

Special-Interest

a publication of
HEMMINGS MOTOR NEWS

AuToS

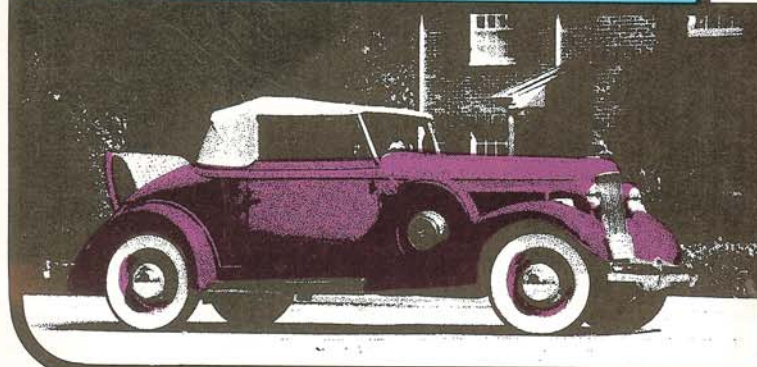
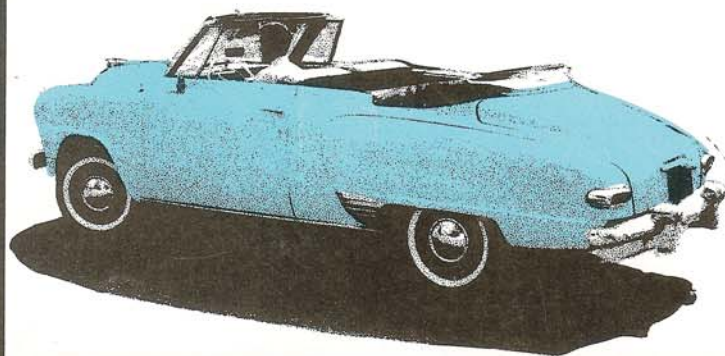
Nov.-Dec. 1973

Price \$1.00



Features galore:

- Fabulous Discovery: a sugar mill full of old experimental Ford engines!
- El Morocco 1957 Chevy customs
- Chrysler's 1930s Experimental Compacts
- Histories of Briggs Mfg. Co. and Independent Front Suspensions



driveReports—3 ragtops:

- 1958 Edsel Citation
- 1947 Studebaker Champion
- 1934 Pontiac 8 cabriolet

plus the usual smiles and tears

El Morocco

The 1956-57 Chevys that Thought They were Eldorados.



Eldorado Brougham illusion is especially convincing from rear. Fiberglass fins use 1956 Plymouth lenses, and bumper bullets come from '54 Mercury.

IF STRAW can be turned into gold and sows' ears into silk purses, why not Chevrolets into Eldorado Cadillacs? Reuben Allender got that idea when he spotted his first 1955 Chevrolet on a Detroit showroom floor. The car looked so much like a Cad, even stock, that he figured the transformation wouldn't be too difficult.

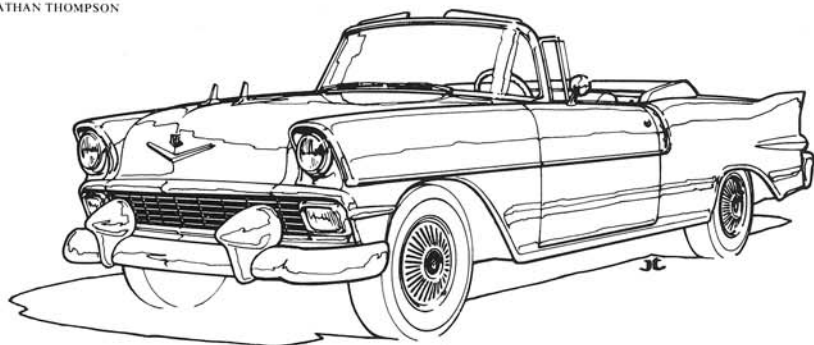
Reuben (Ruby) Allender, a Detroit millionaire war-surplus dealer with a soft spot for cars, met Cyril (Cy) Olbrich, a young engineer who knew the ins and outs of fiberglass, and they worked out an arrange-

ment. Allender provided a shop at the old Alden Park Manor garage on Van Dyke, put up \$40,000 for die models, dies, tools, fiberglass, and prototypes, and Olbrich found himself in the customizing business.

The basic idea was sound and simple: Offer a luxurious but low-priced custom for the commercial market. El Moroccos came with power steering, brakes, and big engines. And most amazing of all, a finished El Morocco cost no more than a new, stock Chevrolet.

Olbrich and Allender worked a deal through a salesman/friend at a

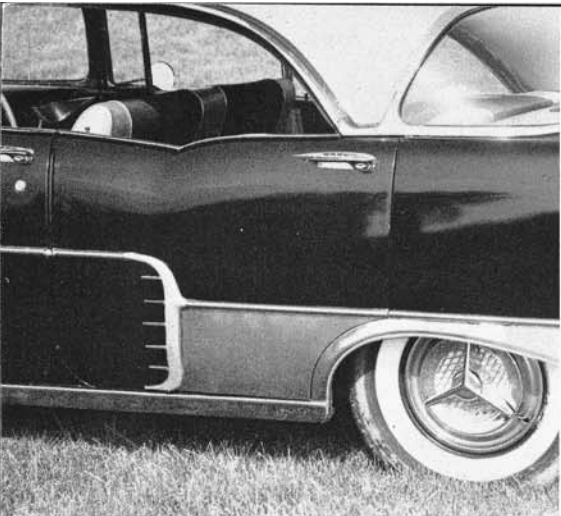
JONATHAN THOMPSON



1956 El Moroccos tried to emulate pre-Brougham Eldo convertible. Twenty were built in Detroit by Allender and Olbrich, but so far as we could determine, none of this earlier version survives.



Moroccos cost same as new stock Chevys. '57s came with 220-bhp V-8s, power steering, brakes.



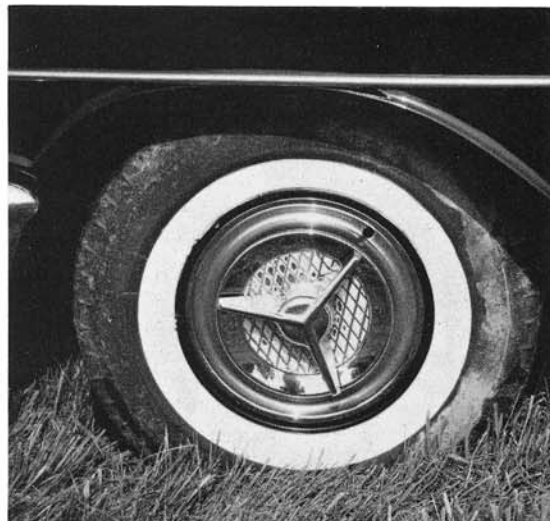
Wettlaufer Engineering in Detroit cast trim moldings. This flank grille is solid brass, chromed.



Each '57 El Morocco got a dash plaque. Reuben Allender had originally hoped to produce 400-500 customs that year. He bought stock Chevys from local dealers at \$50 over wholesale cost.



Coupe looks less like Eldo than 4-door hardtop. We believe about 10 of this '57 version were built. We've traced four survivors. Apparently no Moroccos were ever produced in California.



'57 version used Olds-like spinner wheelcovers that were then available from accessory houses.

ROAD & TRACK



El Morocco *continued*

big Chevrolet agency in Detroit to buy new 1956 Chevrolet convertibles at \$50 over dealer cost. Then, on a crude sort of assembly line, Olbrich and a small crew converted either 20 or 27 1956 Chevrolet convertibles into fair approximations of 1956 Cadillac Eldorado convertibles. These became the first version of the El Morocco. A second, completely different version would follow for 1957.

The 1956 Moroccos sold for \$3250 each, giving Olbrich and Allender roughly \$800 per car to play with. For the '56 version, Wettlaufer Engineering made the necessary special trim parts. In addition, the '56 El Morocco also used 1955 Dodge tail lamps and a modified Chevy hood ornament. The '56's bumper bullets were old Dodge headlight shells turned around backward, and the fin moldings were Willys.

Then in 1957, everything changed, both the stock Chevrolet and the top offering from Cadillac. Enter the Cadillac Eldorado Brougham (see *SIA* #1, pp. 30-35), first shown in Dec. 1956 as a 1957 model. The '57 Chev looked like a natural to customize into a mini-Brougham, and that's what Allender and Olbrich did. Again, Wettlaufer supplied dies for the cast parts—side moldings, lamp bezels, etc. Olbrich made up the fins and filled in the hood where the two stock gunsight ornaments had been. The '57 El Morocco's grille was made of stainless steel flat stock carefully fitted together. Tail light lenses came from a '56 Plymouth, and the rear bumper bullets were from '54 Mercurys.

Cy Olbrich says that only one 1957 El Morocco was built in Detroit before he and Allender parted company. There was a falling out over financing, and the shop was never up to Olbrich's hopes. The sole source of electrical power, says Olbrich, was an extension cord that dropped down from a plug three stories above. At any rate, Olbrich got a job in mid-1957 with B. R. (Woody) Woodill, maker of the Woodill Wildfire sports car (fiberglass roadsters on Willys and Ford chassis), and Woodill and he were planning to build El Moroccos in Woodill's Santa Ana, Calif., plant. Olbrich brought two new 1957 Chevys to California with him from Detroit, but these two cars were never transformed into El Moroccos in Santa Ana. Olbrich and Woodill got too busy with other projects and never built more Moroccos. Meanwhile, in Detroit, Allender put together an additional but unrecorded number of 1957 El Moroccos—probably no more than 10.

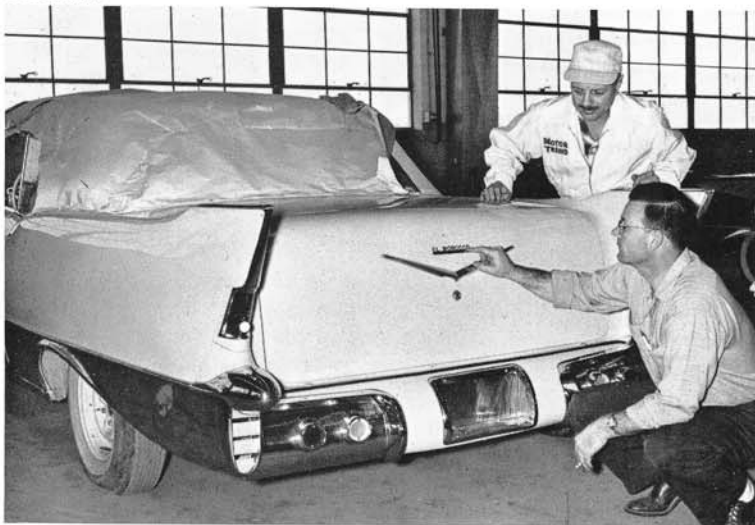
Then in 1958, Chevrolet came out with a new body style completely unsuited to a Cad-like conversion, and the El Morocco project ended.

In all, between 27 and 35 Moroccos were built, counting both the 1956s and the '57 version. Four 1957 El Moroccos are still known to exist, but we've found no 1956s. *SIA* photographed two of the '57s last summer in Indiana—a 2-door hardtop belonging to Charles W. Davis and a 4-door hardtop that's owned by Arthur Heller of Circleville, Ohio.



Stock 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air interior remains intact in black and white. In addition to dash plaque, steering hub emblem was changed.

MOTOR TREND



MOTOR TREND's Detroit editor, Joe Wherry, visited Cy Olbrich at the Alden Manor Park "plant" in '57. Lamps on bumper are 1955 Dodge.

PETERSEN PUBLISHING CO.

