

Impala hardtop convertible provides nostalgic fun

By Mark Followell

My favorite car is a 1962 Chevy Impala. It's a run-of-the-mill type car, but I enjoy tinkering with it and have for 16 years.

My wife and I have made the rounds with the car; we drive it to '50s dances where we compete wearing '50s attire.

I grease my hair back and my wife wears a poodle skirt and saddle shoes.

We attend eight to 10 car shows a year and we've driven as far as Tennessee and North Carolina.

Between the car shows and dance competitions, we've won several plaques, mirrors and trophies.

I've driven over 30,000 miles with the Impala since I bought it.

Although it's important to some car buffs, my car doesn't have the original motor.

This engine is a 1968 327 that came from a full-size 1968 Chevy car, which could have been an Impala.

I've rebuilt the motor twice, and I concentrated on making the bottom end more high-performance oriented the second time around.

I'm also replacing the original 305 gears with 355 gears to give the Impala more acceleration on the bottom.

In other words, it will be easier to spin out the tires, and therefore, more fun to drive.

I'm not interested in driving 130 mph, but I don't want to worry about someone rear-ending me when I accelerate and move into traffic.

Big cars were really doggy back in the '60s—especially cars like mine with power-glide transmission.

Unlike new cars, the power glide only shifts one time, which is another reason it doesn't accelerate as fast.

I've also changed the power steering to a late -70's unit called a "605 gear-box conversion," which makes my car go down the road straighter, although I've upgraded many of the Impala's parts, the exterior of the car is all original.

It has a hardtop convertible roof, for instance, which makes it look like a convertible from a distance.

When you get close to it, however, you realize that it's a hard-bodied car and the roof doesn't come off.

Chevy built the Impala like this from 1962 to 1964 and this roof line has a really neat look to it.

My Impala also has factory-installed air conditioning, which is unusual for a car from the early '60s and it still works just fine.

The original AM radio works too, but it doesn't have the best reception, despite the rear antenna that people hung their "raccoon tails" on.

Although I've replaced the windshield and the window glass channels, the remaining glass windows are original, as well as the car's interior which is red and black with salt and pepper carpeting.

I first saw the Impala parked up on an old wooden ramp at Stanley's Used Car Auto. I went back to look at the car the following Saturday, but it was gone.

Somebody had driven it home, but the salesman told me the Impala would be back on the lot on Monday.

I was recently divorced and my money was my own at that point in time. I went back to Stanley's to buy the car and it was the last one on the old wooden ramp.

I've always been an old car nut. In fact, I've even hired a photographer to take a 17-by 21-inch picture of my car in an autumn setting.

The car's exterior is autumn gold and the autumn leaves look great with the car.

The Impala has been part of my family for many years. I've willed it to my oldest son, but it will be with me until then.

—As told to Tara Marion

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