

# ROCK 'N' ROLL AND THE CHEVROLET IMPALA

• By Richard Greene



David Pearson takes a gander at one of the great cars of the 1950s, his Chevrolet Impala.

**S**ome 40 years after Chevrolet first delivered this 1959 Impala, it was sitting in a garage apparently waiting for someone to haul it off to a wrecking yard. Its current owner, David Peterson of South Arlington, acquired this splendid classic a dozen years ago from its then owner who declared it to be "way too good" for that kind of treatment and proceeded to restore it to its original splendor.

I caught up with David at the Classic Car Show premiering as one of the central events of last month's first Downtown Arlington Ramblin' Roads Festival.

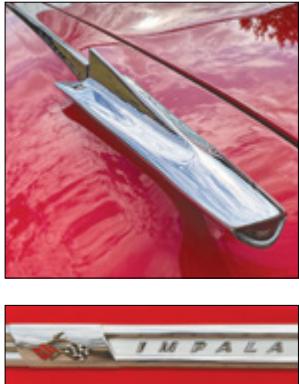
The setting was perfect for this car that just seemed to be at home in the Vandergriff Plaza in front of the Arlington Music Hall with the aroma of burgers on the Grease Monkey grill next door and the striking backdrop of the Legendz Classic Barber Shop Mural framing your view from the front of the car.

It wouldn't take much imagination to believe yourself in the era of cruising and rock 'n' roll. To make sure you didn't miss the connection, "American Graffiti" starring Ron Howard, Richard Dreyfuss and Cindy Williams was, in fact, showing on the Music Hall's screen across the street.

Among many others, this end-of-the-'50s-decade Chevy stood out as an impeccable example of the second year of the Impala that David describes as original in every detail with "everything working except for the clock."

Following the success of the "Tri-Five" Chevrolet era (1955-57) the big car company was ready to launch a new model and decided to name it the Impala. From its debut in 1958, and into its 10th generation, it became the popular flagship

# An automobile ...

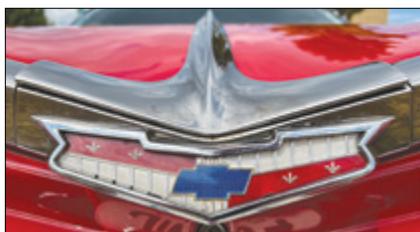


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and among the best selling American-made automobiles in the country.

I checked Wikipedia for the history of how General Motors was promoting their 50th year of production and introduced anniversary models for each of their brands in 1958.

The new Chevy's were longer, lower, and wider and the

first year with dual headlamps. The now immediately recognized tailfins of the 1957 were replaced with deeply sculptured rear fenders and three taillights on each side – a striking departure from the long-established practice of just one.

The result: Chevrolet regained its position as the number-one producer of cars in America.

Impala's second generation introduced a striking redesign with the 1959 model like David Peterson's featured here. Its tailfins protruded outward rather than upward.

Those outward tailfins might have been the reason that a cartoon version of the car made its way onto the big screen in the animation movie, Batman: Gotham Knight. That's likely because it sort-of resembled the Caped Crusader's Batmobile.

The taillights were remarkably redesigned as large "teardrops." However, the following year, the Impala came with reintroduced three round ones sitting just above the rear bumper. That makes it possible now to correctly identify the model year of the two versions that are otherwise almost identical.

Wikipedia's further account tells of a whole new interior as part of the transition from previous models. Inside it featured standard equipment front and rear armrests, an electric clock, dual sliding sun visors, and crank-operated front vent windows.

The contoured hooded instrument panel held deep-set gages and a six-way power seat was a new option as was the "speedminder," for the driver to set a needle at a specific speed and a buzzer would sound if the preset was exceeded.

And, yes, David's has still-working factory air-conditioning.

Restyled again for the third generation that ran from 1961-1964, the car became "finless" as the demand for a more modern look locked in the provenance of just two years of automotive history.

David's Impala is always popular at car shows, and he enjoys sharing stories with people who like to recall their own experiences. But he quickly assures them it's not just for show: "I pretty much drive it anywhere. Her name is Rose, and I take her all over North Texas. These cars are meant to be driven – they don't like to just sit around."

With that description, Rose in all her beauty, certainly was in her element at the Ramblin Roads Festival, and we can expect to see her there again next year. **A**