

fall... ON THE ROAD

This 1957 Chevrolet Bel-Air is not for sale

BY COLIN WILLARD
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VICHY — When the 1957 Chevrolet Bel-Air hit the market, it came with an electric razor to plug into the car's cigarette lighter. The razor was a marketing tool to attract traveling businessmen to buy the car. Roy Richardson of Vichy has the razor that came with his blue Bel-Air, which he bought and restored a few years ago. About 65 years later, the razor remains unused, but the car has gone through several changes. "The story goes that the boy who bought that car brand new in St. Joseph, Missouri went through boot camp," Richardson said. "When he went to Vietnam, he put it in his dad's garage. It sat in that garage until six or seven years ago when I bought it. Then I totally restored the car."

Richardson had owned a body shop out of his home garage for about 40 years. Before that, he had body shops in Rolla and Cuba, and he worked at Bob's Body Shop in Rolla for several years. He retired at the end of 2020 and sold his equipment.

Bodywork was Richardson's trade from 1964 on. "I started with tractors, and it grew into cars." He

started doing bodywork on cars in 1967 or 1968, but his work on cars began before that.

"When I was a young pup, dad used to take me to the garage," he said. "He was a mechanic. I started washing parts. I was 10 or 11 years old." Eventually, he was putting together motors.

Richardson restored the 1957 Bel-Air with the help of his oldest son, who worked in his shop with him. The car parts are all original. "I never did like modifying one," he said. He prefers the cars to be totally original because that is how they were when he was growing up.

The only time he liked to modify a car is when he drag raced with 1955 Chevrolets at Sullivan's God's

Thunder Valley Raceway in the late 1960s. "I had some hot rods I used to drag race," he said. "But that's

back when you could buy them for \$10 apiece. I would go out and buy those '55, '56 and '57 Chevy convertibles and drive them."

"They were plentiful back then," Richardson said. "People just wanted to get rid of them. There were plenty of them laying around. I'd buy them for \$10, drive them for a week or two, then sell them for \$100."

Richardson's current Bel-Air cost him a lot more than \$10, but he said it was worth it. "The car was so nice," he said

about its condition when he first bought it. "It didn't really need a lot (of work) but I went ahead and did it anyway because I was going to keep it. I wasn't

going to sell that one."

It did not take long for Richardson to admit that the Bel-Air is his favorite car that he has owned. "Yeah, well... I've had some nice ones," Richardson said. He said the Bel-Air's closest competition was a red 1962 Chevrolet Impala Super Sport Convertible. He restored the convertible and sold it about four years ago.

The Bel-Air's restoration process took about three months. "I kept my customer work going, and I did it in my spare time," Richardson said. "(It took) a lot of long, late nights."

"That's the frame of the car," Richardson said while showing a photo from when worked on the car. "We sandblasted and put every nut, bolt and screw in it. Everything is brand new."

Richardson said the frame needed special bolts with markings on the head. Some of the heads lost their markings over time. "So I went around to all the salvage yards and picked up the best ones I could pick," he said. "I sent them to Texas and had them plated so they'd be correct."

The restoration process Richardson used is known

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PHOTO BY COLIN WILLARD
ROY RICHARDSON shows off the electric razor that came with the 57 Bel-Air.

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The effects of infrequent driving on vehicle performance

Driving puts a certain measure of wear and tear on a vehicle. Whether a vehicle is used primarily for commuting or as a vessel to take travelers to parts unknown, wear and tear is inevitable.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, individuals may not realize that failing to drive their vehicles regularly also can affect performance. Here's a closer look at what can happen when vehicles sit idle for lengthy periods of time.

- Battery loses its charge. The battery in a vehicle is still being used even if the car isn't running. Batteries power various components in a car, such as the vehicle computer, phone chargers and more. If the engine does not turn over and help to recharge the battery, the battery will eventually die. People who drive infrequently may want to consider a trickle charger that's plugged in during periods of non-use.

- Tire rot can set in. Dry tire rot is deterioration that sets into the rubber. The material dries out and becomes brittle, causing splits and cracks to form. Driving with tire rot can cause tires to deflate.

- Rust and corrosion can occur. There is still plenty of metal in modern vehicles. A vehicle that has been exposed to salt or rain or one that is stored in a moist climate can be susceptible to undercarriage or engine rust. This may cause damage that's not easily repaired.

- Damage from sap or droppings. A vehicle parked in one location for a long time could be a target for bird droppings, fallen berries, sap, and other substances that are potentially harmful to the paint job. Leaving the car or truck out in the sun also means UV rays can cause clear coat over the paint to oxidize and begin to fail, which can produce blotchy or peeling spots.

- Poor brake performance. When vehi-

cles are left to sit, corrosion could build up on the rotors and the brake pads may become less flexible. Moisture also may seep into brake lines, causing issues with pressurization of brake fluid. Each of these factors adds up to brakes that do not work properly — which is a big safety hazard.

- Formation of tire flat spots. When tires are not used frequently, the weight of the car can continually put pressure on the same parts of the tires, leading to flat spots. Tires also can lose pressure if they sit too long.

- Oil and other fluids may lose efficacy. Various fluids can go stale in a vehicle if it isn't regularly driven. Gasoline also may develop condensation, which can reduce efficiency and performance. Taking short trips helps avoid this issue.

Infrequent driving can cause damage to a car or truck. But many potential issues can be avoided by driving vehicles more often.



Six reasons for a check engine light

Modern vehicles utilize various technologies to ensure drivers remain as safe as possible behind the wheel. Technology also can alert drivers when their cars are in need of examination, and such is the case when the often dreaded "check engine"

light comes on.

While a check engine indicator is seldom good news, it may not mean that expensive repairs are right around the corner. The following are six reasons why check engine lights come on and how to remedy these situations.

1. Faulty/loose gas cap: A faulty gas cap is one of the reasons a check engine light might turn on. A cap that is not tightly closed or one that is poorly sealed enables vapors to escape, which can trigger the light. Opening the gas cap and then resealing it tightly may help; otherwise, a replacement cap may be necessary.

2. Faulty sensor: Sometimes there is nothing wrong with the engine or other components, but the light sensor itself. The check engine light might come on because its sensor is corroded or not working properly.

3. Oxygen sensor failure: The oxygen sensor sends data to the vehicle's computer, which it uses to create the right mix of air and fuel to enter the engine's cylinders. The check engine light may come on when the sensor fails or registers a problem with the fuel/air mix.

4. Ignition coils/spark plugs: A check engine light may come on to warn drivers it is time to replace spark plugs and/or ig-

niton coils. According to DigitalTrends, ignition coils generate the electricity needed for spark plugs to ignite the fuel and air mix in the cylinders. Worn coils or fouled plugs can cause any number of issues, including engine misfire.

5. Catalytic converter issues: The catalytic converter heats up hydrocarbons and other emissions so that they turn into carbon dioxide and water vapor to help protect the environment, offers AutoZone. The converter usually does not fail on its own, but a mechanic can help diagnose what might cause the failure.

6. Electronic powertrain controls: Vehicles are large computerized devices

with an array of sensors and modules that run powertrains. Any issues with these sensors, networks or modules can trigger the check engine light.

Depending on the make and model of a vehicle, a check engine light may require less urgency than a flashing light. It always helps to consult with the owner's manual to help determine issues. Automotive retail stores and mechanics can connect the car's computer to diagnostic equipment that will issue a diagnostic trouble code (DTC) that can serve as a starting point to address check engine light issues.

What's behind noises your car might be making

Few things can be as unsettling when behind the wheel as a sudden noise.

Noises coming from a car can indicate a host of issues, and that's one reason why such sounds tend to be so different. Quickly identifying what's behind car noises can make for safer driving and potentially save drivers substantial amounts of money.

belt

A squealing noise at start-up is among the more annoying noises a driver can hear. This sound is often indicative of a worn or damaged serpentine belt, which connects the crankshaft to the alternator, power steering and additional components. Thankfully, a worn down serpentine belt is a relatively inexpensive repair, though it's

**Noise: Engine knocking
Problem: Various issues**

A knocking noise from the engine typically sounds like repeated tapping. The noise will often become louder as the vehicle accelerates. Various issues can be behind the knocking sound, and drivers should avoid self-diagnosing the problem, even if they've experienced it in the past with the same or a different vehicle. Some drivers hear knocking because they're using 87 octane fuel instead of the high-performance and more expensive fuel the owner's manual recommends (this could be a common problem in recent months given the meteoric rise in fuel prices). Another potential cause of engine knock could be problems with the pistons or crankshaft. Regardless of what's causing engine knocking, drivers are urged to take their vehicle to a mechanic promptly, as the cost of repairs is likely to rise the longer knocking goes untreated.

No one wants to hear noises coming from their vehicles. However, such noises should be addressed promptly, as the quickness of drivers' responses could make the difference between a simple, less costly fix and a more time-consuming, expensive repair.

**Noise: Rattling coins
Problem: Loose lug nut in a hub cap**

This noise can be loud and unsettling, but the good news is that it's often a simple fix if addressed immediately. The automotive insurance experts at Geico note that a noise that sounds like coins rattling around in a dryer is likely a loose lug nut in a hubcap. The lug nut might have become loose if a wheel was not tightened sufficiently after a recent maintenance appointment or even if drivers changed a tire on their own. The longer drivers wait to address this, the more dangerous and costly it could become, as it could have an effect on the wheel bearings. If addressed promptly, the damage is likely minimal.



important that it be addressed promptly. Squealing at start-up also could indicate a loose tensioner, which is designed to keep the serpentine belt at a certain tightness and tension, or wear and tear to the belt due to parking outside. These issues can be addressed by readjusting or replacing the tensioner or replacing the serpentine belt, particularly if the part is old.

**Noise: Squealing on start-up
Problem: Issue with the serpentine**

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Richardson's 57 Bel-Air

Roy Richardson, left, proudly stands by his refurbished 1957 Bel-Air. The blue Chevrolet (photos below right) was in good shape both inside and out when he purchased it. After stripping the car down to its frame Richardson restored every nut and screw before putting the car back together. The finished car (center, lower left) now sits in his old shop.

FEATURE PHOTOS BY COLIN WILLARD, OTHER PHOTOS SUBMITTED



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as off-frame restoration. "It means you take the body off and you peel everything down," he said. Nothing stays on the frame.

Richardson said the most difficult part of the restoration process was rebuilding the engine, but it wasn't much of a challenge because he had years of experience.

"I used to work for car dealers," Richardson said. "Of course, at car dealers there are usually 12 to 15 cars outside waiting to be worked on." He estimates he has worked on hundreds and hundreds in addition to owning several throughout his life.

"The sky's the limit," Richardson said when asked how many cars he has owned. "A bunch."

Richardson's first car was a red 1938 Chevrolet two-door sedan that he paid \$10 to buy in 1965. "That was a sweet old car," he said.

Richardson had his share of encounters with early cars while working at George Carney's Autos of Yesteryear in Rolla. The oldest car he worked on was a 1911 Buick. The most famous car he worked on belonged to John Wayne.

"We had John Wayne's 1917 Federal in there," Richardson said. "I worked on it a little bit. Three days before he was supposed to come pick it up, he died. So I didn't get to meet him, but I got to work on his truck. That's kinda neat."

Chevrolet has always been his favorite car manufacturer. "It's kind of funny," Richardson said. "My dad was a Ford man. My grandpa was a Chrysler man. And I like those Chevrolets." He said working on Chevrolet cars is easy.

Richardson won trophies for some of his restorations, including a 1975 Kenworth Truck Tractor. "That was a big job, doing a road tractor," he said. "They're big." He said the size makes the work on road tractors much more difficult than cars.

Richardson said he does not win trophies anymore because he stopped going to car shows. "I built a red 1957 Chevy convertible for myself," he said. "I'd put it on my rollback and got to a car show. When I'd unload the car, the other guys in that class would load theirs up and say 'We can't beat him. We're going home.'" After that, Richardson gave up because he did not want car show rivalries to hurt his business.

"It was just a big game," Richardson said. "They weren't really mad at me." Now, he goes to cruise-ins in Rolla, which are like car shows without the competition. Classic car owners drive up and share stories about their cars.

When Richardson bought the Bel-Air, it

had about 70,000 miles on it. In the years since he fixed it up, he has only added about 600 miles. He takes care to make sure the gravel roads near his house do not hurt the car when he does take it for a drive.

"I grew up with the old cars," Richardson said. "I've been around them all

my life. I would drag race some of them. I fixed some of them. I've sold a bunch of them."

The one car Richardson will not sell is his 1957 Bel-Air. He said he plans to leave it for his son someday. As for the razor, it will probably remain unused.

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