

# SUPER CHEVY

## 1957 Chevy Bel Air Feature - Like Fine Wine This 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air Convertible Only Gets Better with Age!

writer: Bob McClurg

When automatic transmission specialist Hank set out to build his idea of the ultimate '57 Chevrolet Bel Air convertible, he didn't start out with some sow's ear/junkyard dog-kind of reject that would require a miracle from God, a fist full of dead presidents, and an army of expert mechanics and body men to resurrect it. No, not Hank; he started at the top! According to him, "The better the car, the better the results!"

In Hank's case, that "better car" was found through his extensive connections with the movie studios. Believe it or not, this is the same matador red, '57 Chevrolet Bel Air convertible used as the feature car in the mid-'80s lost weekend/road trip flick *Losin' It*, starring Tom Cruise and Shelley Long.



"We completely disassembled the entire car, stripping it down to the very last nut and bolt," says Pro Tech Performance's Mike Astamende.

Then "Big Mikey" and his crew at Pro Tech squared up the frame and welded up all the superfluous holes. After that, they installed a Pro Tech-fabricated crossmember. Once back from a quick trip over to Powder Craft, the all-black '57 frame was equipped with a Heidt's Hot Rod Shop chromed tubular IFS complete with a pair of Heidt's 2-inch dropped front spindles, Air Ride Technologies airbags, and ART "ShockWave" shock absorbers. The front brakes on Springer's Tri-Five consist of a pair of Baer Claw

13-inch four-piston discs, and steering is a McGaughy's GM 605 power steering box hooked up to a GM six-way-tilt steering column.

Out back, Hank's '57 was outfitted with a 3.73:1-geared Currie Enterprises polished Ford 9-inch rearend, sporting a set of Currie 28-spline rear axles, and Wilwood Engineering six-piston disc brakes.



Actual suspension consists of an Air Ride Technologies/ Pro Tech Performance four-bar setup again featuring Air Ride Technologies air bags and ART "ShockWave" shocks. Also along for the ride is a 22-gallon Rock Valley polished stainless gas tank.



Wheels and tires on this little beauty come in the form of 17x7-inch Billet Specialties in the front (rolling on a set of P225/70ZR-17 Bridgestone Potenza radials), and 17x8-inch Billet Specialties in the rear on a set of P255/45ZR-17 Bridgestones.

Of course, that fully detailed 2003 GM Performance Parts Ram Jet 350 looks right at home inside the fully detailed engine room of this ragtop. This 350 small-block pumps out an honest-to-gosh 350 hp at 5,200 rpm and 400 lb-ft of torque at 3,500 rpm straight out of the box.

While the engine is mostly stock, it does feature Street & Performance billet pulleys, Southern Rods climate control, a set of thermal-coated Williams Headers dumping into a Morse Muffler system with DynoMax mufflers, and a Matson polished four-core aluminum radiator and fan.

Backing all of this up is a Leon's Transmissions-prepared 2003 GM 4160-E outfitted with a Leon's shift kit, 1800 stall-speed GM Performance Torque Converter, and an HGM Auto Electronics Comp-u-shift standalone computer. The final link in the Bel Air's powertrain is an Inland Empire polished-aluminum driveshaft.

Bodyman par excellence Stephan Cognata (Steve Cognata's Paint Shop,) gets the credit for massaging the Tri-Five's 48-year-old sheetmetal. He then sprayed the Chevy PPG 2002 Cadillac Red covered by a ton of clearcoat. Once cured, Classic Motor Cars' Bill Corbett color-sanded and buffed the body to perfection. Upon reassembly, the '57 was equipped with a new set of Hagan halogen headlights, Danchuk body trim, and a set of V&C Polishing '57 front and rear bumpers.



On the inside, you'll find a Zuniga's-fabricated custom console (with Lokar shifter) sandwiched by a pair of Toyota MR2 front bucket seats lavished in Zuniga's tan leather with Mercedes Benz tan wool carpeting. The back seat is a modified '57 outfitted with a 2003 Cadillac armrest. Also along for the ride is a Billet Specialties steering wheel, Classic Instruments gauges, and a Custom Auto Sound audio system. Out back in the trunk area, you'll find more of Zuniga's handiwork.

Completed in the spring of 2005 at a cost of \$120,000+, Hank's awesome open-air Bel Air is ready to make its public debut.