

Classic Car Identification Guide

Visual Guide to Identifying Popular 1950s Automobile Models

CHEVROLET - The People's Choice

1950 Chevrolet Styleline Deluxe

Key Identifying Features:

- Horizontal chrome grille with vertical dividers
- Round headlights with chrome bezels
- "Bow-tie" Chevrolet emblem on front and rear
- Straight, clean body lines without tail fins
- Chrome strip running along side of car
- Price Range: \$1,329 - \$1,741

1953 Chevrolet Bel Air

Key Identifying Features:

- First year of Bel Air as separate model
- Distinctive "Powerglide" script on rear fender
- Chrome spear extending from front to rear
- Two-tone paint schemes available
- Wraparound rear window
- Price Range: \$1,874 - \$2,150

1955 Chevrolet Bel Air

Key Identifying Features:

- Revolutionary small-block V8 engine available
- "Motoramic" styling with longer, lower profile
- Distinctive side chrome spear
- Wraparound windshield
- Optional two-tone paint
- Most recognizable: Ferrari Red and Cream White combination

- Price Range: \$1,935 - \$2,305

1957 Chevrolet Bel Air ★ *ICON OF THE DECADE* ★

Key Identifying Features:

- Distinctive tail fins (modest compared to other brands)
 - Dual headlights (first year available)
 - Heavy chrome front bumper with integrated grille
 - "Fuel injection" badges on fenders (if equipped)
 - Side chrome spear with anodized aluminum insert
 - Most famous: Turquoise and White or Red and White
 - Price Range: \$2,290 - \$2,757
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FORD - Built Ford Tough

1950 Ford Custom

Key Identifying Features:

- "Spinner" grille with horizontal chrome bars
- Integrated front bumper and grille design
- Ford script on hood and trunk
- Simple, clean body lines
- Chrome strip along beltline
- Price Range: \$1,333 - \$1,711

1955 Ford Fairlane

Key Identifying Features:

- Completely redesigned "Lifeguard" body
- Distinctive side chrome spear
- Wraparound windshield
- Optional Thunderbird V8 engine
- Crown Victoria model has distinctive roof band
- Price Range: \$1,914 - \$2,272

1955-1957 Ford Thunderbird ★ *PERSONAL LUXURY CAR* ★

Key Identifying Features:

- Two-seater convertible or removable hardtop
- Distinctive round "porthole" windows in hardtop
- Long hood, short deck proportions
- Chrome side exhausts (optional)
- Continental kit rear spare tire mount (optional)
- Price Range: \$2,944 - \$3,408

1957 Ford Skyliner

Key Identifying Features:

- Retractable hardtop (world's first)
 - Complex rear deck mechanism
 - Dual headlights
 - Heavy chrome front bumper
 - "Skyliner" script on rear fender
 - Price Range: \$2,942 - \$3,138
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CHRYSLER CORPORATION - Forward Look

1955 Chrysler C-300

Key Identifying Features:

- Distinctive "Forward Look" styling
- Powerful 300 horsepower Hemi V8
- Minimal chrome trim
- Wire wheels or wheel covers
- "300" badge on front fender
- Racing stripes available
- Price Range: \$4,110 - \$4,109

1957 Plymouth Belvedere

Key Identifying Features:

- Dramatic tail fins
- Distinctive front grille with horizontal bars
- "Belvedere" script on rear fender
- Two-tone paint schemes standard
- Wraparound rear window
- Available in "Fury" high-performance version
- Price Range: \$2,349 - \$2,638

1957 Dodge Coronet

Key Identifying Features:

- Prominent tail fins with chrome detail
- Distinctive front grille with mesh pattern
- "Swept-Wing" styling
- Dual headlights
- Chrome side trim
- Price Range: \$2,371 - \$2,967

1959 Cadillac Eldorado ★ *ULTIMATE TAIL FINS* ★

Key Identifying Features:

- Extreme tail fins (42 inches high)
 - Distinctive "bullet" taillights
 - Wraparound windshield and rear window
 - Extensive chrome trim
 - "Eldorado" script on rear fender
 - Most expensive American car of its time
 - Price Range: \$7,401 - \$7,401
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GENERAL MOTORS LUXURY BRANDS

1953 Buick Skylark

Key Identifying Features:

- Distinctive "Sweepspear" side chrome
- Convertible only (first year)
- Wire wheels standard
- Minimal chrome trim for elegant appearance
- "Skylark" script on rear fender
- Limited production (1,690 built)
- Price Range: \$5,000 - \$5,000

1954 Buick Century

Key Identifying Features:

- Powerful V8 engine in mid-size body
- Distinctive "VentiPorts" on hood sides
- Chrome side spear
- Wraparound windshield
- Two-tone paint available
- Price Range: \$2,534 - \$2,963

1955 Pontiac Bonneville

Key Identifying Features:

- Distinctive "Silver Streak" hood trim
- Dual exhausts standard
- Fuel injection available
- Convertible only (first year)
- Limited production
- Price Range: \$5,782 - \$5,782

INDEPENDENT MANUFACTURERS

1950 Studebaker Champion

Key Identifying Features:

- Distinctive "bullet-nose" front end
- Streamlined body design

- Low belt line
- Wraparound rear window
- Chrome strip along beltline
- Available as coupe, sedan, or convertible
- Price Range: \$1,519 - \$2,328

1953 Kaiser Manhattan

Key Identifying Features:

- Distinctive "safety" dashboard
- Wraparound windshield (first in industry)
- Sleek, modern styling
- Minimal chrome trim
- Unique front grille design
- Price Range: \$2,654 - \$2,947

1956 Packard Caribbean

Key Identifying Features:

- Distinctive "cathedral" taillights
- Reversed spare tire mount
- Distinctive side chrome
- Wire wheels standard
- Two-tone paint schemes
- Price Range: \$5,995 - \$5,995

IDENTIFICATION BY YEAR CHARACTERISTICS

Early 1950s (1950-1952)

- Minimal tail fins or none at all
- Single headlights
- Simpler grille designs
- Less chrome ornamentation
- Straight, clean body lines

Mid 1950s (1953-1955)

- Beginning of tail fin era
- Wraparound windshields appear
- Increased chrome usage
- Two-tone paint becomes popular
- V8 engines become more common

Late 1950s (1956-1959)

- Extreme tail fins reach peak
 - Dual headlights become legal (1957)
 - Maximum chrome ornamentation
 - Longer, lower, wider proportions
 - Space-age styling influences
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QUICK IDENTIFICATION TIPS

By Tail Fins:

- **No Fins:** Most 1950-1952 models
- **Small Fins:** Early Cadillacs, 1953-1955
- **Medium Fins:** Most 1956-1957 models
- **Extreme Fins:** 1958-1959 Cadillacs, Chrysler products

By Grille Style:

- **Horizontal Bars:** Chevrolet, Ford
- **Mesh Pattern:** Dodge, Plymouth
- **Integrated Bumper:** Early Ford, Kaiser
- **Distinctive Shapes:** Studebaker "bullet," Packard "cathedral"

By Chrome Trim:

- **Side Spears:** Chevrolet, Buick
- **Full-Length Strips:** Ford, Mercury
- **Sweepsppear:** Buick distinctive
- **Minimal Chrome:** Studebaker, some Kaisers

By Headlight Configuration:

- **Single Round:** All cars 1950-1956
 - **Dual Round:** 1957-1959 (when legal)
 - **Integrated Design:** Some Kaisers, Studebakers
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MOST VALUABLE MODELS TODAY

Highest Collector Value:

1. **1957 Chevrolet Bel Air** - \$35,000-\$85,000
2. **1955-1957 Ford Thunderbird** - \$45,000-\$125,000
3. **1953 Chevrolet Corvette** - \$110,000-\$200,000
4. **1955 Chevrolet Nomad** - \$55,000-\$110,000
5. **1959 Cadillac Eldorado** - \$65,000-\$150,000

Best Entry-Level Classics:

1. **1955-1956 Chevrolet 210** - \$15,000-\$35,000
2. **1955-1956 Ford Fairlane** - \$18,000