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1968 Chevrolet Impala SS Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1968 Chevrolet Impala SS

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

Model year	1968 — SS returns to RPO Z03 option status; all-new body

About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1968 Chevrolet Impala SS 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 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 Impala SS

The Impala began in 1958 as Chevrolet's top full-size trim, and by 1960 it was America's best-selling car. In February 1961 Chevrolet did something it had never done: it offered a factory performance package for

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ze car — the Super Sport. The 1961 SS was RPO 240, a $53.80 performance package (reported figure) on the Impala sport coupe and convertible that could be ordered with any Impala engine, from the 235 six to the brand-new 409 V8. The package brought heavy-duty suspension and brakes, quicker steering, spinner wheel covers, narrow-band whitewall tires, and a tachometer. Just 453 were built — the rarest SS of them all.

For 1962-1963 the SS became RPO Z03, a $156 (reported) appearance-and-trim package available with any Impala engine — six-cylinder included — on the sport coupe and convertible. The formula worked: 99,311 SS cars in 1962. But it also created the hobby's enduring confusion: an SS badge on a 1962-63 car proves trim, not performance. The 409-powered SS cars (380 and 409 hp in 1962) are the legends; the six-cylinder SS cars are honest, pretty cruisers.

For 1964-1967 the SS became a separate series with its own VIN prefix — 13/14 in 1964, 168 in 1965-66, 166 in 1967 — and production exploded: 185,325 in 1964, 243,114 in 1965. The 1965 redesign brought the 396; 1966 brought the 427. For 1968 the SS returned to RPO Z03 option status (38,210 built), and for 1967-1969 the SS427 (RPO Z24) offered the 427 as the top performance option. After 1969, the Impala SS was gone — it would not return until 1994.

The restoration truth about the Impala SS: it was often trim and appearance as much as performance. Never describe every SS as a maximum-performance car — verify the engine by suffix code, casting numbers, and documentation, and price the car for what it was born with, not what its badges suggest.

3. What Makes the 1968 Unique

For 1968 the Impala SS went back to being an option package: RPO Z03 on the standard Impala series — 38,210 were built on the all-new 1968 body with Astro Ventilation. The VIN no longer proves the SS; it reads standard Impala codes (16437/16467), and authentication runs through the build sheet and Protect-O-Plate.

The SS427 continued as RPO Z24 — and here the sources disagree: 1,778 vs. 1,788 Z24 cars are reported. This guide discloses the conflict rather than picking a winner. The 427 came in L36 (385 hp) and L72 (425 hp) forms; the small-block menu ran from the new 307 through the 327 in 250 (L73) and 275-hp (L30) forms.

For the buyer, 1968 is the mirror image of 1964-67: the paperwork proves everything. A Z03 or Z24 claim without a build sheet or Protect-O-Plate is a story, not a provenance — price it accordingly.

1968 Chevrolet Impala SS

Year-to-year changes at a glance.

■ THE PAPERWORK PROVES IT: Z03 and Z24 were options on the 164 series — the VIN cannot distinguish an SS from a standard Impala. The build sheet and Protect-O-Plate are the entire authentication. No paperwork, no premium.

■ THE Z24 DISPUTE: Sources report 1,778 or 1,788 Z24 cars for 1968. Ten cars' difference, honestly disclosed — any guide that states one figure as certain is overstating the evidence.

■ THE 307 ARRIVES: The new 307 (200 hp) replaced the 283 as the base V8. The 327 came as the 250-hp L73 and 275-hp L30 (per marque-forum research) — verify the suffix code.

■ NEW BODY: All-new 1968 styling with Astro Ventilation — new roofline, new grille, new trim. One-year-only front and rear trim pieces.

■ 427 VERIFICATION: Same discipline as 1967 — L36 vs. L72 by heads, intake, suffix code, and casting dates. The VIN proves nothing about the engine.

■ DISC BRAKES: Power front disc brakes optional — verify against the build sheet; a disc-brake Z24 is the desirable combination.

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