

My 1948 Chevy Pickup “The Heartbeat of America”

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This was my first project of this sort after dreaming about it for years. I did not start the restoration, but have finished the interior, exterior, the engine bay, and performed some undercarriage work. Once starting the restoration, I was “all in”! It became a great stress-reliever from the daily responsibilities of being a middle school principal in a state hard-hit by the Great Recession. I spent more time in my waking hours thinking about the truck than I should; it occupied my dreams as well! The truck was back on the road by August 2009, and it now has over 1,700 miles on the completely rebuilt 235 c.i. six-cylinder engine pulled from a 1955 Chevy. It has a four-speed stick (floor) with a 4:11 rear. The truck is now my summer daily driver in West Branch, Michigan (approximately 90 miles from my home in Alma, Michigan).

The truck was in the service fleet for the Road Department in Mineral County, Nevada (county seat is in Hawthorne) sometime until the mid/late 1960s. I have

corresponded with the man who purchased it from them; it has had multiple owners since then. The truck was originally purchased by the Road Department from the Chevy dealership in Hawthorne, which is no longer in existence. The Mineral County seals on the door sides were compliments of the current Road Department supervisor. I purchased the amber Federal service light and mounted it on a pole in the front-left of the truck bed; the switch is now under the dash. The patched holes from a roof-mounted service light were clearly visible before the headliner was replaced. I’d love to find a rare 1948 Nevada “highway exempt truck” license plate to mount on the front of the truck, which would replace the standard 1948 Nevada truck plate.

Evidence of the truck’s past includes “cleats” of some sort, which can be seen below the tailgate area and the various holes on the side-rails. Holes in various other locations around the truck where unknown items were mounted can be seen. One such set of holes on the upper left of the dashboard was



The 1948 pickup, now restored, was originally owned by the Road Department of Mineral County, Nevada.

for a small rubber-bladed electric fan. I found a rare N.O.S. Casco rubber-bladed fan and installed it in that very same location! Another hole on the dashboard was where the wiring for the vintage N.O.S. illuminated Hull compass is now located. I completely restored the original Harrison heater that came with the truck, which must have come in handy on cold Nevada mornings/evenings out on the Mineral County roads. IF THESE OLD TRUCKS COULD ONLY TALK!

Amongst a very long list of things done to this truck, I've added vintage Guide turn signals, a horn, amber Guide 5-3/4" fog lights, a rear passenger tail light, Guide back-up lights, the side-mounted spare tire, decorative hood ornament, a restored radio/antenna, under-hood lamp (a rare accessory), refinished the bed, and added seatbelts (the only way my wife and son were going to ride with me!). A new old stock Casco cigar lighter was installed. New wheels were painted/striped and mated to a new set of tires, along with new hubcaps. The cab was stripped. The driver's side inner door panel, the driver's side upper hinge detents, hinge pins, and the passenger side door latch were replaced. I had to also replace the driver's side stainless steel window trim. Original "high dome" bumper bolts, along with Marsden nuts, were restored and used on the bumpers. The rear bumper is an original rechromed bumper. An original jack/handle and complete tool set were also placed under the bench seat. A finishing touch was finding and mounting a GM accessory chrome grille guard. The truck was completely rewired, maintaining the original six-volt electrical service. Instrument gauges were also restored.

New friends have been made through the project the past few years—some over the phone, others via the Internet, and many in person. The information, help received, and locating miscellaneous parts from the Stovebolt, H.A.M.B., V.C.C.A., and Chevy Bomb forums has been much appreciated. I also found eBay a good place to find parts.

Younger brothers Joe and John were a big help on the project. Joe was a huge help on the electrical side of the project, as well as the body finish. John completed the restoration by building a set of bed racks/rails out of red oak left behind by our deceased Grandpa K.—"the Judge"—who ironically retired from the Bay County, Michigan Road Department.

Driving the "Heartbeat of America" on a regular basis and attending antique car shows has validated for me that completing this restoration was a very worthwhile project to others as well. Attending the 50th V.C.C.A. Anniversary meet in Flint, Michigan in July 2011 sure was quite an event! The truck has appeared in three "Stovebolt" calendars (2010-2011-2012) and has been featured in the V.C.C.A.'s Generator and Distributor monthly magazine September 2010. It also appeared in Hemmings Classic Car magazine December 2011. A newspaper article was also written on it in the Mineral County Independent-News June 2011. The "Heartbeat of America" has come back to life and lives again, 64 years after its creation in Oakland, California. At age 50, I see this restored '48 Chevy truck as a tribute to the rich auto heritage of our great state of Michigan—which has fallen on hard times recently. Like this truck, we will survive to thrive once more some day again. —



Notice the rubber-bladed Casco electric fan which was added to the dashboard using the same attaching holes that were there before the truck was restored.



The engine is out of a 1955 Chevrolet. Notice the radiator overflow tank on the firewall and the rare under-hood lamp.



The side-mounted spare tire and the orange service light were added during the restoration. The recently-added back-up lights and passenger side tail light are correct "Guide" accessories.