

FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1966 Chevrolet Caprice Restoration Guide

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Factory-Correct Restoration Reference

1966 Chevrolet Caprice Restoration Guide

Model Years 1966

Model	Chevrolet Caprice — a series of its own
Body / frame	119-in wheelbase, perimeter frame
Engines	283 (195 hp); 327 (250/275 hp); 396 (325 hp); 427 L36 (390 hp); 427 L72 (425 hp)
Transmissions	3- and 4-speed manuals; Powerglide; Turbo Hydra-Matic
Production	181,000 (excluding station wagons)
Identity	Series promotion year; the formal-roof coupe is Caprice-only

Every specification in this guide was checked against factory literature, marque references, period road tests, and documented survivor vehicles. Where sources disagree or the record is silent, this guide says so rather than guessing.

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1. What this guide is — and is not

This is a single-year guide. It covers model year 1966 only. Where a neighbouring year differs, the difference is stated as a difference — the other year's parts, ratings and trim are never silently borrowed. Shared platform engineering is shared honestly; the specification table, the year-change register and the finishes in this guide are this year's own.

2. The year in brief

One year after the Z18 experiment, Chevrolet promoted Caprice to a full series — and gave it the body style that defines it. Alongside the four-door hardtop and the Estate wagon sat the Custom Coupe, a two-door hardtop with its own formal, squared roofline shared with no other Chevrolet. The series sold 181,000 cars excluding wagons in its first year, aimed squarely at Ford's LTD buyer: luxury trim, quiet running, and an engine sheet that ran from the 195 hp 283 to the solid-lifter L72 427 at 425 hp.

That breadth is the 1966 restoration problem in one sentence: the same nameplate covers a 283 family coupe and one of the great stealth performance cars of the decade. The L35 396 (325 hp, 410 lb-ft) and the two 427s (L36 at 390 hp; L72 at 425 hp) demanded the heavy-duty Turbo Hydra-Matic when ordered with an automatic, and manual gearboxes behind any of these engines are rare. Decode first; the car in front of you is one specific point on that very wide sheet.

3. Year-change register

Read this register before ordering anything. It is the difference between a 1966 car and a car that merely looks like one from across the street.

Item	1965	This year (1966)
Series status	Option package (Z18)	Standalone Caprice series
Body styles	4-dr hardtop only	Formal-roof Custom Coupe, 4-dr hardtop, Estate wagon (6- and 9-passenger)
Top engine	396, 325 hp	427 L72 solid-lifter, 425 hp
427 availability	Not offered	L36 (390 hp) and L72 (425 hp)
Production	Package take-rate (1965)	181,000 excluding wagons

4. Specification table — 1966

Item	Specification
Wheelbase	119 in
Standard V8	283 cu in, 195 hp (gross)
Small-block options	327 cu in, 250 and 275 hp
Big-block options	396 L35, 325 hp / 410 lb-ft; 427 L36, 390 hp / 460 lb-ft; 427 L72, 425 hp
Transmissions	3-speed and Muncie 4-speed manuals; Powerglide; Turbo Hydra-Matic (required automatic behind 396/427)
Production	181,000 (excluding wagons)



5. Numbers, tags and identity

- 1966 cars decode through the Chevrolet VIN system: series, engine and body codes together identify a Caprice and its original engine family. The formal coupe's body code is unique to its roofline.
- L72 claims require the full evidence chain — suffix code, casting numbers and dates, and documentation. The L72 was a special-order engine in a luxury car; undocumented claims should be priced as the 396 or 327 they usually are.
- Wagon identity: the Caprice Estate's woodgrain specification is series content, not decoration — verify body code before restoring the trim.

6. Engines and transmissions

- **283 / 327 small-blocks.** 195 hp and 250/275 hp respectively; the 327/275 is the sweet spot for a driven car.
- **396 L35.** 325 hp, 410 lb-ft — period tests put a 396 Caprice at roughly 8.5 seconds to 60 mph despite 4,100 lb: the luxury-express formula in full.
- **427 L36 / L72.** 390 hp hydraulic-lifter and 425 hp solid-lifter versions of the same 427. The L72's mechanical lifters need periodic lash attention the hydraulic engines do not.
- Big-block cars carry the 12-bolt axle; Positraction optional across the range.

7. Paint, trim and finishes

The formal coupe's roofline is the year's signature — its C-pillar trim and rear glass are Caprice-only parts. Interiors restore to the series' luxury specification (Comfortron climate control and a tilt-telescopic wheel were the headline options); source trim by body style, because coupe, hardtop and wagon interiors differ in more than length.

8. Rust and inspection map

The formal roof adds a trap: the squared C-pillar and its vinyl covering (where fitted) hide rust that the sloping Impala roof sheds. Start there on coupe inspections.

- Frame rails at the body mounts and rear kick-up — the perimeter frame rots from inside; probe, do not just look.
- Trunk floor and drop-offs, rear quarter panels low behind the wheels, and the valance behind the rear bumper.
- Floor pans at the front seat mounts and under the rear seat; lift the carpets on any car being valued.
- Lower front fenders and the cowl sides behind them; formal-roof cars add the C-pillar and rear-window channel.
- Wagon tailgate and spare-tyre well on Estate cars; the well is a water trap by design.
- Bumper-integral taillight housings (1968–69): the beam that carries the lamps corrodes from behind and is expensive to replace well.

9. Restoration priorities for this year

- Decode the engine family from the VIN and suffix before budgeting — a 283 car and an L72 car are different restorations sharing a nameplate.
- Formal-roof brightwork and glass: secure these first; they are the scarcest 1966-specific parts.
- L72 cars: lash the solid lifters to the factory schedule and keep the documentation file with the car.