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1964 Studebaker Challenger Restoration Guide

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Factory-Correct Restoration Reference

1964 Studebaker Challenger Restoration Guide

Model Year 1964

Model	Studebaker Challenger 1964
Wheelbase	109 in (2-dr sedan) / 113 in (4-dr, wagon)
Engines	169.6 six; 259 V8; 289 V8
Bodies	2-dr sedan, 4-dr sedan, wagon
Production	~6,000 (one year only)
Notable	Entry-level Lark replacement; no factory R3/R4

Every specification in this guide was checked against factory literature, marque references, period road tests, and documented survivor cars. Where sources disagree or the record is silent, this guide says so rather than guessing.

Published by RestorationEssentials



Inside This Guide

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Chapter 1 — Studebaker: The Last Full Year

Studebaker entered 1964 riding the handsome new styling Brooks Stevens had given the Lark line for 1962–1963 — clean, modern sedans and wagons that looked like the future on a shoestring. Under Sherwood Egbert the company was fighting on every front: the Avanti halo, the Lark/Daytona volume cars, and the new Challenger at the bottom of the ladder. But the math wasn't working, and in December 1963 Studebaker closed South Bend. The 1964 model year — the Challenger's only year — was the last full model year of American Studebaker production; Hamilton, Ontario carried on through March 1966.

For the restorer, 1964 Studebakers occupy a poignant niche: the final South Bend cars, built as the doors closed. Factory records survive at the Studebaker National Museum, the Studebaker Drivers Club preserves the knowledge base, and the mechanicals — the 259/289 V8 family, Dana axles, Borg-Warner transmissions — are shared across the line. The Challenger's one-year-only trim was made in the low thousands.



Chapter 2 — The Challenger: Thrift as a Model Name

For 1964 Studebaker replaced the Lark Standard — the stripped, price-leader Lark — with the Challenger: a new name for the same mission. The Challenger was the entry-level Studebaker, offered as a two-door sedan (109-inch wheelbase), four-door sedan, and Wagonaire station wagon (113-inch wheelbase). The wagon — including the sliding-roof Wagonaire version — made the Challenger line genuinely practical family transport. Rubber floor mats instead of carpet, minimal chrome, painted trim where the Daytona wore brightwork — the Challenger was honest transportation priced for the thriftiest buyer.

The formula was simple: Lark mechanicals — the 169.6 six, the 259 V8, or the 289 V8 — in the lightest, least expensive wrapper Studebaker offered. A Challenger with the 289 four-barrel and overdrive was a genuine sleeper: full-size Studebaker V8 power in a stripper sedan. Few buyers ordered them that way, which is exactly why the survivors are interesting.

For the restorer, the Challenger is a one-year model — every trim piece unique to 1964, production around six thousand, and values that will never match the Avanti or the Hawks. This guide is honest about that: restore a Challenger because you love the underdog, document it properly, and you'll own one of the rarest Studebakers at any show.

Chapter 3 — What Makes 1964 — the Only Year — Different

The Challenger existed for one model year only, which makes “what makes this year different” beautifully simple: everything about the Challenger is 1964. The grille, the side trim (or deliberate lack of it), the badging, the interior patterns — all one-year pieces. There is no 1963 or 1965 Challenger to confuse it with, and no interchange to get wrong.

The performance footnote: while the R3 and R4 engines were theoretically available across the 1964 Studebaker line, sources report **no documented factory-built Challenger with R3 or R4 power**. A claimed R3/R4 Challenger should be treated as a tribute or a misunderstanding until factory documentation proves otherwise — and no such documentation is known. The real performance Challenger is the 289 four-barrel car, documented by its production order.

For the restorer, the one-year status cuts both ways: nothing interchanges incorrectly, but nothing was made in volume either. Challenger-specific trim — badging, grille details, interior patterns — is among the hardest Studebaker trim to find. Buy the most complete car you can.

Chapter 4 — Serial Numbers and Body-Tag Decoding

The 1964 Challenger carries a Studebaker serial number plate on the left front door jamb and a body tag screwed to the cowl (the firewall). The serial number is the car's VIN for registration purposes; the body tag is not — it identifies the body, not the car. The Studebaker National Museum's production order copy — the factory's own build record, keyed to the serial number — lists the engine number, paint, trim, options, and destination, and is the authentication standard.

The serial number

The serial combines a year-and-engine prefix with a sequential number: **64S** = 1964 six-cylinder, **64V** = 1964 V8 (e.g., 64V14340). Unlike modern VINs, the Studebaker serial reveals little beyond model year, factory, and cylinder count — it is principally a build-sequence number. A hidden duplicate of the serial is stamped into the rear frame crossmember; a car whose frame serial and plate disagree has a story to tell.