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1973 Chevrolet Nova Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1973 Chevrolet Nova

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1973 Chevrolet Nova — 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 over fifty 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 the 1960s it was the best-selling automotive brand in America — the 'Heartbeat of America' in its own advertising. Chevrolet's formula was simple and devastatingly effective: full-size-car engineering values (V8 power, automatic transmissions, real road manners) delivered at prices working families could afford, backed by the largest dealer and parts network in the country.

Chevrolet's performance era was built on the small-block V8. Introduced in 1955 as a 265-cubic-inch engine, the small-block grew into the 283, 327, 350, and 400, and became the most-produced, most-swapped, most-supported V8 in automotive history. The big-block Mark IV family (396, 427, 454) gave Chevrolet its heavy artillery for the muscle-car wars. For the restorer, no engine family on earth enjoys deeper parts, documentation, and interchange support than the Chevrolet small-block.

The 1960s were Chevrolet's golden decade of performance: the 1963 Corvette Sting Ray, the 1964 Chevelle and its SS, the 1967 Camaro (Chevrolet's answer to the Mustang), the Nova's transformation from economy compact to giant-killer, and the 1970 Monte Carlo, which invented the affordable personal-luxury coupe. Chevrolet sold performance in every showroom in America, which is why its cars dominate the restoration hobby today — and why factory-correct examples command real premiums over the sea of clones.

The 1970s brought unleaded fuel, lower compression, and the end of the gross-horsepower era. For the restorer of a 1962-1973 Chevrolet, the news is almost all good: factory service manuals are thorough and

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widely available, reproduction parts exist for nearly every wear item and most trim, casting-number references are mature, and the marque clubs make verification possible down to the fastener level.

2. Model History: Chevrolet Chevy II / Nova

Chevrolet's answer to the Ford Falcon arrived for 1962 as the Chevy II - a conventional, sensible senior compact with a unit body (Chevrolet's first), coil-spring front suspension, and a standard four-cylinder

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because Chevrolet figured economy buyers wanted economy. The top trim level was called Nova and within a few years the Nova name swallowed the Chevy II name entirely, until Chevrolet made it official.

The Chevy II grew teeth fast. A V8 (the 283) arrived for 1964, the Super Sport package debuted in 1963 and became a genuine performance package, and the 1966 redesign brought the L79 350-horsepower 327 - a giant-killer in a lightweight body. The 1968 redesign made the Nova a proper compact muscle car: the SS became a performance package with the 350 and the 396 (1968-1970), and the lightweight body-shell made Novas dragstrip legends.

By the 1970s the Nova was Chevrolet's everyman performance car - the cheapest way into a big-block (until 1970) or a hot small-block, and a favorite of racers who cared about power-to-weight, not prestige. Over 3.5 million Chevy IIs and Novas were built from 1962 through 1973. Survivors range from six-cylinder commuters to L78 SS396 cars worth deep into six figures.

For the restorer, the Nova is the small-block Chevrolet's natural habitat: everything mechanical interchanges with the Camaro and Chevelle parts universe, reproduction sheetmetal is deep for the 1968-1973 cars, and the documentation culture is strong. The authentication traps are the SS package (a trim package before 1968, a performance package 1968-1970, a dress-up package 1971-1973) and the VIN's limits - including the 1964 quirk where factory V8 cars were coded as 6-cylinder series. Trust stampings and paperwork over badges.

3. What Makes the 1973 Unique

The 1973 Nova added a hatchback coupe body - the Nova 1X17 - alongside the coupe and sedan, and the SS completed its transformation: from 1973 on, the SS was a dress-up package (stripes, badges, trim) available with ANY engine, including the six-cylinder. 35,542 SS packages were sold in 1973 - and not one of them included performance hardware. A 1973 'SS' is an appearance option, full stop.

The engines, net-rated: 250 six (100 hp, code D), 307 (115 hp, code F), 350 2-bbl (145 hp, code H), 350 4-bbl (175 hp, code K). The 5th-digit VIN engine code continues - verify the born-with engine against the stampings. Total production was 369,511, the highest since the 1963 peak.

The Custom series (1Y) added an upscale trim level. The 1973's 5-mph front bumper changed the car's face, as it did across the industry. The hatchback's folding rear seat made the Nova genuinely practical - the compact that could swallow cargo.

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For the buyer: the 1973's value is as a clean, usable classic - the V8 coupes and hatchbacks are honest, affordable old cars. Do not pay SS money for a 1973 SS: it's stripes. The authentication that matters is the VIN engine code and the body condition, not the badges.

Restoration notes: 1973-only 5-mph bumper, hatchback-specific parts (glass, hinges, trim), and Custom trim details. The hatchback's rear glass seal and the tailgate area are rust-prone - inspect carefully. Verify suffix codes per 1973 references.

Year-to-year changes at a glance.

- Hatchback coupe body added (Nova 1X17).
- SS becomes a dress-up package only - available with any engine; 35,542 built.
- Custom (1Y) upscale trim series added.
- 5-mph front bumper - new face for 1973.
- Engine codes: D/F/H/K (K = 350 4-bbl).
- Total: 369,511.

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