



Dave & Diane's 1951 Chevrolet Styleline Deluxe Convertible Coupe

This story begins in June 1951 when this 1951 Chevrolet Styleline Deluxe Convertible Coupe, Serial No. 5JK-F 52075, rolled off the assembly line in Kansas City, Missouri. Some lucky buyer paid \$2,030 (base price) for this top of the line, fathom-green Chevy with a tan convertible top and deep-buff leather seats. I wish I knew who that lucky buyer was. What I do know is that in 1960 this “well-used” convertible was traded in on a new car at Dellenbach Chevrolet Company in Fort Lupton, Colorado.

My Dad saw its potential right away and paid his employer, Dick Dellenbach, \$50 for this “fixer upper”. It has been a family treasure since that time. Unlike the often-heard story about the low-mileage car that was owned by a schoolteacher and was only driven to Church on Sundays, this is a classic Chevrolet story about the well-used Chevy that just kept on going and served a family for many, many years. And today is only being driven on Sundays (well, maybe Sundays and Mondays!!)

Although the car was only nine years old in 1960, it was in poor shape and was going to require a lot of work. Who better to start that work than a veteran certified Chevrolet mechanic, my Dad? He immediately replaced the “worn out” stock “216” engine with a 1954 “235” engine with the “full pressure” oil lubrication system. He also swapped out the Rochester “manual choke” carburetor with a 1954 “automatic choke” Rochester, rebuilt the brakes, replaced the top, replaced the windshield, and made numerous other improvements. During the early years I provided as much help as a devoted seven-or eight-year old son can provide. It was a good way for a boy to learn the difference between a flat head and Philips screwdriver and channel-lock and needle-nose pliers, but there is no doubt that my biggest help at that age was my ability to shag tools.

Once the major work was complete my Dad drove the car to work and we used the car for family picnics as well as occasional camping, fishing, and hunting trips to the Colorado Mountains or nearby lakes. However, this was our second car (we also had a brand-new 1960 Chevrolet Brookwood wagon) so it wasn't heavily used until 1966 when Dad taught my older sister and me to drive the car (I was 13 and she was 15 years old).

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My sister “inherited” the car when she turned 16 and used it to drive my younger sister and me to school. She also immediately convinced Mom and Dad to paint the car and chose an awful bright-yellow color. Yellow was supposed to be a “cool” color in the 60s but I thought it was disgusting; it took me another twenty years and two of my own kids to understand why Mom and Dad were so eager to oblige. They must have known when they made that decision, that in our little town of 3,000, they would be getting daily reports on where that bright-yellow convertible had been and what those kids had been doing. And, boy, did they get reports!!

Yes, life was simple in the 60’s; but so were those pesky 6-volt car batteries. Unless they were brand new it seemed that they just would never hold their charge in cool weather. I have fond memories of cool and downright cold Colorado mornings with my younger sister and me pushing that car down the street while my older sister “popped the clutch” to start the car. I would jump into the car “huffing and puffing”, but it still beat walking. It was great for us “teenagers” to have that independence from parents that a car can bring.

When my sister graduated from high school my parents bought her a used 1958 Chevrolet Biscayne and I was given the keys to “the 51”. I was happy to have a car but was not happy to have inherited “the yellow bomb”, the nickname given to the car by my older sister’s friends. But it was transportation, it was a convertible, and it was mine. What else can I say!! I drove it everywhere and was glad to have it.

I even drove it on my first date, a high school dance after a football game with a girl named Suzie. It was fun to hang out at the local A & W Drive-In with the top down and Drive-In movies and convertibles were a great combination in the 60s. I remember watching movies like Barbarella (1968) and Easy Rider (1969) with the top down and the stars shining above.

For my high school graduation in 1971 Mom and Dad bought me a used 1962 Impala 2-door sport coupe (maroon color) and I passed the keys to “the 51” to my younger sister. She also drove it to from high school until she graduated in 1973. After a year or two of sitting in the driveway, I decided that a 20-year old convertible could be a classic and began some restoration work on the car. My Dad helped me (or I helped my Dad?) overhaul the engine and we began some other needed maintenance and the exterior conversion of “the yellow bomb”. We went to a local junkyard and cannibalized numerous parts (including the entire floorboard) from a 1951 5-passenger coupe and welded the floorboard in place. It was nice to be rid of those “Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble” sized holes in the floor pan. I also repaired some minor body damaged that the car had endured (not too bad considering it had experienced three teenage drivers in six years). I sanded and primed the car and painted it back to its original fathom green.

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Well, "the 51" got another long rest between 1979 and 1999 while I was busy raising my own family. I dutifully kept it garaged all those years and used it occasionally for joyrides in the summer. My wife, Diane, was nothing less than a Saint, allowing me to keep it in the garage while her car sat in the driveway!!

Finally, with both my daughters off to college and the car now more than 50-years old, it was time for more restoration work. Last winter we worked on the interior, even rebuilt the seats from the springs up, and put on new seat covers and this summer we repainted it, this time a closer rendition of the original fathom green. We will continue to play with this "family heirloom" and make repairs and upgrades as we enjoy using it in the summer. I plan on driving it back to the old stomping grounds in 2006 to the National VCCA meet in Grand Junction, Colorado.

My daughters, now 20 and 22, have both learned to drive "the 51" and already discuss who will deserve it most when I am ready to pass it down. I have decided that the only solution to this dilemma is to buy another classic Chevy to use for a while and then I will have two cars to pass down!!! Does anyone know of another fifties classic that needs a good home?????



Chevrolet produced only 20,172 convertibles in 1951. This is less than 2% of the total production run of 1,250,803 cars. The base price of the car was \$2,030 before optional equipment, freight, and excise taxes. The standard new car warranty on a 1951 Chevrolet was 90 days or 4,000 miles (whichever came first) and didn't cover the tires or battery!!

Specifications

1951 Styleline Deluxe Convertible Coupe (Model 2134)

Serial No. 5JK-F 52075

Style No. 51-1067TX

Body No. L 13294

Trim No. 206 (Green Leather interior)

Paint No. 445 (Fathom Green exterior)

Built in Kansas City, Missouri in June 1951

Original color Fathom Green with Argent Silver wheel stripes

Tan convertible top, green interior

Original Seats and armrest tops were made of deep buff leather

Door panels, rear quarter panels, etc. of light gray leather fabric (vinyl)

Original dashboard panel painted Fathom Green

Lower instrument panel painted Light Gray

Original engine 216 cu. in.

Current engine 235.5 cu. in.

115 HP @ 3700 rpm (The "Blue Flame-115"-1954)

3-speed manual transmission

Electrical system 6-volt (negative ground)

Tires 7.10-15 bias ply (only the convertible, others were 6.70-15)

Weight 3615 lbs.