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1971 Chevrolet Impala Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1971 Chevrolet Impala

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

Model	Chevrolet Impala (all-new B-body)
Model year	1971
Base engine	250 cu-in inline six, 145 hp gross (sedan + Sport Coupe only) V8 options 350 (245 hp), 400 (255/300 hp), 454 (365 hp) — all gross New for 1971…

About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1971 Chevrolet Impala — 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 (trim) 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 fifty to seventy 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 race driver Louis Chevrolet and General Motors founder William C. Durant, who had been forced out of GM and needed a new vehicle company. Durant used Chevrolet's early sales success as the lever to regain control of General Motors, and Chevrolet became a GM division in 1918. From that point on, Chevrolet was GM's volume brand — the division that put America on wheels with affordable, durable cars sold and serviced by the largest dealer network in the country.

Chevrolet's identity was forged by two engineering decisions. The first was the 1955 small-block V8 — a lightweight, compact overhead-valve V8 designed under Ed Cole that delivered V8 power at six-cylinder weight and cost. It made the V8 the default American engine and became the most produced V8 in history, with its basic architecture serving Chevrolet for nearly fifty years. The second was the division's full-size car itself: from the 1955 Bel Air through the Impala's record-shattering 1965 model year — more than one million Impalas sold in a single year, an industry record that still stands — Chevrolet owned the American family car.

For the restorer, Chevrolet's scale is the great advantage. No classic car on earth enjoys deeper reproduction support or a larger knowledge base than the 1955-1973 full-size Chevrolet. Factory service manuals, assembly manuals, and judging standards are widely available; casting numbers, date codes, and suffix codes are thoroughly documented; and the interchange between years and models is enormous. The challenge is not finding information — it is verifying that the information applies to your exact year, because Chevrolet changed details constantly while the cars looked similar.

1971 Chevrolet Impala

2. Model History: Chevrolet Impala

The Impala debuted for 1958 as the top-line Bel Air Impala — a Sport Coupe and a convertible loaded with every bright trim piece Chevrolet offered. It was an instant hit, and for 1959 the Impala became its own series, adding four-door sedans and hardtops. From that point the Impala was Chevrolet's flagship

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ne: more chrome inside and out, plusher interiors, and the widest engine range in the division.
The Impala rode Chevrolet's X-frame from 1958 through 1964, then moved to the new full-perimeter frame for 1965 — the year Impala sales passed one million units, an all-time industry record that still stands. The Super Sport option (1961-1969) made the Impala a performance icon, but the base Impala was always the volume car: six-cylinder and small-block family transportation that happened to wear the prettiest sheetmetal Chevrolet drew.
The fifth-generation Impala of 1971 was the largest Chevrolet ever built — a 121.5-inch wheelbase B-body — and the 1972 convertible was the last Impala ragtop. By 1973 the six was gone from the Impala line, the convertible had moved to the Caprice, and the wagon had rejoined the Impala series. Through every change, the base Impala remained what it was in 1958: the best-appointed full-size Chevrolet most buyers actually bought.

3. What Makes the 1971 Unique

1971 brought the all-new B-body — the largest Chevrolet ever built, on a 121.5-inch wheelbase — with ventless front windows, a new frame, and standard front disc brakes. GM mandated lower compression across the line for unleaded fuel: 8.5:1 on every V8.
The engine lineup was re-rated in gross figures: the 250 six at 145 horsepower (sedan and Sport Coupe only), the 350 at 245, the small-block 400 at 255, the big-block 400 at 300, and the 454 at 365. All V8s came with the TH400, power steering, and power front discs — standardized mid-year.
A 67-day UAW strike disrupted 1971 production; 427,000 Impalas were built, including only about 2,300 sixes against 425,400 V8s. The strike makes early-1971 build dates and equipment worth verifying carefully.
Year-to-year changes at a glance.
■ All-new B-body — largest Chevrolet ever, 121.5-in. wheelbase; front discs standard.
■ 8.5:1 compression across the board; 350/245, 400/255, big-block 400/300, 454/365 (gross).
■ 67-day strike; 427,000 built.

4. VIN Decoding

1971 Chevrolet Impala
1965-1971 full-size Chevrolet VIN: division, series (63 = Impala six, 64 = Impala V8), body code, year digit, plant letter, sequence. Drivetrain parts carry partial VIN stampings.
Position
Meaning
Codes / Notes
1
Division
1 = Chevrolet
2-3
Series
63 = Impala six, 64 = Impala V8
4-5
Body style
Body code
6
Model year
1 = 1971

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