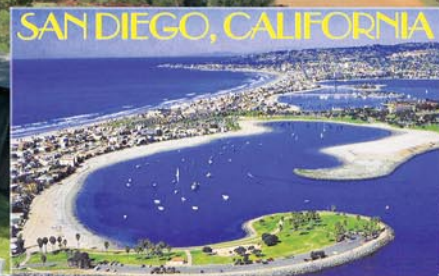


Turn the page...

By Joe Sage



SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA



Really, what's more appropriate than a classic Bob Seger title to introduce the all-new 2014 Chevrolet Impala? After all, the Seger ballad *Like A Rock* has sold many a Chevy pickup over the years. And this new Impala definitely represents the significant turning of a page.

Gone is the familiar though easily forgotten rental and corporate fleet sedan of recent years. In its place is a third-millennium interpretation of the Chevrolet flagship Impala of decades earlier.

Job well done. Job very well done.

The new Impala is, as GM tells us, "the final

piece of the puzzle" in a totally rejuvenated Chevrolet lineup. Chevy Cruze has been the number one selling car in the compact class around the globe. The Spark, new last year, has brought in brand conquests galore, with 60 percent of sales to buyers formerly buying outside GM and one-third of sales being a buyer's first car ever. The Sonic has bragging rights as the most awarded car ever. Chevrolet Volt not only has 50 percent of the plug-in market (and tripled sales in 2012 over 2011), but also has the highest rate of loyalty, period, at 92 percent. Chevy overall, in fact, is up

47 percent since 2010, and GM overall by 40 percent, as all brands scratch back from a brutal recession. (See our Nov/Dec 2012 issue for the launch event covering Spark and Sonic RS, as well as Malibu Turbo, Traverse and Equinox.)

Clearly, dramatic sales numbers are impressive, but all the moreso when compared with what may have come before. Similarly, the 2014 Chevrolet Impala—impressive as it is in its own right—becomes all the more impressive when compared with the model that came before. The prior Impala achieved its numbers through 70 per-



Muscular yet elegant, the new Impala is as complete and utter a departure from the previous model as one could dream of. The interior is on a par with the finest Europeans. And base price is just \$36,580.

(Lower right) On the afternoon we arrived, we drove the new Impala through downtown San Diego to Harbor Island. We had a great experience in this spacious and cozy cocoon but not much of a drive, as it was the thick of rush hour. The next day, we drove all day, along rural highways east of San Diego, enjoying pure, full size American sedan bliss. The brown slash across the hillside at bottom right is the US border, and the rocky hilltop is Mexico.



cent fleet sales—rentals and company fleets. "We are going to flip that," says Chevy, hoping to move in one year to 70 percent retail sales, "and we know how." It does appear that they do.

Their first area of emphasis is on craftsmanship, inside and out. Next is the car's road presence: Chevrolet hopes to get a reaction as people see the car, which it certainly achieved around town and on the highway during our recent San Diego launch drive. Power is upgraded to a 305-hp 3.6L V6. Suspension and handling are calibrated to deliver more of a driver's car—planted and responsive, though not punishingly so. Smoothness and comfort are not compromised.

The reason this new Impala is so far removed from the prior one (and so evocative of the best of its forebears) is rooted in General Motors VP of global design Ed Welburn's dictate to work from a clean sheet... for the team to think as though they were in the 1960s working with classic GM design superstar Bill Mitchell. It worked.

From the first front end sketch, the car took on a premium feel. Grilles and lights are wider, and the upper grille is contiguous with projector lamps. This is the car's "jewelry"—and indicative



KEEP RIGHT >>



The formal reveal of the 2014 Chevrolet Impala was held in San Diego architect Jonathan Segal's penthouse. A 3800-pound Impala was hoisted up to that location to become an informative part of our decor. For lunch during our drive the next day, we stopped at the architect's studio, for a display of his collectible Italian and German machinery and automobilia. Here Segal told us his favorite car is his own Chevrolet Volt. Also on display were a first-year 1958 Impala and a 50-year-old 1964 Impala SS.

of many details throughout. Through the clay stage, the Impala's design theme was that of a spacious six-window sedan—with sleek lines flowing into the decklid. All four rear lamps are illuminated, which you may have never noticed but is unusual on a Chevy. The taillamps also feature subtle aerodynamic details. Exhaust runs through the rear fascia, a feature typically seen on more expensive vehicles. Interiors come in rich tones that are a significant departure from the usual grey of the old fleet Impala. LT and LTZ models have two fashion interiors available.

Corners of the instrument panel are pushed forward and out. A swooping trim strip (chrome during the day and a fine line of ice blue lighting at night) separates the upper and lower areas, while also defining a dual cockpit feel (offering just a hint of Corvette). All buttons have been designed to be easy to see and easy to use—which may sound obvious but bucks a few unfortunate trends from some others right now.

The Impala features Chevrolet's MyLink screen interface, a first cousin to Cadillac's CUE, which we rate far more favorably than some current systems. We took a tour of MyLink with program manager Keith Ramsey. Key to its operation is customization—the screen is reconfigurable by touching and dragging, as intuitive as iOS or Android, whereby you can store icons, move icons, resequence controls or relegate them to

additional pages. As your pages may grow, you can post aliases of favorites to a smaller-icon bar across the top, for immediate access from any page—a neat idea even Apple hadn't thought of yet. You can plug in two sound devices and mix them, so if you have two people on a road trip debating whose music you're going to listen to, you can listen to both, intermingling them. You can pick favorites from a variety of sources and put them in up to 60 presets—not just radio stations but any number of things. These look somewhat like navigation destinations, but can represent for example an artist, so whether you are on your own or intermingling with your copilot, you can touch your favorite button for an artist and hear that artist's music from both of your collections until you move on to something else. With all the dozens and hundreds of stations on XM, you can enter a favorite you want to watch for, when it comes up. There is already a constant information stream for each song on satellite, so it doesn't matter if you're even listening to XM, or to FM or your iPod, but when that artist comes up anywhere on XM, it will tune you right to it.

We've wondered over the past several years why manufacturers weren't working with Apple on these systems. From what we've seen, GM doesn't need to. They're at least as clever.

The new Impala is built on GM's Epsilon II platform, shared with the Cadillac XTS and Buick LaCrosse, as well as a couple of Opel and Holden products in Europe and Australia. We've spent time in the Cadillac XTS and top-rated it—and the Impala delivers much the same experience, closing the traditional Cadillac-Chevy gap more than ever, at a price starting about \$8000 lower.

As with the XTS, we found the Impala powerful, graceful and comfortable, both around town and on the open highway. City turns and freeway sweeps were strong and smooth, with no indication that this is a front-wheel-driver—thanks in part to the same clever MacPherson strut front end with rebound springs internal to the struts that we first saw on the Cadillac.

We rode in the back at one point, in a group en route to one of the presentations, and can attest to noticeable roominess. The new Impala seats five adults comfortably, and if there are no passengers in the rear, those headrests articulate forward to open up the driver's rear visibility.

All in all, it's easy to conclude that you can basically buy a top-of-the-line Cadillac for a Chevrolet price, with the new Impala. A compromise? Or the deal of a lifetime? We love them both, but we think the 2014 Chevrolet Impala represents the return of a great American full-size sedan for a broad audience, at a great price. And it's a beauty. We can't take our eyes off it. ■

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