

# THE SPECTACULAR

## SS 396 EL CAMINO



***Chevrolet's other two-seater for enthusiasts goes fast, handles like a champ, and has good looks. Really now, this is a truck?***

**S** IRED BY SPORTS CAR out of pick-up truck, Chevrolet's El Camino is such a good blend of different types of vehicles that it's a shame no one seems to know exactly what it's supposed to be. A passenger car? It only has two seats. A sports car, then? It has a cargo bed. Even the British wouldn't build a sports car with a cargo bed. A truck? The bed isn't all that

big, and the suspension is more suited to hauling people down the freeway than hay to the south pasture.

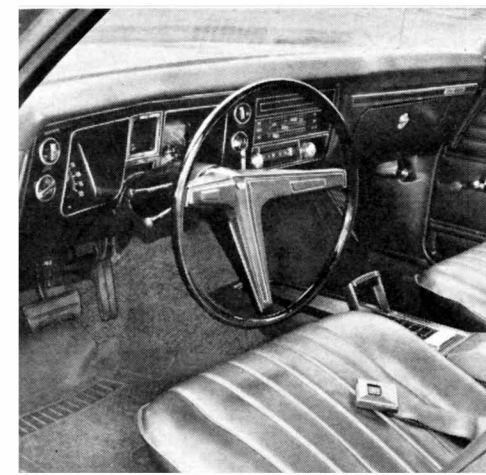
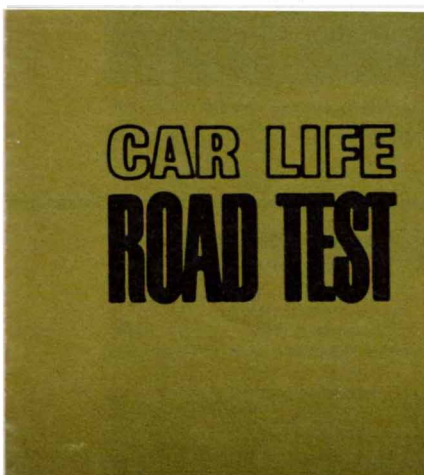
Mere quibbling. Whatever else it is, the El Camino is a success. Surfers, suburban weekend farmers, genuine farmers and ranchers, motorcyclists, and camping buffs, storekeepers and contractors, anyone who needs a utilitarian sports car, or a luxurious truck,

finds the answer with the El Camino (or the similar offering from FoMoCo).

The only authoritarian opinion on what the El Camino is comes from toll booth attendants—they collect truck fees. The factory lists the El Camino under trucks in the specifications for dimensions, then switches to the Chevelle spec sheets for engines and trans-



**CORNERING** power is high, even with the big engine. El Camino understeers at steady cornering speeds, but the car can be balanced with more power.



**PLUSH** interior is very comfortable, with bucket seats, console and adjustable steering column.



**STYLISTS** did a good job blending Chevelle front body panels into the pick-up bed.

missions. Fair enough, for the El Camino is in essence a Chevelle, on the 116-in. wheelbase of that intermediate's four-door sedan. Engine and interior are Chevelle, too, but the El Camino has that cargo bed, about six feet long by five feet wide, replacing the sedan's rear seat and trunk.

CAR LIFE's test El Camino had the optional 350-bhp/396-cid V-8 engine and the optional three-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic automatic transmission. It's a fine combination. One of the dividing lines between Supercars and just plain cars is a quarter-mile elapsed time of 15 seconds or less. The El Camino was a Supercar, or even a Supertruck, if such exists. Quarter-mile times were in the high 14s, run after run. No drama, no trick starts, no between-run trips to the garden hose for emergency cooling, just instant performance. Mind, the El Camino wasn't equipped for the drags. The tests were with exhaust emission controls, street tires and pressures and the standard 3.31:1 final drive gearing. The Turbo Hydra-Matic shifted quickly and firmly every time. Very impressive.

Highway performance is just as good. Mentioning no names, but there are high-performance engines on the market that are only suitable for racing, being lumpy and intractable at less than full throttle. They come with transmissions that are either in or out. The result is road performance in a series of lurches and clanks. The 396/Turbo combination, though, is powerful and smooth all the way from traffic trickle to pure stock eliminator.

Handling and ride are good, considering the problems the designers had to work with. The 396 engine weighs 243 lb. more than the standard V-8, and the weight goes right between the front wheels. The business end of the truck is light, unladen. Most of the weight is unsprung. American cars are usually front-heavy, and the El Camino was more so than most. On the handling course, the El Camino understeered strongly, with the front wheels trying to slide off the turn. More throttle would balance the car, but body roll and soft shock absorbers made the transition awkward. On rough roads (remember, it's a truck) the rear axle hopped in a most disquieting manner and there was noticeable shake and flex in the body. Making a pick-up truck out of a sedan apparently reduces torsional rigidity. Spring rates are an attempt to provide a comfortable ride on the highway and a firm ride over bad roads, both when the El Camino has no cargo and when it does. None of the aims are quite achieved, but the ride is acceptable under any condition, with a fairly good combination of comfort and handling.



# EL CAMINO

continued

Brakes were good. The test El Camino had disc brakes in front, and drums in the rear. The discs require a power booster. The need for boost made the brakes easier to control than the standard all-drum system, which too often has too much power. With the El Camino, the boost was there if needed, but thankfully the driver has to push to get it. The first hard stop from 80 mph showed a healthy deceleration rate of 25 ft./sec.<sup>2</sup>, and the second stop pulled 26 ft./sec.<sup>2</sup> After that, the brakes faded slightly, but they still worked well and they still could be controlled.

Climbing into the sports car/truck/passenger car brings back the question of, "What is it?" The test El Camino had optional bucket seats. Comfortable, stylish, popular, but there's only room for two people. Do surfer girls sit on laps? Do the weekend farmer's kids ride in the cargo bed? The standard bench seat and steering column gear lever might be more practical. Luggage space is pure sports car—there isn't any. Matched duffle bags could be wedged behind the seats, and



**AT HOME** on the range, El Camino easily holds hay bale used on handling circuit. Pick-up bed is about five feet wide, six feet long and 15 inches deep.

there's a cubbyhole for valuables under the cargo bed floor, but anything big will bounce on the bed or stay home.

The driver, though, does have room. Seat travel is more than adequate, and with the optional steering column height adjustment, just about anybody should be able to drive or ride in comfort. The instrument panel is sports car, almost. The instruments are recessed, to reduce glare, and are angled toward the driver, to improve legibility. The optional gauges, for fuel level, oil pressure, water temperature and amps, are useful in any vehicle.

Now then, chaps, about that tachometer. Detroit thinks tachometers are a fad, something the buyer wants, but doesn't really need. Usually the tach is mounted on the floor, or in the glovebox, where it won't distract the driver. Not in the El Camino. It's right up there above the steering column, in the line of sight. Only thing is, it's so small that the driver can't read it. A thin, horizontal needle moves vertically inside a tiny panel. From idle to valve float is about one inch. By the time the driver could tell that danger approaches, it's there. For all the good the tachometer does, it might as well be put back in the glovebox.

Styling is very attractive; the design-



**CUBBYHOLE** behind driver's seat can be used for hiding valuables when the El Camino is parked. Vehicle has plenty of cargo space, no luggage space.

ers did a good job of blending Chevelle front panels to the cargo space. The only styling trick is a pair of hood bulges, with the heater/defroster intakes disguised as carb scoops.

In sum, the El Camino is a compromise, not quite a sports car, or a passenger car, or a truck. Chevrolet sale research shows that there are a large number of people who want just such an amalgam. Men, mostly, in the Southwest or Pacific Coast. They want a performance car that can do something useful, or a pick-up truck that can hold its own at the country club or the church parking lot. They get it with the El Camino. Chevrolet has

found that many of the El Camino's buyers own just the one vehicle, while at the same time two-thirds of the El Caminos are used to tow trailers.

Whatever the use, or the reason, the El Camino has appeal. It's good looking. With the 350/396, it goes like the hammers. It is more comfortable than a truck, and has more cargo space than a station wagon. Just about everybody who sees it can think of a good reason for wanting to own one. Fancier than a truck, more utilitarian than a passenger car, able to leap past sports cars in a single bound, the El Camino will fill needs that the owner never knew he had.

## 1968 CHEVROLET

### EL CAMINO PICK-UP



#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	116.0
Track, f/r, in.	59/59
Overall length, in.	207.0
width	75.7
height	54.0
Front seat hip room, in.	23 x 2
shoulder room	58.3
head room	37.7
pedal-seatback, max.	43.0
Rear seat hip room, in.	n.a.
shoulder room	n.a.
leg room	n.a.
head room	n.a.
Door opening width, in.	41.5
Trunk liftover height, in.	n.a.

#### PRICES

List, FOB factory	\$2949
Equipped as tested	\$4179
Options included: 350-bhp V-8, power steering, disc brakes; bucket seats; appearance group, console, positraction; tilt steering wheel; instrument panel; AM radio; wheel covers.	

#### CAPACITIES

No. of passengers	2
Fuel tank, gal.	20.0
Crankcase, qt.	4.0
Transmission/dif., pt.	8/4
Radiator coolant, qt.	24

#### CHASSIS/SUSPENSION

Frame type: Perimeter.	
Front suspension type: Independent by s.l.a., coil springs and concentric shock absorbers.	
ride rate at wheel, lb./in.	117
antiroll bar dia., in.	0.937
Rear suspension type: Live axle, two lower and one upper trailing arms and telescopic shock absorbers.	
ride rate at wheel, lb./in.	126
Steering system: Semi-reversible, recirculating ball gear, parallelogram linkage in front of wheels.	
overall ratio	20.4:1
turns, lock to lock	4.0
turning circle, ft. curb-curb	45.1
Curb weight, lb.	3760
Test weight	4080
Distribution (driver), % f/r	58.3/41.7

#### BRAKES

Type: Ventilated disc front, cast iron duo-servo rear, proportioning valve.	
Front drum/rotor, dia. x width, in.	10.6 x 2.21
Rear drum, dia. x width	9.5 x 2
total swept area, sq. in.	332.4
Power assist: Integral.	
line psi at 100 lb. pedal	n.a.

#### WHEELS/TIRES

Wheel rim size	14 x 6JK
optional size	none
bolt no./circle dia. in.	5/4.75
Tires: Goodyear Wide Tread.	
size	G70-14
normal inflation, psi f/r	24/32
Capacity @ psi	6000 @ 24/32

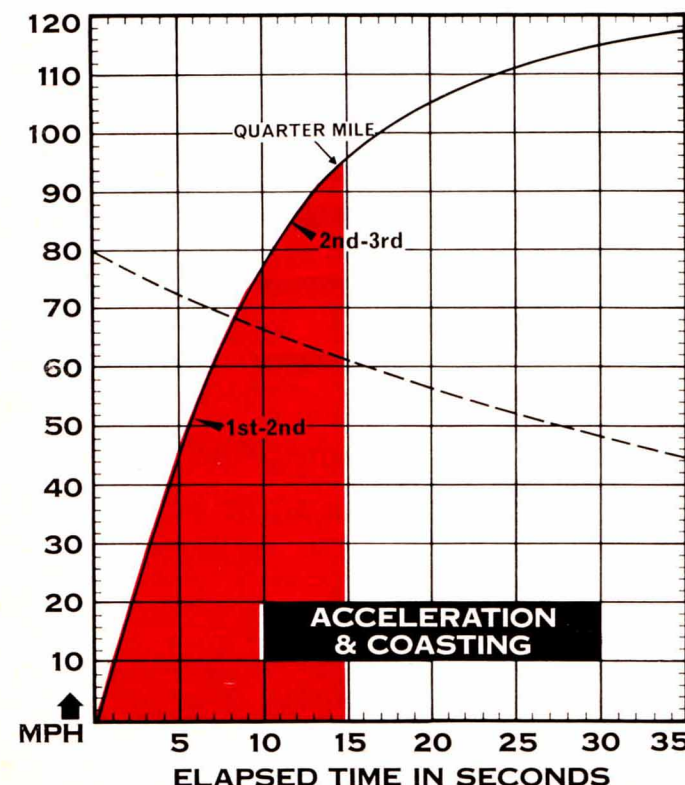
#### ENGINE

Type, no. of cyl.	90° ohv V-8
Bore x stroke, in.	4.094 x 3.76
Displacement, cu. in.	396
Compression ratio	10.24:1
Fuel required	premium
Rated bhp @ rpm	350 @ 5200
equivalent mph	119
Rated torque @ rpm	415 @ 3400
equivalent mph	78
Carburetion: 1x4 Rochester.	
throttle dia., pri./sec.	1.38 x 2.25
Valve train: Hydraulic lifters, push-rods and overhead rocker arms.	
cam timing	deg., int./exh. 40-80/88-32
duration, int./exh.	300/300
Exhaust system: Dual, reverse flow muffler.	
pipe dia., exh./tail	2.5/2.25
Normal oil press. @ rpm	50/75 @ 2000
Electrical supply, V./amp	12/37
Battery plates/amp. hr	66/61

#### DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission type: Three-speed automatic with torque converter.	
Gear ratio 3rd (1.00:1) overall	3.31:1
2nd (1.48:1)	4.90:1
1st (2.48:1)	8.21:1
1st x t.c. stall (2.04:1)	16.75:1
Shift lever location: Console.	
Differential type: Hypoid.	
axle ratio	3.31:1

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



#### CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test weight)	11.64
Cu. ft./ton mile	1462
Mph/1000 rpm (high gear)	22.8
Engine revs/mile (60 mph)	2640
Piston travel, ft./mile	1652
CAR LIFE wear index	43.52
Frontal area, sq. ft.	22.7

#### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	26.6
40 mph	36.6
50 mph	46.5
60 mph	56.9
70 mph	66.7
80 mph	77.1
90 mph	87.0

#### MAINTENANCE

Engine oil, miles/days	6000/120
oil filter, miles/days	6000/120
Chassis lubrication, miles	36,000
Antismog servicing, type/miles	pump filter serviced and belt tension checked/12,000
Air cleaner, miles	replace/24,000
Spark plugs:	
gap, (in.)	0.33-0.38
Basic timing, deg./rpm	TDC/900
max. cent. adv., deg./rpm	36/5000
max. vac. adv., deg./in. Hg.	15/15.5
Ignition point gap, in.	0.19
cam dwell angle, deg.	28-32
arm tension, oz.	19-23
Tappet clearance, int./exh.	0/0
Fuel pressure at idle, psi	7.25
Radiator cap relief press., psi	15

#### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (5800), mph	132
Test shift points (rpm) @ mph	
2nd to 3rd (5500)	85
1st to 2nd (5500)	51

#### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	3.2
0-40 mph	4.3
0-50 mph	5.5
0-60 mph	6.8
0-70 mph	8.4
0-80 mph	11.0
0-90 mph	13.2
0-100 mph	17.3
Standing 1/4-mile, sec.	14.80
speed at end, mph	94.93
Passing, 30-70 mph, sec.	5.2

#### BRAKING

Max. deceleration rate from 80 mph	ft./sec./sec. 26
No. of stops from 80 mph (60-sec. intervals) before 20% loss in deceleration rate	8-10% loss
Control loss? Moderate.	
Overall brake performance	good

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Test conditions, mpg	11
Normal cond., mpg	10-14
Cruising range, miles	200-280