

1961 Chrysler Crown Imperial Convertible

The short era of “fin car” styling was drawing rapidly to a close with the introduction of the 1961 Crown Imperial. Many sources believe that Virgil Exners’ effort to redefine classic-era styling elements in the modern idiom had hit a new low in 1961! The Imperial was arguably the worst case. The only Chrysler Corporation make to continue with body-on-frame construction after 1959, the ’61 retained the familiar 1957-60 body shell. Replacing the “Smiley face” front with “Batmobile” wings (as they were popularly called at the time) and a nondescript grill flanked by freestanding headlamps mounted on pedestals in the inward-curving front fenders did not help the image. In a word, it was awful! Especially next to the 1961 Lincoln Continental, elegant, tastefully conservative, and today hailed as a modern design landmark. But Chrysler did get credit because nothing else like it has ever appeared before or since!

Sporting a large 413 cubic inch V-8 wedge, it perhaps made up for appearance with its road handling characteristics. With all the usual add-ons, this example carried a MSRP of \$5776.00 and didn’t sell well. Total manufactured production was only 429 examples! Could this be because both the Cadillac and Lincoln had more showroom appeal and were cheaper???



Because these cars were considered bizarre and oddball at the time, they have now developed a fair following of devoted collectors and are considered a rare find today.

This is the last year of the tail fins. The 1961 Crown Imperial has the distinction of having the highest rear fins on any American manufactured car ever produced. They are just slightly larger than the now coveted 1959 Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz which is rumored to be the reason Chrysler approved them for the 1961 models.



Our nice unrestored vehicle shows the entire spectrum (or should I say spectacle) of these interesting and little understood cars.