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The opening pages of

1971 Chevrolet El Camino Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1971 Chevrolet El Camino

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

Model year	1971 — lower compression for unleaded; last year of gross hp ratings
Wheelbase	116 inches Body series Base: 13380/13480; Custom: 13580/13680 — SS is RPO Z15/Z25 on the Custom
Engines	250 six; 307, 350; 402 ("Turbo-Jet 400"); 454 LS5 (365 hp gross)
Transmissions	3-speed manual, 4-speed Muncie, TH350, TH400

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Single-year coverage. Factory-correct specifications. No guesswork.

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet



About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1971 Chevrolet El Camino Restoration Guide — one model, one year, nothing else. Every specification in this guide was checked against marque references, factory literature excerpts, and enthusiast documentation before it was written. Our operating ethic is simple: we don't lie and we don't steal, we offer value. That means three things for this guide. First, no invented specifications — every number has a source. Second, where reputable sources disagree, the disagreement is disclosed in the text and in the Sources, Conflicts & Omissions section rather than papered over. Third, where a detail could not be verified, it is omitted and the omission is recorded — an honest gap beats a confident fabrication.

How to use this guide: start with the VIN and cowl-tag decoding sections to establish exactly what your car was when it left the factory. Use the engine, transmission, axle, paint, and casting sections to verify that what is on the car today matches what should be there. Use the rust and restoration-sequence sections to plan the work. And keep this guide in the shop — it is a working document, not a coffee-table book.

A final note: these cars are sixty years old. Parts have been swapped, tags have been lost, and memories have faded. Trust

the metal — casting numbers, date codes, and stampings — over stories. When in doubt, photograph everything and verify

against the factory service manual for your year.

1. Manufacturer History: Chevrolet

Chevrolet was founded in 1911 by Louis Chevrolet and William C. Durant, and by 1918 it was a division of General Motors — the volume brand on which GM's empire was built. Through the 1920s and 1930s Chevrolet outsold Ford by selling a simple proposition: more car, more engineering, for the same money. The 1929 'Stovebolt' six gave Chevrolet a six-cylinder in a four-cylinder price class, and the brand never looked back.

The 1950s made Chevrolet an American institution. The 1955 small-block V8 — 265 cubic inches, 162 horsepower, light, cheap, and nearly indestructible — is the most significant engine in automotive history, and its descendants powered everything in this guide. The 1957 Bel Air, the 1958 Impala, and the 1961 SS (the car that opens this sub-wave) carried Chevrolet's performance banner while the brand sold more than two million cars a year.

Chevrolet's engineering culture shaped every car in this sub-wave: the small-block V8 family (283, 327, 350) that defined the 1960s; the W-series big-blocks (348, 409) that owned the early-60s drag strips; the Mark IV big-blocks (396, 427, 454) that replaced them; the Muncie four-speed and Turbo Hydra-Matic automatics; and the 10-bolt and 12-bolt rear axles. Chevrolet parts interchange across the GM corporate parts bin on a scale no other brand can match — a gift to the restorer.

The high-compression era ended after 1971, and the 1972 switch to SAE net horsepower ratings rewrote every specification sheet in America. But the 1961-1972 Chevrolet performance cars — Impala SS, Chevelle SS, El Camino SS — remain the blue-chip core of the hobby, supported by the deepest 1971 Chevrolet El Camino

reproduction ecosystem and the most complete factory documentation trail (Protect-O-Plate, build sheets, dealer invoices) of any 1960s American brand.

2. Model History: Chevrolet El Camino

The El Camino began life in 1959 as Chevrolet's answer to the Ford Ranchero — a car up front, a pickup in back, built on the full-size Chevrolet platform. The first generation ran just two model years (1959-1960)



Chevrolet dropped it. It returned in 1964, completely reinvented on the new mid-size Chevelle (A-body) platform, and never left again.

The 1964-1967 El Caminos were Chevelles from the doors forward: same front sheetmetal, same cowl, same dashboard, same front suspension. Behind the cab, an integrated pickup bed replaced the wagon body. The formula worked — production ran 32,000-35,000 a year through the first A-body generation (1964-1967), steady business for a niche vehicle.

The second generation (1968-1972) grew with the restyled A-body: longer, lower, more sculptured. And 1968 brought the milestone that defines this line for collectors — the first factory SS El Camino, the SS396, built as its own separate 138-series model for that one year. For 1969-1970 the SS became an option package on the Custom El Camino, and for 1971-1972 it was an appearance-and-performance option available with several V8s.

Through 1972, the El Camino was always a Chevelle underneath — which is the restorer's greatest advantage. Every mechanical part, most of the front sheetmetal, and the entire interior interchange with the corresponding Chevelle. Only the bed, cab back, and tailgate are El Camino-only — and those are the parts to verify first.

3. What Makes the 1971 Unique

1971 was the pivot year: compression ratios dropped across the board (8.5:1 became the norm) as Chevrolet prepared for unleaded fuel, but the ratings were still gross — the last year before the SAE net switch. The 454 remained the top El Camino engine as the 365-hp LS5, the 402 continued as the 'Turbo-Jet 400,' and the SS split into two option codes: Z15 (SS454) and Z25 (SS with the 350 or 402). Production was 41,606. The facelift brought the new single-headlight grille and revised trim. Like 1969-70, the SS was an option package on the Custom — the VIN cannot prove it, and the two-code split (Z15/Z25) means you must know which SS you're authenticating.

For the restorer, 1971 is the last of the gross-horsepower cars — the final year the specification sheets read the old way. Lower compression makes these engines friendlier to modern pump gas, and the cars remain the value play against the more famous 1970s.

Year-to-year changes at a glance.

1971 Chevrolet El Camino

■ **THE SS SPLIT:** 1971 divided the SS into Z15 (SS454 — 454 only) and Z25 (SS with the 350 or 402). Know which code the car claims, and verify it — the equipment differs, and so does the value.

■ **LAST GROSS YEAR:** 1971 ratings are still gross horsepower — the 365-hp LS5 reads like the old days, but lower compression (8.5:1) tells the real story. Compare 1971 and 1972 ratings with the gross/net change in mind, not as a performance collapse.

■ **COMPRESSION DROP:** 8.5:1 across the performance engines for unleaded-fuel compatibility. The practical upside: these engines run happily on modern pump gas — a genuine driver-quality advantage.

■ **FACELIFT:** New grille with single headlights per side, revised front trim and taillights. 1971-only front pieces — verify part numbers.

■ **402 'TURBO-JET 400':** The 402 continued at 300 hp gross — still a strong big-block, still SS equipment under Z25. Verify the suffix code and partial-VIN stamping.

■ **VALUE PLAY:** 1971 SS cars trade below 1970s with comparable equipment — the market hasn't fully priced the last-gross-year cars. Buy documentation, not stories.

4. VIN Decoding

A-body VINs, 1964-1971 (13 characters): division(1) - series - body style - model year - assembly plant -