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The opening pages of

1970 Chevrolet Chevelle Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1970 Chevrolet Chevelle

Restoration Guide

Model Year 1970 • GM A-Body • Chevelle, Malibu, Concours, El Camino

KEY SPECS AT A GLANCE	
Platform	GM A-body: 112-in. wheelbase coupes/convertibles, 116-in. sedans/wagons
Body styles	Sport coupe, sport sedan, convertible, 4-door sedan, wagons, El Camino
Engine range	250-cu.in. six (155 hp) through 454-cu.in. V8 (450 hp)
Flagship engine	LS6 454 V8 — 450 hp, 500 lb-ft (SS 454 option)
Base price	1970 Malibu V8 sport coupe listed at \$2,809
LS6 production	4,475 LS6-optioned Chevelles built (coupe, convertible, El Camino)

Factory-correct data for the hands-on restorer. Every specification in this guide was checked against published factory and marque references.

1. Chevrolet: The Division Behind the Chevelle

Chevrolet was founded in 1911 by William C. Durant and Swiss-born racer Louis Chevrolet, three years after Durant founded General Motors. Durant had lost control of GM in 1910 and built Chevrolet as his way back in; by 1918 GM had acquired Chevrolet outright, and the bowtie division became the corporation's volume leader — the brand that paid the bills while Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, and Cadillac chased narrower slices of the market. That volume role shaped everything about the Chevelle: it had to be affordable to build in huge numbers, easy to service at any of thousands of dealers, and flexible enough to wear everything from a thrifty six-cylinder family sedan to the most powerful production engine GM had ever sold.

The Chevrolet of the late 1960s was at the absolute peak of its postwar power. The division sold well over two million cars a year, its small-block and big-block V8 families were the industry benchmark, and its engineering culture was defined by a simple formula: simple, overbuilt mechanicals, shared across as many models as possible. The 1970 Chevelle sits squarely in that tradition. Its frame, suspension, engines, and transmissions were shared with the Monte Carlo, the El Camino, and — in slightly altered form — with the Pontiac LeMans, Oldsmobile Cutlass, and Buick Skylark. That parts-sharing is a restorer's gift: mechanical components are widely reproduced and interchange across the GM A-body family, while the year-specific sheet metal and trim are where the real detective work (and expense) lives.

Two larger forces were pressing on Chevrolet as the 1970 model year opened. First, the muscle-car arms race was at its zenith: with GM's long-standing ban on racing-derived big engines in intermediate cars finally lifted, Chevrolet could sell the 454 in the Chevelle — something unthinkable two years earlier. Second, the first federal emissions and safety strictures were beginning to bite, which is why 1970 represents the high-water mark: the most power, the boldest styling, and the last year before compression ratios and net horsepower ratings began their long decline. A 1970 Chevelle, in any trim, is a car built at the very top of the curve.

The performance side of Chevrolet deserves its own paragraph, because it is the reason the 1970 Chevelle exists in the form collectors want. Through the mid-1960s GM enforced a corporate ban on factory racing involvement and on intermediates with engines over 400 cubic inches — which is why the 1965 Z16 and the early SS 396 cars were built the way they were, skirting the edges of the rulebook. By 1970 the ban was effectively dead: the COPO system had already put 427s into 1969 Chevelles for dealers who knew how to order them, and the 454 was a regular production option anyone could check off. Chevrolet's engineering bench — the same people who had developed the small-block into the most successful V8 in history — turned its full attention to the big-block, and the LS6 was the result. When you restore a 1970 big-block Chevelle, you are working on the final, unrestricted expression of that era.

One more piece of context for the restorer: Chevrolet built 1970 Chevelles at six U.S. plants (section 4), plus Oshawa, Ontario for the Canadian market, and plant-level variation is real. Trim tag formats, data-processing numbers, and even some assembly details differ between Lakewood, Baltimore, Flint, Kansas City, Van Nuys, and Arlington. 'Correct' is therefore always relative to the plant that built the car — a detail that matters when a judge or a buyer questions a hose routing or a tag format. Photograph survivor cars from the same plant whenever you can.

2. The Chevelle Model Line, 1964–1977

The Chevelle was Chevrolet's answer to the mid-size segment that Ford's Fairlane had opened up. Introduced for the 1964 model year on a 115-inch wheelbase, it slotted between the compact Chevy II and the full-size Chevrolet. The first generation (1964–1967) established the formula — clean styling, a full range of bodies from wagons to convertibles, and the SS package that grew from a trim-and-bucket-seat option into the SS 396 performance car. The 1965 Z16 — a limited-production 396-powered Malibu — proved there was a market for a big-block intermediate, and by 1966 the SS 396 was its own series.

The second generation arrived for 1968 on a shorter 112-inch wheelbase for coupes and a 116-inch wheelbase for sedans and wagons, with the sweeping coke-bottle styling that defines the era. Through 1968 the SS 396 was a separate series with its own 138 VIN, and the SS was unequivocally a performance car: order the SS and you got a 396, period. That changed for 1969, when the SS became an option package (RPO Z25) on the Malibu rather than a series — and it matters enormously when you are authenticating a car, because from 1969 on the VIN alone cannot prove an SS.

The 1970 model year was the visual and mechanical peak of the second generation: quad headlamps, a new grille and front bumper, reshaped fenders and hood, and the 454. The 1971 and 1972 cars carried the look forward with single headlamps and detuned engines, and the third generation (1973–1977) moved to the Colonnade body. Within that arc, 1970 is the year collectors and restorers prize most — the last year of the unrestrained big-blocks and the most aggressive styling of the breed.

2.1 Year-by-year: how the Chevelle evolved to 1970

- 1964: The Chevelle debuts as a 115-inch-wheelbase mid-size in 300, 300 Deluxe, Malibu, and Malibu SS series. The SS is a trim and bucket-seat package on the Malibu — any engine could be ordered beneath it.
- 1965: The limited-production Z16 Malibu SS puts a 396 in the intermediate body and proves the market. The SS 396 becomes its own 138-series for 1966.
- 1966–1967: The SS 396 is a separate series with its own VIN — the authentication situation restorers wish still applied. Styling sharpens each year; the 1967 is the refined peak of the first generation.
- 1968: Second generation — 112-inch wheelbase coupes, 116-inch sedans/wagons, coke-bottle styling. The SS 396 remains a separate series.
- 1969: The SS becomes an option package (RPO Z25) on the Malibu instead of a separate series. COPO ordering put 427s into a small number of Chevelles through dealers in the know. Sheet metal largely carries over — which is why 1970 wagons and El Caminos could reuse it without looking stale.
- 1970: Everything in section 3. The SS continues as an option package (Z25 SS 396, Z15 SS 454), the 454 arrives, the front end goes quad-headlamp, and the base series is renamed Chevelle in the U.S.

This timeline is a practical tool, not trivia. When a part is advertised as '1968–1972 Chevelle,' the timeline tells you whether to believe it: a grille is 1970-only, a quarter panel may span the generation, and a trim piece might be 1970-only because of the interior redesign. Always ask 'which years, exactly?' and check the answer against the year-change register in section 3.

3. What Is Unique About the 1970 Chevelle
