



OF BUILDING THE FUTURE

L A R R Y E D S A L L FOREWORD BY ALAN BATEY CHEVROLET



#### For all the generations of Chevy truck owners who have made possible 100 Years of Building the Future.



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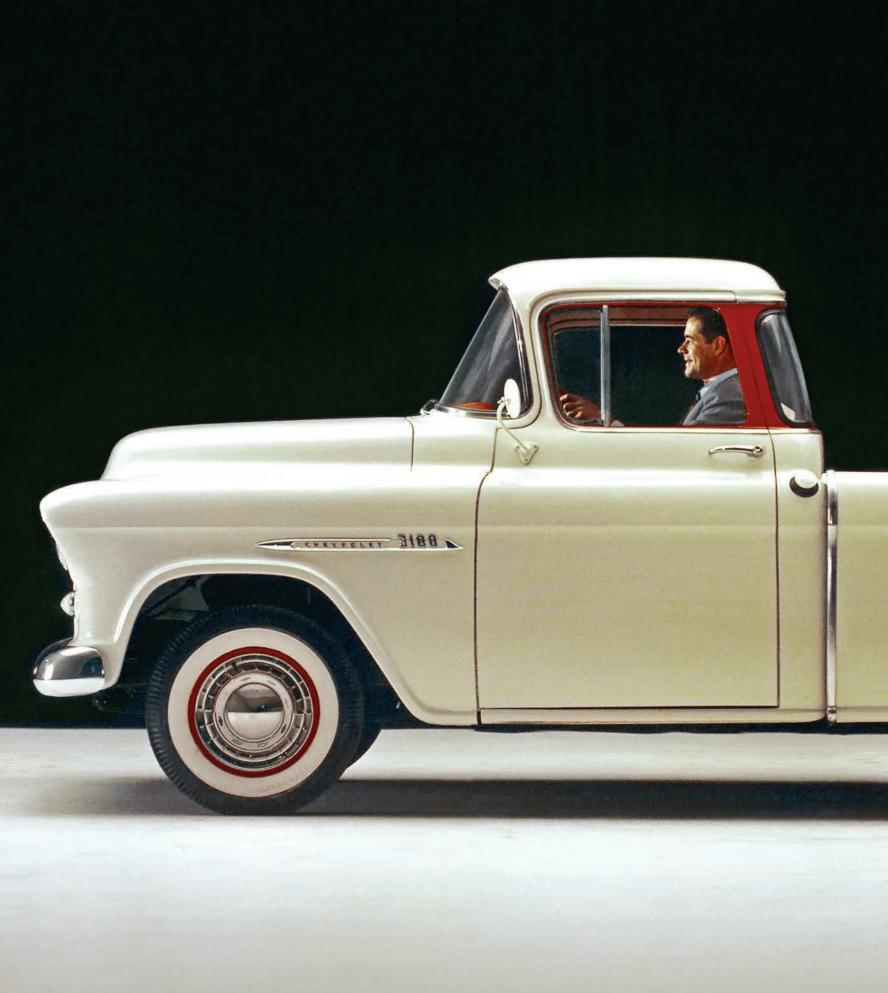
# CHEVROLET TRUCKS

#### **100 YEARS OF BUILDING THE FUTURE**

### Larry Edsall







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### Foreword

To me, the benefit of any history book is the perspective it provides for today, and tomorrow.

Reading Larry Edsall's review of the first hundred years of our truck production is no exception. While navigating the many generations, models, and changes that are inevitable over a century, some patterns emerge that help explain the enduring legacy of Chevy Trucks.

For example, our most iconic trucks were created to fit a specific customer need. The very first Chevrolet trucks were built as parts runners for the factory. We introduced our first fleetside truck bed in 1955 for customers who wanted more cargo room. We introduced our first dual-rear wheel truck in 1973 for customers who wanted more payload capacity.

As a result, Chevrolet has offered a wide variety of choices for truck buyers over the past hundred years. For the reveal of the 1947 "Advance Design" trucks, Chevrolet featured ninety-nine different body configurations on nine wheelbases! This stemmed from the realization that truck customers are too diverse for a "one size fits most" approach. Cattle ranchers and weekend campers both buy trucks, but they need very different trucks for very different uses.

Finally, it is apparent that from the very first trucks Chevrolet built that we understood durability is paramount for truck buyers. People buy trucks to work—whether that work is hauling parts in an assembly plant, transporting a crew of ranch hands, or towing a camper on summer vacation. That focus was evident when Chevrolet drove a half-ton truck, carrying a half ton of weight, ten thousand miles across the United States with no repairs—an incredible feat in 1937.

These patterns are still true today. Chevrolet continues to build trucks tailor-made for different customers, with a three-truck strategy compromised of the Colorado, Silverado 1500, and Silverado HD. We continue to offer customers a wide variety of truck choices, from the agility of the Colorado ZR2 off-road truck to the towing confidence of the Silverado 3500 HD, with a staggering 445 horsepower and 910 pound-feet of torque. Most importantly, we continue to design, engineer, and build each truck with the goal of offering unrivaled durability, which is why Silverado remains the most dependable, longestlasting full-size trucks on the road.

Looking forward, we are confident these patterns will continue to influence Chevy Trucks for the next hundred years.

We hope you enjoy this book, and thank you for your continued support of Chevrolet.

Best, Alan Batey Global Head of Chevrolet



### Introduction

From the beginning, Chevrolet trucks have been designed to meet customer needs and enhance customer lifestyles, whether that involved those working in the trades, fighting a war, or, more recently, towing trailers for weekend recreation. In many cases, features on Chevrolet pickups were rolled out even before customers realized they needed them-something the auto industry calls "surprise and delight."

But this may be the most delightful surprise I discovered while researching this book: because they needed a specialized vehicle to move parts around within their assembly plant, Chevrolet staffers were building trucks for their own use two years before Chevy trucks were offered for sale to consumers.

These earlier half-ton trucks built in 1917 were based on Chevrolet's 490 model passenger car, though with the rear bodywork replaced by a platform for hauling parts and parcels around the plant.

There was a need—and they found a solution. Soon there would be loyal customers from coast to coast and beyond, people devoted to their Chevy trucks. They weren't about to look at another brand the next time they were in the market for a new truck.

Those Chevrolet trucks met customer needs, and they did it while also fulfilling what would become the legacy of Chevy trucks: they proved themselves to be "the most dependable, longest-lasting" pickups on the road.





### **Chevrolet's First Trucks**

Ever since the first Chevrolet truck rolled off an assembly line a hundred years ago, those trucks have been designed, engineered, and built to meet one primary mission: to enhance the owner's life, whether it be at work or, increasingly as modern lifestyles evolved, at leisure activities.

Think of the challenge involved in building such diverse capabilities in a single vehicle, to provide a purposeful *and* practical vehicle while also offering the needed flexibility of service across the spectrum of truck owner demands.

From the start, one of the most challenging tasks for Chevrolet's engineers and designers has been fulfilling the customer's present wants while identifying the customer's future needs, even before he or she had recognized those needs.

It's been that way throughout the hundred-year history of the Chevrolet pickup truck. In fact, it was that way for a couple of years *even before* there was a Chevrolet truck.

Although that first Chevy truck wasn't produced until January 1918, the need for such a versatile, capable vehicle was clear to those working at Chevrolet assembly plants. Because of this need, they took a few Chevrolet passenger cars, reinforced the load-carrying components, removed some of the rear body panels, and replaced them with platforms to carry parts and supplies. *Voilà!* The Chevrolet truck was born and, initially, put into service ferrying various parts from place to place at the company's assembly plants.

Maybe it was the sight of such vehicles and their effectiveness at meeting the chores at hand that led Chevrolet executives to approve the production of their own—and official—truck models. The role of trucks pressed into service with troops fighting in World War I may have been another factor.

It was in January 1918, just a few months before Chevrolet became part of General Motors, that Chevrolet's first seriesproduced trucks, designated as the Model T, appeared.

Those first trucks were open-cab vehicles using the same cowls and flat, but rearslanting, windshields as Chevrolet's clothtopped, open-sided passenger cars. Standard equipment included a speedometer, ammeter, tire pump, electric horn, and twelve-spoke hickory-wood wheels with demountable rims, as well as other essentials.

OPPOSITE: A 1916 Chevrolet 490 passenger car, converted into the configuration that would have been used in a Chevrolet assembly plant up to two years before the company produced trucks for commercial sales. Vintage Chevrolet Club of America



Chevrolet based its first trucks on its 490 passenger car chassis, such as this 1918 touring version appearing in a classic car show. Chevrolet's overhead-valve inline fourcylinder provided motivation, but with modifications to provide more displacement via a longer stroke and more power—37 horsepower compared to 26 for the passenger car version.

Customers bought the rolling chassis (manufacturer's suggested retail price: \$595) and worked with dealers or aftermarket suppliers to secure whatever bodywork was required for their specific needs.

In addition to Light Duty trucks, the Model T also was available in three heavyduty versions:

#### Worm-drive chassis, \$1,325 Flare Board Express truck, \$1,460 Curtain Top Express, \$1,545

In its January 19, 1918, edition, the automotive trade magazine *Automobile Topics* proclaimed in a two-deck headline that such a truck would be coming before the end of the calendar year:

Chevrolet Reveals One-ton Truck With Capacious Canopy-top Body Has Valve-in-head Unit Power Plant and Worm Drive-Speed Limited by Governor-Wheelbase 125 Inches "Regular equipment includes a flareboard body with canopy top on eight substantial supports, and side curtains," the report noted. "The driver is protected by a windshield. The top can be removed by releasing the stanchions where they fasten to the body sills. The loading space is 114<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches long, 45<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches wide and the depth of the body is 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches."

In a shorter article, *Motor Record* headlined its report:

#### New Chevrolet Truck Shows Careful Design

Soon, a Light Delivery truck based more closely on the 490 passenger car was added to the truck line. While the 490 numbers continued to be counted in the car category, Model T production soared to 6,098 units in 1919, with trucks coming off assembly lines in Flint, Michigan; Tarrytown, New York; St. Louis, Missouri; and Oakland, California.

"The popularity of Chevrolet trucks was starting to rise," *The Standard Encyclopedia of American Light-Duty Trucks* notes in its entry detailing the 1919 model year. It also indicates that, while the 490 truck was a carryover vehicle in its second year, the medium-/heavyduty Model T truck benefited from Chevrolet's FB engine.

By 1919, Chevrolet Model T medium-/ heavy-duty trucks were being produced in Bay City and Saginaw, Michigan, as well as in Flint; in St. Louis; Tarrytown; Oakland; Fort Worth, Texas; Toledo, Ohio; and Oshawa, Ontario, Canada.

In the "Instructions for Operation and Care of Chevrolet Model 'T' One Ton Worm-Drive Motor Truck," owners were reminded that the "hardest of all operation rules to remember and observe" was "**Do Not Overload**."

The evils of overloading are understood by most users of motor trucks but there are

many times when they do not make use of this knowledge.

The Chevrolet truck is built so well that it can be overloaded without any apparent noticeable depreciation—but there is depreciation even though it does not seem to be noticeable.

Tires, bearings, differential, worm, wheels and, in fact, every part of the truck is affected by the overload and time will show the effects.

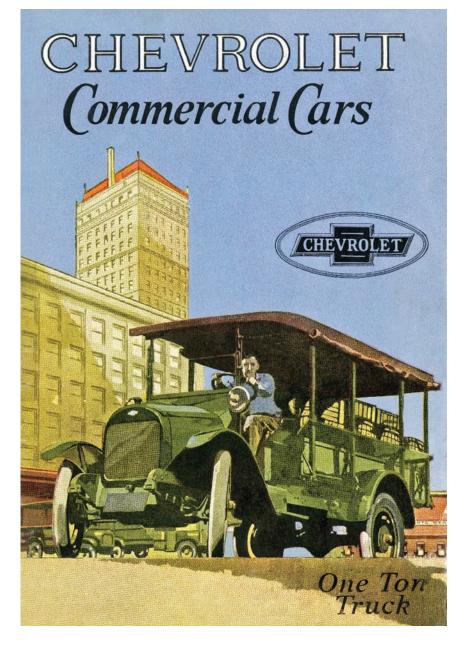
Loads should be watched carefully because the life of your truck as well as your repair expense will largely depend upon it.

Little did the writers of this owner's manual know that Chevrolet's trucks proved so strong and steadfast that they became the most dependable, longest-lasting trucks on the American road.

Although Chevrolet still didn't produce what we would recognize as pickup bodies for its trucks, in 1920 it equipped the 490 line with fully crowned fenders and headlamps mounted on the front fenders instead of the former tie-bar setup. The company also

Remove the bodywork from the cowl rearward on a Chevrolet 490 passenger car and you have the basis for Chevy's first series of trucks.





An early sales brochure referring to Chevrolet's first trucks as "Commercial Cars." offered to install some bodywork from outside suppliers right on the assembly line. For example, buyers could select the standard open version or an express wagon with a canopy-style roof supported by what we would recognize today as B- and C-pillars; there was even one version with three rows of seats. Side curtains were available for use in inclement weather.

The 1920 sales brochure also showed the 490 chassis with delivery and station wagon

bodywork, as well as a "farm wagon" setup for showcasing fresh produce at the marketplace.

Meanwhile, the Model T one-ton truck was shown with passenger bus, fire truck, wholesale hauling, and farm stand bodies.

"Here is a motor truck of unusual strength and endurance for its capacity," the brochure proclaimed.

Yet records of what it has done show that its cost of operation is consistently low.

That is the real test of service in a commercial car. When you divide cost for fuel, tires and adjustments by the number of miles traveled and tons carried, you realize the practical economy of the Chevrolet One-Ton Truck. That is the purpose for which all Chevrolet cars are built—reliable, efficient transportation at low cost.

Speaking of cost, a General Motors internal document produced sometime later explored the cost advantages of a truck versus a horsedrawn cargo wagon and noted: "In the early days of the automobile industry, the horsemen said that while the car might compete with the carriage horse . . . it could never be hoped that it would make a serious bid for Dobbin's job between the shafts of a one- or two-horse delivery wagon."

Dobbin was the period nickname for farm and work horses, but even horsemen of that era could foresee the day, the document continued, when mechanically powered devices might be "capable of carrying five tons, 40 miles a day, or of carrying a load of passengers for 200 miles in a single day."

[It] might lessen the work of the horse by emancipating him from that kind of service, it would really help commerce because it would release so many perfectly good horses for delivery work, which, of course, would always remain the peculiar field for Dobbin.

It was pointed out that a single horse wagon making seventeen miles a day could not be touched by any motor equipment and that the two-horse wagon, traveling 20 miles a day, was perfectly secure in its job.

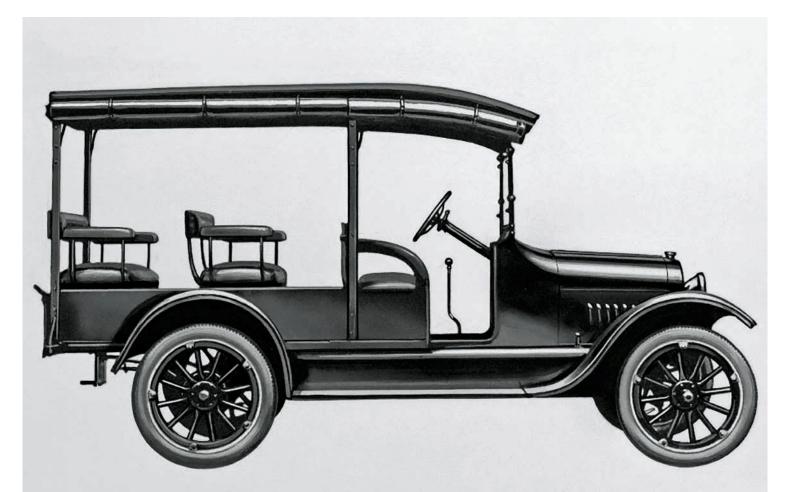
The conventional wisdom—and the practical experience of the later days of the horse-drawn era—was that it cost between \$1.32 and \$1.39 per day to keep a horse "without getting one iota of series out of him." Put that horse to work for deliveries totaling seventeen miles a day, six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, and the cost of horse, wagon, and \$2-a-day wages for the driver is \$4.25 per day, or 28.3 cents per mile.

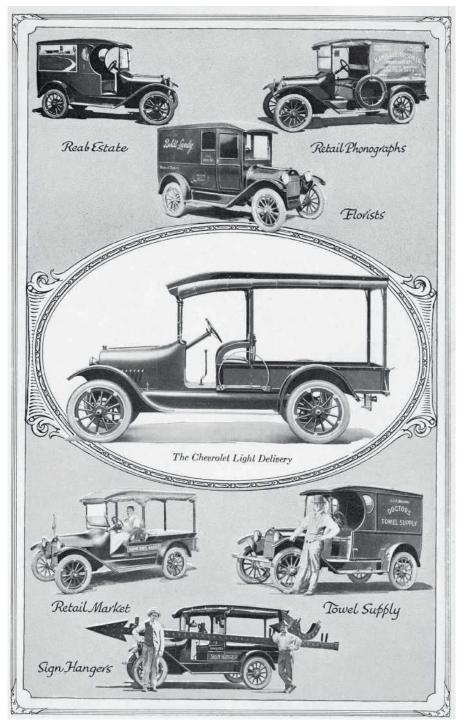
"The knell of the horse is sounded in the per mile cost of automobile delivery," the GM document reported. It costs \$2 per working day to keep a truck capable of carrying 1½ tons of freight or merchandise and costing around \$2,000 in first expenditure. The driver of the car requires higher wages also, and the great companies have found that they have to pay about \$3 a day for such labor. It costs just under 7 cents a mile to run such a truck and as it can make 50 miles a day without strain, the total cost of daily operation is shown to be \$8.50, or 16.67 cents per mile delivered.

The report noted that, in a single day, one truck can do the work of three single-horse wagons, and suggested that there was no point in even making an argument about comparing "big" trucks with horsepower, suggesting that the big truck not only is more economical, but a horse "dragging five tons up a 6 percent grade is a cruelty that should be stopped."

According to the report, farming figured to be the last holdout for preferring horses over

At first, Chevrolet built truck chassis for customers to have "aftermarket" bodywork installed to meet their specific needs. This is one example, a 1918 Chevrolet 490 half-ton light delivery cowl chassis with what we'd now consider an open SUV body and seating.





motor vehicles. It pointed out that "farmers bought approximately one-half of the 753,000 passenger automobiles built for the 1915 season, and there are several excellent reasons why the proportion will increase in succeeding years."

The primary reason, the report speculated, was the expansion of better roads to rural areas. As a result, it suggested, the sales of "motor trucks" also figured to grow. And they did. For 1920, Chevrolet offered the 490 as a Light Delivery Chassis, Delivery Wagon with one seat or Delivery Wagon with three seats, and the Model T as Chassis & Cowl, Flare Board Express, or Covered Flare (sided bed).

In 1921, a new Model G was added to the mix. It was a <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-ton truck, created by taking the front section of the 490 and backing it with a stronger and larger rear frame and true truck axle. The Model G Light Truck was available as a plain Chassis, Chassis & Cowl, Open Express, or Canopy Express.

The sales brochure noted:

This new Chevrolet commercial model is the product of years of experience in the design and manufacture of successful motor cars.

It is built especially to supply the demand for a three-quarter ton truck whose strength and performance equal cars of greater capacity yet whose operating expense is far less. This purpose is reflected in every detail of Model "G" construction.

While Chevrolet still didn't produce its own bodywork for its trucks, the company worked with several suppliers to help meet customer needs. For example, the GM Heritage Center holds a copy of the Commercial Automobile Bodies catalog of bodies built by the Brooklyn Commercial Body Co. of Brooklyn, New York, "especially designed to fit Chevrolet Trucks."

The catalog begins with text that still rings true today, though I've substituted the phrase "pickup truck" (in brackets) for "commercial":

A [pickup truck] body to do the work required of it, must be built with a

complete understanding of what a [pickup truck] is called upon to do. The dependable truck must be correct in design, and be simple in construction. It must be sturdily built of durable material to withstand its loaded capacity, and be able to withstand the daily shocks and strains it must endure.

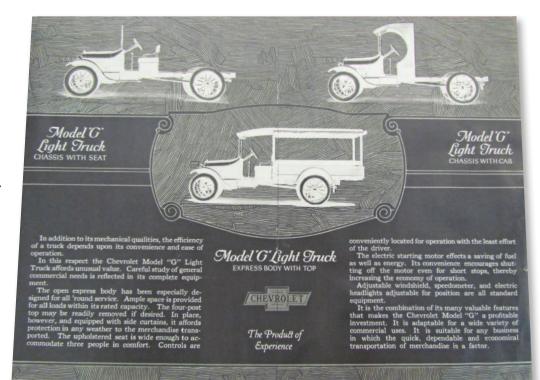
In the design and building of our trucks we have sought reliability and service at low cost. To this end we have incorporated only those mechanical principles which have proven their worth in the hardest kind of service ...

When you buy a [pickup truck] you make an important investment.

Among the truck bodies available in the catalog are those designed for delivering furniture, a stake body for carrying heavy crates or barrels, a body fully enclosed by panels, a six-post express body with side rails and a top (but otherwise open), a cabin express with an open bed but sheltered area for the driver and a passenger, and a "combination passenger express" with sides and roof to cover multiple rows of seats but with large, unglazed window openings.

Well into the 1922 model year, Chevrolet briefly expanded its truck offerings with the addition of a fourth model, the New Superior.

For 1923, both the 490 and the Model T trucks were replaced with the half-ton Light Delivery Superior Series A (to be replaced later that model year by the updated Superior Series B). These were available as Chassis, Canopy Express, Panel, or Station Wagon. In the one-ton Utility



Express category, the Superior Series D came in Chassis, Utility Express, Cattle Body, and Delivery configurations,

again with aftermarket bodywork in the various guises.

The evolution continued. In 1924, Series F (with a new front axle) replaced Series B and, a year later, this was replaced by Series K (with new rear axle and semi-elliptic springs). Meanwhile, D begat H, which now was tagged as a Utility Truck, soon succeeded by J and by M for 1925, when the truck engines were redesigned. The hundred-thousandth Chevrolet truck—a Series M one-ton—rolled off the assembly line at Janesville, Wisconsin, on June 3, 1925.

While this evolution took place, an innovative, even revolutionary, truck was progressing through the Chevrolet product pipeline and was about to appear on city streets, country lanes, and a variety of work sites around the country. OPPOSITE: This Chevrolet brochure shows just some of the variations and uses possible with its 490 truck chassis for the 1920 model year.

ABOVE: Pages from a Chevrolet sales brochure advertising the company's new Model G light truck lineup.





### A Six Sets Chevrolet Trucks Apart

Even though pickup trucks were still in their automotive infancy, Chevrolet worked throughout the 1920s and 1930s to make its trucks not only more durable but more comfortable as well.

They were also more complete as readyto-use vehicles, serving customers' needs straight out of the showroom. Early on, buyers of a "truck" got a four-wheeled vehicle with a drivetrain, hood, cowl, front fenders, and (maybe) a set of running boards, as well as a beefed-up frame and a place for the driver to sit. But there likely was no cabin around that driver, nor what we'd recognize as a pickup truck bed behind the seat. Those were supplied by outside companies, selected by the buyer to meet specific needs and installed either by the dealership or even by the customer.

A catalog for the Brooklyn Commercial Body Co., produced late in the 1910s, shows the company's specialized truck bodies: Style 100 Furniture Body, Style 105 Stake Body, Style 113 Panel Body, Style 115 Six-Post Express, Style 119 Cabin Express body, and Style 120 Combination Passenger Express. Except for the Combination Passenger Express, all were available in the buyer's choice of green, maroon, or red. The Combination Passenger Express, with a full roof, windshield, and rolldown canvas side curtains to help protect all passengers from the elements, offered a russet brown shade of paint.

Several other companies provided truck bodywork, including Hercules, Superior, Columbia, Mifflinburg, Geneva, Springfield, Fisher Body, and Martin-Parry. This last, a company formed in 1919 when Martin Truck and Body of York, Pennsylvania, and Parry Manufacturing of Indianapolis merged, had some fifteen thousand dealer outlets across the country. It noted in its advertising the strength of the "dense long leaf southern pine ... the supreme structural wood of the world" used in its wood-framed structures. The company also boasted in its advertising that it offered specialized commercial bodies "for farmers, contractors, express companies, produce dealers, lumber, and general draying."

For more than a decade, Martin-Parry enjoyed favored status with Chevrolet and, in 1930, the company's Indianapolis plant and commercial-body business were acquired by General Motors to produce Chevrolet truck bodies. OPPOSITE: This 1926 Chevrolet Superior Series X is a one-ton truck that is part of the GM Heritage Center Collection. The hood fenders, lights, and powertrain were shared from Chevrolet's 1926 passenger cars. A stake bed is mounted atop the Series X chassis. Larry Edsall



BELOW: This Chevrolet publicity photo shot on Detroit's Belle Isle in 1930 shows the company's Roadster Delivery pickup truck carrying four golf-club-wielding dancers from *Follow Thru*, a golf-themed musical comedy.



(Dealers' Names Here)

#### QUALITY AT LOW COST

For the 1925 model year, Chevrolet introduced a new generation of half-ton "light delivery" trucks. Known as the Superior Series K, the trucks had Fisher Body–produced cabs with "vertical ventilating" windshields, although those windshields were angled back slightly to give the trucks a more modern design. New technology included one-piece rear axles with semi-elliptic springs.

A year later, Chevrolet started producing its own complete truck bodies for its oneton trucks, with the driver and passenger enclosed in a wood-framed, steel-covered, factory-produced cabin. For its half-ton lineup, Chevrolet added two new models for 1926: a roadster pickup—basically a Chevrolet roadster car but with a factory-installed cargo box in place of a trunk—and a "commercial roadster" with what we would recognize now as a true pickup-style truck bed.





The strength and durability of Chevrolet trucks was dramatically demonstrated in 1927 when a Chevrolet LM series truck built in South Africa carried supplies and communications equipment from Cape Town to Stockholm, Sweden, with promotional stops in Cairo and London.

Having powered its trucks with a fourcylinder engine since the beginning, Chevrolet unveiled a revolutionary development late in 1928—one period publication called it "an epoch in motor car development"—when it introduced its new inline six-cylinder engine. While the engine—known as both the "Cast-Iron Wonder" and the "Stovebolt"—displaced only 194 cubic inches and pumped out only 46 horsepower, it provided Chevrolet with a modern powerplant well ahead of Henry Ford's launch in 1932 of his Flathead V-8. The new engine's updated features included overhead valves and a forged and balanced crankshaft. Chevrolet saw fit to advertise that it was selling "A Six in the Price Range of the Four."

A 1928 Chevrolet Light-Delivery National AB half-ton chassis with a 35 horsepower, fourcylinder engine was priced at \$495, while the 1929 International Series LD with the straight six was only 400 Depression-era dollars.

"The engine represents the latest and best in modern design and construction," Chevrolet touted in its advertising brochure. "It developed unusual power at slow engine speeds; and its dependability is beyond any question—for the five years spent in the perfection of this remarkable power plant included hundreds of thousands of miles of testing at the General Motors Proving Ground."

"The Chevrolet Six boasted ample power, excellent gas mileage, smooth operation, and In the 1920s, Chevrolet trucks still shared their underpinnings with the company's passenger cars. Touting the strength of the chassis, this ad ran in *The Saturday Evening Post.*