER CONVERTIBLE

Dynamic DeSoto



Darin Schmabel ©2017, courtesy of RM Sotheby's

Few automobiles from the flamboyant '50s turn heads quite like Adventurers, and their prices reflect that

VIN: 50417133

by Tom Glatch

All Adventurers built between 1956 and 1958 were limited in production, but the 1957 model was especially so, having been introduced later than the rest of that year's DeSoto line. There was no mention of the model in the catalog and no Adventurer brochure — just an insert for the owner's manual, welcoming owners to “the elite Adventurer family.” Elite, indeed; in 1957, only 300 convertibles were made.

The car offered here is even rarer in being equipped with factory Airtemp air conditioning, as well as the Benrus steering wheel-mounted chronometer, power seats and correct accessory wire wheels. It was fully restored in 1998 by well-known Forward Look expert Greg Groom of Chrysler Works in Highland, CA, to a very high standard. The work included proper trim throughout, such as the metallic-threaded carpet that is now nearly impossible to find. In a recent telephone conversation, Mr. Groom recalled the DeSoto well, noting that it is a true Adventurer and that it was acquired as a solid, good-running car, on which only the trunk floor and fenders required replacement. The interior was done by Mopar upholstery legend Gary Goers.

Subsequently, the DeSoto was acquired by Thomas F. Derro in January 1999, and has remained in his collection since. Fit and finish throughout remains superb, and the car appears to have always been well maintained and preserved. It recently underwent a brake service and detailing, in preparation for sale, and presents beautifully throughout, with fine paint and chrome and an excellent interior.

ACC Analysis

This car, Lot 257, sold for \$126,500, including buyer's premium, at RM Sotheby's auction in Hershey, PA, on October 7, 2017.

Straddling a fence can be a perilous act, yet that is exactly what Detroit's mid-price makes did.

General Motors sandwiched Pontiac, Oldsmobile and Buick between Chevrolet and Cadillac, roughly in that price order. Ford introduced Mercury in 1939 as their bridge between the Ford brand and the luxury Lincoln. Over at Chrysler, DeSoto was created in 1928 as their value proposition between Dodge and Chrysler (budget-brand Plymouth launched a few years later).

At times, poor management reduced these mid-range brands to mere badge-engineered Chevys, Fords or Dodges — which didn't fool the buying public.

But when these fence-sitters were allowed to develop their own unique image and style, the results became some of the best cars to roll out of the Motor City, hitting that sweet spot of price, performance and features.

Looking forward

Beginning in 1955, DeSoto nailed that mid-market target right in the bullseye. Sure, they shared much of their components with Dodge and Chrysler cars, but their engineering and styling deftly hid their commonality.

Famed designer Virgil Exner had been brought in to remake the entire Chrysler lineup from old-and-



stodgy to cutting edge, and the 1955–56 lineup jolted the market with the first of Exner's "Forward Look" designs, and from Plymouth to Imperial, sales took a turn upward.

The new Adventurer became the style and performance leader of DeSoto in 1956, even serving as Indianapolis 500 Pace Car. But Exner's next remake stunned the market in 1957 — and the two cars that delivered the biggest blows were both limited editions: the Chrysler 300C and DeSoto Adventurer.

"The most exciting car today is now delighting the far highway. It's DELOVELY! It's DYNAMIC! It's DeSOTO!" shouted the TV ads for the '57 cars. Hardly warmed-over Dodges, Exner's DeSoto exuded the style and performance of the top-line Chryslers, without stealing the Chrysler's thunder. Sales were up from '56, with 117,514 DeSotos built, including 1,950 Adventurers. Of those, just 300 were convertibles.

Starting at \$4,272, the Adventurer was powered by a 345-ci first-gen Hemi delivering 345 hp (the legendary one-horsepower-per-cubic-inch) through a 3-speed TorqueFlite automatic. Surf White, Adventurer Gold and black were the only colors available, with contrasting trim. DeSoto was at its zenith — but not for long.

From dynamic to defunct

Author and DeSoto enthusiast Dave Duricy wrote, "It's said that DeSoto 4-door hard tops built at Los Angeles leaked so badly in the rain that occupants were wise to exit the car to avoid drowning. One 1957 DeSoto Adventurer was incapacitated for four of the total 18 months it was owned by its first owner. The car went through four transmissions, three power-steering units, two new double-point distributors, new valve guides and a new radiator. Reportedly, it took considerable effort and the attention of Chrysler's



chairman of the board to have the car corrected. Stories like these and a propensity for early rust angered DeSoto's traditional clientele."


DeSoto's moment was up. Sales dropped so precipitously (by 70%) in the recession year of 1958 that the brand never recovered. The last DeSoto was built on November 30, 1960 — an ugly, half-hearted Dodge re-skin. This was the first domino that would eventually leave Buick as the last mid-market brand standing today.

Top of the drop-top heap

What made the DeSoto Adventurer so compelling when new continues to make them popular 60 years later, and when the Adventurer is a convertible, all the better. Our feature DeSoto has a fine restoration and loads of options. Few automobiles from the flamboyant '50s turn heads quite like Adventurers, and their prices reflect that.

Mr. Derro paid \$81,400 for this DeSoto at Barrett-Jackson in 1999. Today the median price for a '57 Adventurer convertible has risen to around \$181,500, with several selling for over \$200k.

With few Adventurers in existence, only one or two of these cars come to market every year. For the past several years, we've seen no real upward or downward trend with the Adventurer — just steady value near the top of the peak for all '50s American cars.

That said, considering this car's condition, the price paid was a deal at \$50k under what the market can support. Maybe the Mardi Gras Red 1961 Chrysler 300G convertible that was next in line completely stole the spotlight. Whatever the reason, there is nothing middle-of-the-road here — this DeSoto was very well bought at a truly Delovely price. 

(Introductory description courtesy of RM Sotheby's.)



Detailing

Years produced: 1956–60
Number produced: 300 (1957 convertibles)
Original list price: \$4,272
Current ACC Median Valuation: \$181,500
Tune-up/major service: \$350
Distributor cap: \$102.61 (NOS)
VIN location: Plate on driver's side door hinge pillar
Engine # location: Top of block in front of valley cover
Club: National DeSoto Club Inc.
Web: www.desoto.org
Alternatives: 1957 Chrysler 300C convertible, 1957 Oldsmobile J-2 convertible, 1957 Pontiac Bonneville convertible
ACC Investment Grade: D

Comps



1957 DeSoto Adventurer convertible
 Lot 5103, VIN: 50414922
 Condition: 2+
 Sold at \$198,000
 Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/10/2015
 ACC# 256727



1957 DeSoto Adventurer convertible
 Lot 5008.1, VIN: 50417567
 Condition: 1-
 Sold at \$225,500
 Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/15/2012
 ACC# 191444



1957 DeSoto Adventurer convertible
 Lot 609, VIN: 50411051
 Condition: 3
 Sold at \$187,000
 Auctions America by RM, Fort Lauderdale, FL, 3/4/2011
 ACC# 169134