

1970 Chevrolet Chevelle SS 454 LS6 Convertible

This Chevelle became the poster car for muscle car “doom and gloom”—the seller took a cool million-dollar haircut in under four years

by Colin Comer

Photos: Darin Schnabel



Chassis number: 136670B190703

Big changes at GM for 1970 included the end of the corporate edict forbidding engines larger than 400 cubic inches in its intermediate models. Chevrolet's “big-block” V8 was enlarged to 454 ci and formed the basis of the LS6 option, intended to help Chevrolet wrest control of Super Stock drag racing from Chrysler.

The redesigned 1970 Chevelle SS was the perfect platform for the LS6 engine, which was underrated at 450 hp and 500 ft-lb of torque. It was backed by either an M22 “Rock Crusher” 4-speed manual or hard-shifting M40 Turbo Hydra-Matic automatic transmission. Depending on rear-end gearing, which ranged from 3.31:1 to 4.10:1 from the factory, LS6 Chevelles were capable of easy 13-second quarter miles.

Diehard Chevrolet racers Ralph Truppi and Tommy Kling of New Jersey dominated the NHRA's North East Division during the 1960s. Truppi was a skilled interpreter of the NHRA rulebook, relying on brainpower rather than financial power for the competitive edge. Truppi later joined forces with Kling, and found Ray Allen, a talented young driver. The Truppi-Kling team focused on incredibly careful preparation, a major factor in their success.

When the LS6 Chevelle was introduced, Truppi-Kling ordered a Fathom Blue convertible with a column-shifted M40 automatic for a planned assault on the NHRA SS/E class. Their major sponsor was Briggs Chevrolet from South Amboy, New Jersey. The convertible was chosen for its factory-added structural reinforcements, and the NHRA allowed it to run without a roll bar, provided the top remained up. NHRA-legal engine modifications consisted of Hooker headers, an L88 solid-lifter camshaft, and an Edelbrock Tarantula intake manifold. A Vitar torque converter and 5.14:1 Zoom rear end gears were fitted.

According to Allen, while the Chryslers were clocking times in the mid-eleven-second range, “...we went out and ran 11.01, and the Chrysler guys just died. The next week we lowered our own national record to 11.33 seconds.” The Truppi-Kling Chevelle was undefeated in 1970, winning the NHRA North East Division championship, the 1970 World Finals, and the 1970 Supnationals. After the 1971 racing season, Allen moved up to a Pro Stock Vega, and another Truppi-Kling team member, Claude Urevig, took over the LS6 from 1972 until about 1974–75.

The “Killer Car,” as this particular Chevelle became known, ended Chrysler's domination of the NHRA's Super Stock classes at the peak of the muscle car era. It's one of the most important pieces of American motorsports history.

SCM Analysis *This car sold for \$264,000, including buyer's premium, at RM's Icons of Speed & Style auction in Los Angeles, California, on September 26, 2009. It previously sold for \$1,242,000 on January 14, 2006, at the Barrett-Jackson auction in Scottsdale (SCM# 40317).*

This Chevelle became the new poster child for “gloom and doom” muscle car analysts within seconds of this sale. After all, the consignor took a cool million-dollar haircut on this car in under four years. But the last time it sold, at Barrett-Jackson Scottsdale 2006, this LS6 instantly raised the bar on muscle car prices, so it represents an extreme case of extreme swings in the market.

Not much of the NHRA champion was left

Let's look at more of its history. Once it was out of sanctioned Super Stock racing in 1972, it was treated like any other old drag car—they just kept hacking at it to make it faster. When purchased by Ray Allen in the 1980s

Details

Years produced: 1970
 Number produced: Total RPO LS6-engined 1970 Chevelles and El Caminos: 4,475.
 Estimates range from 17–50 LS6 convertibles; 100–500 LS6 El Caminos; with the balance being Chevelle hard tops
 Original list price (LS6 convertible): \$4,800
 SCM Valuation: \$350,000–\$550,000
 Tune-up cost: \$400, including valve lash adjustment
 Distributor cap: \$14.99
 Chassis#: Driver's side dashtop; cowl data tag in engine compartment
 Engine #: Pad below front edge of right side cylinder head
 Clubs: American Chevelle Enthusiasts Society (ACES); The Supercar Registry/The Yenka Sportscar Club
 More: www.chevelles.com; www.yenka.net
 Alternatives: 1970–71 Plymouth Hemi 'Cuda convertible, 1969–70 Ford Mustang 428 SCJ R-Code convertible, 1969 Chevelle 396/375 L89 convertible

Comps



1970 Chevelle SS 454 LS6 2-door hard top
 Lot S127, s/n 136370A135886
 Condition 2+
 Sold at \$318,000
 Mecum, Indianapolis, IN, 5/13/2009
 SCM# 120623



1970 Chevelle SS 454 LS6 convertible
 Lot 653.1, s/n 136670B167506
 Condition 1
 Sold at \$148,500
 Barrett-Jackson, West Palm Beach, FL, 4/9/2009
 SCM# 120172



1970 Chevelle SS 454 LS6 2-door hard top
 Lot S144, s/n 136370A168118
 Condition 2+
 Sold at \$65,720
 Mecum, Kissimmee, FL, 1/22/2009
 SCM# 119450

in Georgia, not much of his original NHRA Champion was left.

The B-J consignor, a well-known broker/dealer from SoCal, purchased the car from Ray Allen in a semi-restored state. And therein lies the rub. The Ray Allen car falls into the gray area between original cars with no fame, and famous race cars that were preserved as testaments to their crowning achievements. As found, this LS6 was not in the same configuration as the car that won the 1970 Nationals, nor was it a well-preserved stock 1970 LS6 convertible, of which fewer than 20 were produced.

Such was the dilemma that faced the 2006 B-J consignor. The car was being restored by Allen to stock LS6 trim, but it didn't have original sheetmetal, the original drivetrain was gone by 1971, and the base car was a column-shift automatic LS6—not the ultimate version by any means.

The value was in its race history, but what arrived at B-J was a restored street car with a vintage drag car appearance. Under the hood was a replacement motor dressed as a stock LS6 unit, with none of the period NHRA-legal speed parts or internal modifications that would enable it to leave the polo field with the front wheels hung high. The race lettering and sponsorship logos were decals, easily removable so the car could be used on the street, and not hand-painted as they were in 1970.

It's hard to get excited about a wheezing drag car

The restoration was decent, but it had driver-level paint and fit and alignment issues. Even the tires were just modern drag racing tires and not proper vintage slicks 'n skinnies that would have really given the car the right look. And it's hard to get excited about a drag car that wheezes onto the stage. More telling perhaps was that the 2006 consignor hoped the car would bring around \$400k—little more than a stock LS6 convertible at the time.

So when two determined, high-profile bidders decided to duke it out on Speed TV and the hammer dropped at \$1.15m plus commission, I knew the best way to get free drinks was to follow that consignor around for the rest of the night. It was a completely over-the-top price based solely on two people fighting it out to the bitter end. The value wasn't based on the car but on its history. Instantly this result pushed LS6 values up 30%.

Which leads me to my opinion on the two high-profile sales of this particular LS6. The first sale at B-J was easily 50% higher than any logical value, while the sale at RM at \$264k was a very good buy for an end user.

Why so cheap? Anyone who can count can figure the world's economic crisis and



the roughly 30% decline of the collector car market was a contributing factor. And if there is a market that has been hit harder than muscle cars, it has to be vintage drag cars. The market has been flooded with historically significant drag cars and prices are in the tank. Besides, unless you have a museum or a private drag strip, you can't really use them; you can't throw the kids in the back and head to Bob's Big Boy cruise night.

My advice for the new owner of this LS6 is to call up Ray Allen and pay him to help you make the car exactly as it was when he last raced it. Scour eBay for an Edelbrock Tarantula intake, vintage slicks, and Hooker headers. Have the motor built back up to NHRA-legal Truppi-Kling specs. Find a retired sign painter who can hand-letter the graphics. Make sure the car is safe, tuned right, hooks hard, and goes straight. Then call me so I can help you get it to the Supercar Reunion next year and we can make a dozen passes and see if she'll still run 11-flats. Well bought. ♦

(Introductory description courtesy of RM Auctions.)

