

'48 Chevy Fleetmaster convertible was a handsome post-war car

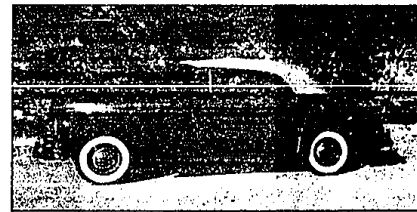
By RICK FERIBUS
AUTOWIRENET - SAN FRANCISCO

The 1948 Chevy was a handsome car. It wasn't low slung and modern like the first post-war Studabaker, or streamlined like the contemporary Packard, but it certainly was handsome. This car was the last chapter in the history of a model line that started in mid-1931.

By 1948 American needed new cars. The old ones were worn out and replacement parts were in short supply. Most of the American manufacturers just started cranking out facelifted '42 models. Chevy installed a wider, less fussy grille and started selling all they could build. The '47 Chevrolets sported an even wider, much more attractive grille and some cleaner, more up-to-date trim. Sales were booming. Chevy set an all-time convertible sales record when it

produced 28,443 units. But the Chevy started to look old by 1948. The '48 was the best of its pre-war line. Chevrolet's venerable 216 cu-in. six had finally been replaced with precision-type main bearings instead of the old rough fit and runners, and a vacuum actuated overhead speed column mounted shifter. In total, 776,000 Chevys were built that year before the lines were shut down to re-tool for the all-new 1949 models.

This particular Drive Report is owned by Gerry Flett of Fairfield, California. Gerry found his '48 Fleetmaster convertible in Redwood City, CA. He bought it, in pieces, from the widow of the fellow that started the restoration years before. After putting out the boxes of unlabeled parts, Gerry was able to find the missing bits and



start restoration. Every part was stripped, cleaned or sandblasted, and either plated, painted or replaced with brand new pieces. The car was then re-assembled, using all new rubber and hardware. The rebuilt running gear was installed into a newly painted metal chassis. The interior features red

leather seats while the power top is covered in tan. Options included the vacuum shift, a spotlight, and a rare set of factory 16" wheels painted body color and correctly detailed with beige striping.

The Classic Drive
This is not my first time

around the block in a '48 Chevy. In 1966, I bought a nifty Fleetline conversion (fastback) from the local butcher in Menlo Park, CA for \$75. Drove it to Woodside High - and to visit my girlfriend on weekends. She had moved over 36 miles away and in the Chevy, with its maximum and a General Electric 6500 cc engine driving 60 MPH, it felt like a hundred miles. I used the hand throttle as a primitive cruise control and my '48 might have been slow but it never once let me down.

A '48 Chevrolet somehow appears larger than it really is. It's high, the doors are big and heavy, and all of the styling components are large. The hood is big and so are the fenders if you count the part that is flaring out on the fender. Still, if you park one next to a Chevy from the mid-'50s, the '48 looks like a

compact. Quite an illusion. This is one of those "arm-lingo" cars that remind you of sitting in grandma's salon. I grabbed onto that bigger-than-life, white steering wheel, tugged the shifter into neutral and pressed my toe down on the floor mounted starter pedal. The little slow-bolt hardly cranked and ticked right over - just like my old fastback (damn, I wish I hadn't sold that car!). The fully instrumented dash sprung to life, the little needles jumping to their appropriate places.

On the road, the car feels big and durable. Gerry's Fleetline sits high, rides soft and smooth and leans like a speedboat in the curves. You sit behind that really big wheel, shifting that easy but slow shifter while listening to the lethargic six moon through its low-and-torque-intensive power range.

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