

**FEBRUARY 2018** 





# THIS MONTH: J.C. CONWAY'S 1969 KINGSWOOD ESTATE, 1958 LEVEL AIR SUSPENSION, 1958 MEMORABILIA



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#### **EDITOR'S NOTES**

I hope everyone's new year is off to a great start. Hi Russell, 1993 Chevrolets turn 25 this year and are eligible for AACA judging. The most collectible cars I really enjoyed this (December) issue. We start from this model year are probably the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary Corvettes and Camaro Z28. Camaro Carlo that I really liked. I passed it on to my was restyled for 1993 and served as the granddaughter and later to her mother, my Indianapolis 500 pace car. Chevrolet produced daughter. When we finally sold it, the mileage 645 pace car replicas which should also be collectible.

I'll be attending the AACA Annual Meeting in Philadelphia this year. Region Vice President John Mahoney will be there too. If you're attending, please email me so we can try to get together. You can reach me on my cell phone, 516-445-7165 during the meeting.

One of our newest members, Verne Frantz, will present a seminar on 1960's Chevrolet assembly plant procedures at the meeting. Verne's seminar will be held in the Freedom ball room and is scheduled for Friday, February 9 at 1:15 p.m.

Thanks to all the members who submitted articles and photos this month. Our 1958 60th anniversary articles conclude with a look at So this issue brought back many good memories Level Air suspension and some dealer of cars that I had that I really liked. memorabilia. I think you'll enjoy the 1969 Kingswood article a lot. Station wagons have Don Allen, become big collector's items over the last few Winter Haven, FL years.

We continue to pick up new members as a result of the October AACA Speedster article. As always, please try to recruit Chevrolet owning friends for our region.

Stay well, I hope to see you in Philadelphia.

Russell Heim

#### **LETTER TO THE EDITOR:**

with the '77 Monte Carlo. I had a 1987 Monte was up to 325,000 miles. It still looked very good, drove very well, and the engine had never been apart.

Then on page 5, the first car you shot at Hershey. It was a beautiful '61 Impala SS. My first new car was a '61 Impala Bubble top like that, same color. We drove that one to 100,000 and traded it for a four-door because with a baby, we needed the convenience of four doors.

On page 10 you have a '67 Chevy II. I had one of those except it wasn't a hardtop (I only wish it had been), it was a four-door. It was that light blue metallic. I drove it for years, always liked it, and sold it to one of my employees who later sold it to another employee.

# *"Putting you first, keeps us first"* **The 1969 Chevrolet Story:** By J.C. Conway



For 1969, Chevrolet's line of full-sized cars were all new. Available in seven body styles (three 2-doors, two 4-doors, a convertible and station wagon), with eight engines (one six and seven V8s), and five transmissions (two 3-speed manuals, a 4-speed manual, a 2-speed automatic and a 3-speed automatic), Chevrolet tried to anticipate every need and driving requirement.

With station wagons getting their own unique names, big Chevys were available in four model lines. As an entry model and the basis for taxis and police duty, the Biscayne and Brookwood station wagons were budget priced. Moving up the pecking order, but still pretty basic, were the Bel Air and Townsman. Next came the sales leading Impala, Impala SS and Kingswood. At the top of the line in price and trim, came the Caprice and Kingswood Estate. GM did not separate wagon sales out from the other models, but of the 1,171,755 full-sized Chevrolets sold in model year 1969, 166,900 were Caprices/Kingswood Estates.

#### One of a kind?

This 1969 Kingswood Estate is unique in several ways. Few family haulers were ordered in black, or with almost every available option. The Caprice and Kingswood Estate were the only models

available with the optional hidden headlights, which included headlight washers, and only about two percent were so equipped. Additionally, this wagon is equipped with the L36 390-horsepower 427 cubic-inch V8, rare for a station wagon. This was the most powerful cataloged engine available in the full-sized line up (A 335 hp 427, and a COPO 425 hp 427 were available, though the latter was never advertised and not available with air-conditioning).

Contemporary road tests of similar 427-powered Impalas and Caprices suggest a sprint from 0 to 60 in just over 7 seconds and the quarter mile in 15 seconds, with the ability to bury the needle of its 120-MPH speedometer. While these numbers might not sound too impressive today, in 1969 they were pretty striking; especially for a vehicle weighing over two tons.

#### **1969 CHEVROLET KINGSWOOD ESTATE**

Wheelbase:	119 in.	Base Price:	\$ 3,548.00		
Length:	216.7 in.	Sticker Price:	\$ 6,483.75 *		
Weight:	5042 lb. *	Color:	Tuxedo Black		
* Includes installed options					

## **OPTIONS ON THIS CAR**

- · 427-cid 390-hp Turbo-Jet V8
- · Concealed Headlights
- · Headlight Washer System
- Power Windows
- · Power Tailgate Window
- · Power Door Locks
- · Variable-Ratio Power Steering
- Tilt Steering Wheel
- · Speed Control
- · Power Disc Brakes
- · Six-Way Power Seat
- · Head Restraints
- · Four-Season Air Conditioning
- · Rear Window Defogger
- · AM/FM Pushbutton Radio
- · Stereo 8 Track w/4 Speakers
- · 3 Seat 9 Passenger
- · Floor Mats
- · Cargo Floor Carpeting
- · Soft-Ray Tinted Glass
- · Passenger Side Mirror

- 3-Speed Automatic Transmission
- · Positraction
- · 3:07 Rear Axle Ratio
- · Superlift Rear Shocks
- · Trailer Tow Package
- · Whitewall Tires
- 15 x 8 Rally Wheels
- · Heavy Duty Radiator
- · Dual Exhaust
- · Luggage Carrier
- · Rear Window Air Deflector
- · Front Bumper Guards
- · Auxiliary Lighting Package
- · Rearview Mirror Map Light
- · Under-Dash Courtesy Lights
- · 3<sup>rd</sup> Seat Courtesy Light
- · Under Hood Light
- · Glove Compartment Light
- · Ashtray Light
- · Warning lights for Low Fuel,
- Door Ajar, and Fasten Seat Belts

# Features standard on the Kingswood Estate that were optional on other some full size Chevrolet wagons:

.

- Wood-Grain Body Panels Wood-Grain Interior Accents •
- Wheel Opening Molding
- · Bright Pedal Trim
- Bright Accents on Grill and Taillights · •
- Electric Clock .
  - Lighter
  - Full Carpeting







**Ownership History** 

Buyers rarely purchased station wagons in the late '60s with the thought that someday they would become "collectible vehicles". Few of them generally survived the hard life as a family hauler or work vehicle long enough to see the half-century mark. Although this particular wagon has belonged to several owners, each of them recognized its unique combination of utility, luxury, and muscle. In addition to providing excellent maintenance, they kept detailed records, and they passed them along with the car's history to each successive owner.

- 1 Manufactured in November 1968 in Janesville, Wisconsin, this 1969 Chevrolet Kingswood Estate was specially ordered by Ron Taylor of Spokane, Washington. Ron ordered a station wagon because he had several children and needed the big 427 motor as he used the wagon to tow a race car to the Spokane International Raceway. Purchased on December 11, 1968 through Buchanan Chevrolet in Spokane, this was the most expensive '69 model vehicle sold that year at the dealership with the exception of one specially ordered L88 Corvette.
- **2** Ron Taylor sold the Kingswood to Chris Johnson, also of Spokane. This is the only transaction date information I do not have.
- **3** In April of 1978 with only 36,857 miles on the odometer, Pete Utheim of Spokane purchased the car. In 1980, under his ownership, an accident resulted in a new hood, front bumper, grille and one fender.

- 4 In April of 1989, with 92K miles, the car was sold to Leo Welter of Spokane. Between 1989 and 1993, Leo restored the wagon, keeping it in its original Tuxedo Black and using the factory correct wood-grain vinyl siding. He also had the engine rebuilt during this time. The interior is original.
- **5** In June of 1999, Leo Welter sold the car to Randy and Bonnie Moreau of Mt. Vernon, Washington. Randy was Leo's brother-in-law. Randy's sister's husband was friends with Ron Taylor, the original owner. Randy remembers being picked up by his older sister in the station wagon and being driven to the beach when he was about 10 years old.
- 6 After less than a year, in March of 2000, the Moreaus listed the wagon for sale though a consignment dealership. The Kingswood was purchased by Judith and James Carns of Burien, Washington. The odometer was reading just over 101K miles.
- 7 In July of 2001, The Moreaus, having regretted selling the Kingswood, bought it back from the Carns.
- 8 In January of 2003, Jeff Brownell of Milwaukee, Wisconsin contacted the Moreaus to see if he could purchase the car. Jeff had wanted to buy the wagon when the Moreaus sold it the first time. The Moreaus agreed to sell, and Jeff purchased the car in April of 2003.
- **9** Jeff listed the car for sale in November of 2004. After having a friend in Milwaukee check it out, we purchased the car in December, now with 109K miles. We had it shipped to our home in Georgia, and my parents took delivery of it while we were out of town. The first time we saw the Kingwood Estate in person was when we opened our garage door. What a great Christmas present!



### In Print

Before our ownership, this wagon was photographed for an article in the December 2000 issue of *Collectible Automobile* magazine and is included in the Consumer's Guide book, *Chevrolet Chronicles*, published in 2002.

## **Mysteries**

Though we have the original window sticker, data card, many service and parts receipts, registration and insurance forms, and much passed down history, this Chevrolet still has a few mysteries besides the purchase date by the second owner. For example, there are a few options on the car that are not on the manufacturer's window sticker.

The AM/FM radio and passenger side mirror could have been added by the dealership before the car was delivered. The window sticker only lists the AM Radio and the Stereo Tape System (8-Track). The dealer probably added the GM trailer hitch at the first owner's request as he used the station wagon for towing. The dealership sales receipt for the hitch and GM installation instructions were included with the paper work passed down. The trailer hitch and right hand mirror do not have regular production codes (RPO) and were never factory offered. The front bumper guards probably were on the replacement bumper when the car was repaired after the accident in 1980. The Rally wheels were most likely added when the car was restored in the early 90s.

Oddly, the build sheet is coded as a two seat model. It currently has three rows of seats. The third seat looks to be age correct. Only three row models included the rear courtesy light and power rear window switch which this car has. Also, the cargo area floor panels and supports on three seat models are completely different than two seat models. Did the dealer add the rear seat or was the build sheet mis-marked? I have been unable it track down the early owners, so these may remain a mystery.



## **Miscellaneous Fun Facts**

- There are only four factory options not on this wagon; Comfortron automatic A/C, automatic level control, speed warning indicator, and the light monitoring system (fiber optics). As the first two were problematic, I'm glad they were not ordered.
- The only time GM ever offered hidden headlights on it full-sized 4-doors, under any division, was in 1968 and 1969, and only on the Caprice and its corresponding station wagon.
- Though the Kingswood Estate was aligned with the Caprice, the interior was similar to the Impala. Chevrolet did not think the standard cloth interior in the Caprice would hold up well in a family hauler. Ford and Chrysler did the same with their top-line wagons.
- Only two 425 hp 427s Chevrolet station wagons were produced. The GM Heritage Collection has one of them. The other was used as a stock-class drag racer, the Lead Sled.
- All full sized cars except the Kingswood Estate had the engine CID integrated into the front side markers. Because the trim around the woodgrain connected to the markers, this was not used. The 427 cross-flags on our car are not correct and were added by a previous owner.
- The only gauges provided on any full sized 1969 Chevy was the speedometer and gas gauge, even on the Impala SS. A tachometer, which was a dealer installed option, was a standalone assembly mounted on the dash or steering column. An extremely rare option for police cruisers was a gauge package where a temperature, alternator and oil pressure gauge were wedged into the small space allotted for the optional clock.
- The optional rear window defogger has the blower outlet mounted in the spare tire cover. To remove the spare tire, the blower hose must be disconnected.
- The rear bumper has a section cut out that is attached to the tailgate. When the two-way tailgate is swung out like a door, the notch in the bumper provides a step to access the rear seat. This bumper design was also used on other 1969 and 1970 GM station wagons.
- Auto World manufactures a 1:64 scale model of the 1969 Chevrolet station wagon in several colors, with and without woodgrain and with and without hidden headlights (Alas, they do not seem to offer a hidden headlight woodgrain model in black).

# **1958 LEVEL AIR SUSPENSION -BY RUSSELL HEIM**

suspension. The optional 'Level "Chevrolet's new suspension system offers maximum ride quality reservoir raised the car. As the car raised, the to the customer." The service booklet explained: leveling valve arm rotated to normal position "Level Air suspension supports the car at the which closed the inlet valve. same height regardless of the number of passengers or weight of baggage, thus providing When extra weight was removed from the car, best possible steering and drive line angularity the reservoir raised in relation to its piston. This at all times. This is done by leveling valves opened the exhaust valve and permitted air to which permit additional air to enter the air escape. When the reservoir lowered to its springs as load is increased and air to exhaust as normal height, the exhaust valve closed. load is lightened."

Here's how it worked: assemblies replaced the four coil springs in the both rear air springs. A balance line ran from 1958 standard suspension. Air under pressure the left rear to the right rear assembly. Each in the air springs supported the car. Each air leveling valve contained a Schrader type valve spring included a reservoir, a piston mounted on in the inlet port which was supposed to prevent the lower control arm, and a bellows.

When a wheel struck a bump, the piston was forced up into the reservoir, further compressing Air for the system was supplied by a belt-driven the air and absorbing the shock. Increased compressor and stored in an accumulator tank. compression of the air, as the piston was forced A check valve in the compressor outlet hose higher, prevented bottoming on large bumps. prevented loss of pressure through When the wheel passed over the bump and compressor when it wasn't running. dropped down again, the compressed air in the reservoir expanded to its normal pressure.

The leveling valve was mounted in the reservoir. The valve arm, which opened and closed the inlet and exhaust valves in the valve body, was rotated by the relative motion of the piston and reservoir. The inlet and exhaust valves were of Separate air lines carried exhausted air from the the flap type, with a rubber seat on each flap that leveling valves back to the junction block. This closed against an orifice in each valve insert.

When extra passenger or baggage weight was added to the car, the reservoir lowered in relation

A new feature for 1958 was Level Air to its piston. This rotated the leveling valve arm sales pitch claimed: and opened the inlet valve and admitted air under Air' high pressure. The higher air pressure in the

The system used only three leveling valves. The Four air spring left rear leveling valve controlled pressure for air leakage from the air spring if system pressure dropped off.

the

High pressure air went from the accumulator to a high pressure chamber in a junction block. The junction block served as a manifold from which air lines carried air under high pressure to the leveling valves.

air went through an inlet hose to the compressor. A low pressure blow-off valve limited pressure in the low pressure side of system to 25 psi.

A relief valve limited high pressure air in the Service personnel were advised to always close system to 250 psi. Air above that pressure was the manual shut-off valve when raising a car on exhausted into the low pressure chamber where a lift. They had to always open the valve once it either returned to the compressor or was the car was lowered off the lift. When lowering pressure blow-off valve.

There was a manual shut-off valve, which when closed, prevented air in the low pressure Service men had to be sure the rear axle was chamber from returning to the compressor or centered on the hoist yoke when using a twinexhausting through the low pressure blow-off post hoist. If it wasn't centered, the yoke might valve. With the manual shut-off valve closed, have damaged the air lines at the left rear air air couldn't exhaust from the air springs. Also, spring or the gas tank, especially if air was there was a low side safety valve in the junction exhausted from the system. The front yoke block. This protected the low pressure side by needed to be correctly positioned on the lower exhausting air to the atmosphere if the manual control arms on cars with front stabilizer bars or valve was closed or the low pressure blow-off it might have damaged the stabilizer brackets. valve was inoperative. This valve exhausted at 165 psi. Air required to replace lost air during operation entered the system through an air cleaner in an alcohol bottle.

The Level Air system was prone to leaks and moisture related problems. Chevrolet issued a 65 page booklet for servicing the system in February 1958. The first 13 pages described the system's operation. The remaining 52 pages were devoted to maintenance and repair procedures. This booklet accompanied a Jam Handy training film strip.

The accumulator tank had to be drained every 5,000 miles. Chevrolet recommended shorter intervals in very humid climates as it was necessary to exhaust accumulated moisture from the system. It was recommended to remove and clean the air filter every 1,000 miles.

Special precautions were recommended when servicing a Level Air equipped car. The manual shut-off valve had to be closed to prevent air from being exhausted when performing any maintenance operation where a wheel was permitted to drop below normal position.

exhausted to the atmosphere through the low a car with exhausted air springs, service men were advised to make sure there was nothing under the car which could cause damage.





5. NO BUILD-UP OF AIR PRESSURE. This is probably caused by a faulty compressor, a complete blockage in compressor outlet line, the high pressure relief valve stuck open, or a large leak in system. Check as follows — ... disconnect compressor outlet line from outlet check valve. Run engine. If there is little or no air output, there is a blockage in air inlet or outlet lines or compressor requires overhaul. Disconnect inlet and outlet lines from compressor to check for blockage.



Add air at high pressure Schrader type valve. If car rises, the difficulty is in the check valve or compressor. To determine which is at fault . . .



If there is a strong surge of air, outlet check valve is probably stuck closed. Test by installing check valve on end of outlet line. If no air comes through, valve is stuck and must be replaced.



A few illustrations and procedures from the Level Air Suspension service manual. Photos courtesy of the John Mahoney collection.

# **1958 CHEVROLET MEMORABILIA**

# **PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY BOB PARRISH**

![](_page_12_Picture_2.jpeg)

Ramjet fuel injection wall dealer wall displays.

![](_page_13_Picture_0.jpeg)

Another dealer wall display. This one touts the new cars' beauty.

![](_page_13_Picture_2.jpeg)

Wall plaque claiming Chevrolet is "America's First Choice"

The Space Age Star is the official publication of the Space Age Chevrolet Region of the Antique Automobile Club of America. This is a non-geographic region dedicated to the enjoyment, restoration, and history of 1955 and later AACA eligible Chevrolet cars and trucks. We publish the newsletter six times each year.

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