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1954 CHRYSLER IMPERIAL



ROYALTY
on the Road

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1954 CHRYSLER IMPERIAL OWNER - Robert Henderson

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Chrysler styling in the mid 50s was not much different than what it was in the early 40s. Imperials tended to be fancier New Yorkers with a higher price. The hood was long because it had been designed for the 385 straight 8. The hemi put out the same horsepower with 50 cubic inches less displacement and that was a big difference at the time. KT Keller had said that a gentleman should be able to wear his hat while driving which made for a tall car. It was the options that made the Imperials special with air conditioning, power disc brakes, power steering, chrome wire spoke wheels, power windows, and other accessories. The interior has plenty of leg room, foot rests, robe rail, wide centre arm rests, padded dash, clock, interior lights, and a dashboard that displayed all that you needed to know. The exterior was restrained with chrome and stainless trim, one piece front and rear windows, and a first generation 331 hemi.



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With a hemi, power is the benefit, while cost and weight are the down side. Engines were characterized by wide and tall cylinder heads that were oversquare (bore is greater than stroke). The early Chrysler hemis were V16 aircraft experimental engines in early 1945 but did not go into production as the Second World War was winding down. Next came a V12 air-cooled M47 tank engine and Chrysler used that military experience to bring out the 331 'FirePower' in 1951 with 'FireDome' and 'Red Ram' coming in under DeSoto and Dodge. This Imperial has dual Carter WCFB four-barrel carburetors setup and is rated at 300 hp.

Imperial was part of Chrysler from 1926 to 1954 when it was spun off as its own division in 1955 with the 'New Look' designed by Virgil Exner. The Chrysler Imperial would return briefly from 1990 to 1993.

My father bought the car from a Calgary car dealer in 1961. It was a big improvement from the 1951 Dodge Special that he had been driving. My father would give me rides to school in the 'Green Giant' as we called it, and it was special. Coming home from summer vacation in the Okanagan, my brother and myself, in the back seat, would be pressed between boxes of peaches, pears and plums as we brought back fruit for canning. It was the first car I was allowed to 'drive' but my feet could not reach the pedals. We would go to the North Hill Shopping Centre parking lot on a Sunday and I would steer the giant while sitting in my father's lap. It had some issues: the hydraulic lifters collapsed causing the con rods to be jammed up into the rocker arms. The con rods would be hammered to a point and then have to be changed. The tail pipes were regularly blown off by the hemi and had to be replaced on more than one occasion. There were pockets of body work that rusted out, plus paint oxidizing down to primer and it began to look shabby. It was put in storage in 1973.



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1954 CHRYSLER IMPERIAL STATS

ENGINE:
V-8 331 Cast iron block
Overhead valves
Displacement: 331.1 cubic inches
Bore and Stroke 3.81 x 3.62 inches
Compression Ratio: 7.5:1
Brake Horsepower: 235 @ 4400 rpm
Main bearings: Five Hydraulic Valve Lifters
Carburetor: Carter WCFB 2041S

CHASSIS:
Wheelbase: (sedan and limo) 133 1/2"
Overall length: Custom 223 3/4"
Overall width: Custom 77 1/4"
Overall height: Custom 63"
Tires: (Custom) 8.2 x 15
Weight: 4,350lbs

PRODUCTION: 4,324

TRANSMISSION:
Powerflite automatic transmission
was standard on all models



The car was shifted several times to other storage spaces and one shed actually collapsed on the car putting a dent in the roof. In 2018, I decided that the work had to be done and took it to one restorer who decided it was too big for his tandem garage shop and Delco ideas, so it went back to storage. Mark Love, an Imperial collector, told me about Investment Vehicle Restoration and Terry who specialized in Mopar products, so I went down in 2021 to see the shop. I liked what I saw and appreciated Terry's straight forward manner. The car went down to Granum in late 2021 after I had found a parts car in Ohio and had it shipped up, arriving in December. The work commenced with a full deconstruction. The interior, engine, and drive line were removed, the body was sandblasted, and then things started to come back together. Alberta Plating did the chrome work although a lot of the bright work is stainless steel and I did some of the polishing.

It was ready by November 2023 for the interior and it went to Cascade Vans & Interiors for a full fitting. The interior was done by March 2024 and then it went to Dale Adam's Automotive to be put in running order. There were small issues with special parts only used for a few years in the 50s on the V8s that were hard to find, but I bought a hat and I was finally able to drive the car to its new storage in November 2025 - this time I could reach the pedals.

The colour is Everglades Green pearl (original is metallic) and the interior is finished as manufactured. There are still a few issues to work out and that will take time, but it has an Alberta plate and it will be ready when everything comes together.