

# 50 Years of the '57 Chevy



*by Steve Wolf  
photos by Angel Herrera*

The fifties were a time of automotive styling excess. And while there may have been wilder designs, no car better defines the era than the venerable 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air.

Bel Air is a French term which means “Beautiful Line.” 1957 marked the Bel Air’s final year as Chevrolet’s top of the line offering, relegating that honor to the new Impala the following year. 2007 marks the fiftieth anniversary of this icon, which has been well-represented in plastic since AMT first introduced their kit in 1962. Their first few issues included numerous customizing parts, including a unique chopped window assembly; the model’s roof would be cut into sections and grafted to the windows, creating a chopped top. Radical front and rear body sections were also supplied, along with putty and sandpaper to mold everything together! In 1967, AMT offered the `57 in their elegance series. This could be built only as a street custom, was molded in bright yellow, and had blue tinted windows. Packaged in a flat box, it included a can of AMT pearl lacquer. Also produced were 1/43 and 1/16 scale Bel Air kits, the latter in hardtop, convertible, and Nomad versions. In the `80s, AMT was acquired by The Ertl Corporation, and some of the `57 kits were repackaged under their label. For their fiftieth anniversary in 1998, AMT tooled up an entirely new `57 kit. This one had many more parts and much more detail than the old kit, and now featured an opening trunk. The Pro Shop issue included photoetched emblems! Things had come a long way!

Revell first issued their `57 in 1963. The model had three building versions and a surprising number of features for the era. There were poseable steering, opening hood, trunk, and doors, and operational rear quarter windows. The Nomad

version was issued in `68, its box depicting a flamed 1:1 Nomad on a California beach. Both models shared most of their tooling. The grille was a separate piece, could be replaced with an optional tube grille, or the grille cavity left open and a moon tank installed. The front bumper lacks the factory-optional bullets. Unlike AMT, Revell modeled their kit after the fuel injection equipped car. Later issues of these kits deleted the stock wheel option, and wheel choices have varied wildly over the years. Ed Roth’s “Mr. Gasser” made the scene in `63, a 1/32 scale Bel Air snap kit in `69, and two Deal’s Wheels caricatures in the `70s; The `57 Chevy and the “Go Mad Nomad.” Revell also offered the `57 fuelie motor in their parts packs. In 1989 they offered the Tom McEwen `57 Funny Car, and, in `91, the Softseal Pro-Mod car, currently available as the Streetburner. Finally, the new millennium brought the introduction of Revell’s all-new 1/25 Snap Kit hardtop.

Monogram didn’t get into the act until the mid-seventies with their hardtop and Nomad kits in 1/24 scale. In 1986, they tooled up a 3-in-1 hardtop kit in big 1/12 scale. A nice feature was separate side trim which fit into recesses in the body. A rare issue of this kit was offered in K-Mart stores; it included a bonus 1/24 scale Monte Carlo SS kit! Only one issue of the 1/12 hardtop was correctly identified as Sport Coupe. Monogram also offered their fictitious “Outcast” Funny Car. Later issues were Wildfire, `57 Chevy, and Plum Crazy.

Not every `57 issue is included in this overview. All the significant ones are, however, as are all base kits and original issues. What I would most like to see available in the future is a well-done `57 convertible in 1/25 scale. Happy Fiftieth to the fifty-seven Chevy!



The largest Bel Airs are Monogram's 1/12 scale kits. They can be built in any of three versions. The K-Mart only issue included a bonus 1/24 Monte Carlo kit in the same box!



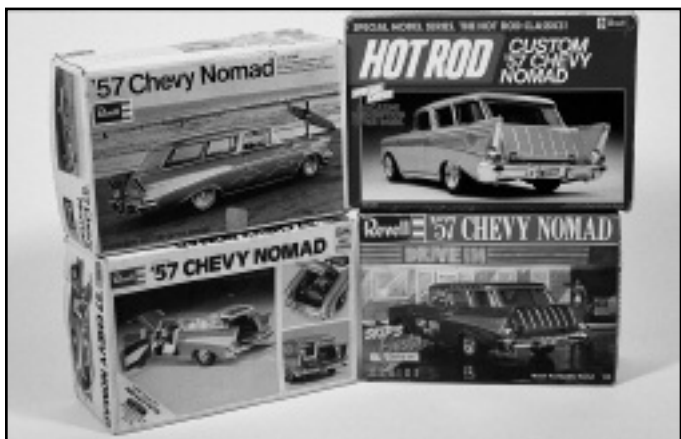
Monogram's selection of Five-Sevens in 1/24 scale. Not shown here is a jacked up street machine version of the Nomad. Hallmark Cards even offered the '57 hardtop in special packaging. The Highway Scenes Nomad came with a cardboard gas station diorama.



MPC released different versions of their flip-nosed street machine, the only sedan ever offered in styrene. Versions differed in wheel selection, decals, and molded colors. One issue included tinted windows.



Slammed, jacked, injected, and blown: there were many ways to build Revell's '57 Bel Air. Numerous versions were offered over the years. The original (top) gets my vote for best-ever box art!



A few years after their Bel Air, Revell kitted the Nomad. Again, Many versions were issued. The wagon featured opening doors, hood, tailgate, and posable steering.

AMT's original (right side, middle row), and subsequent issues of their first '57 tooling. The Elegance Series Lemon Peeler is at top right. The cartoon box issue (lower left) included a cardboard fold-out dragstrip scene.





In the '90s, AMT tooled up an entirely new Bel Air, which included many more separate pieces than the original kit. A curiosity is the box art depicting a 1:1 sedan. The kit is actually a hardtop!



There were three body styles offered by AMT in 1/16 scale. Convertibles are still pretty easy finds, while the hardtop and Nomad are more of a rarity. The Erl ESCI model is from AMT tooling.



Small scale! The Williams Brothers HO scale Bel Air was molded in clear plastic, and intended for model railroading usage. Also shown are a few issues of AMT's 1/43 fifty-seven.



All the 1/32 scale '57s were decent models, but the Gunze Sangyo kit is gorgeous! Pyro, Lifelike, and Lindberg all shared the same tooling. Revell's is the only snap-together kit in this scale.



Here are two versions of Revell-Monogram's 1/25 scale snap kits. These are very nicely molded and proportioned, and one issue includes an excellent set of Halli-brand wheels.



Whimsical '57s were made by Revell, as Ed Roth's Mr. Gasser, and the '57 CHEVY, driven by one Harold Ferndock. MPC's Zinger was based on AMT's 1/43 '57, with oversized engine and wheels.



Alternative five-sevens include Boyd's Chezzoom, two Pro-Mod cars (one for the street), and two Funny Cars. Even the once-phenomenal 283 small-block engine was available as a kit!



The 1957 Bel Air has been well-represented in all of the popular scales. From the diminutive H0, to the impressive 1/12, '57s have been molded in a plethora of colors!



There are infinite ways to build the Bel Air! Here's a couple of this Chevy's versatility.

[www.islandcollectibles.net](http://www.islandcollectibles.net)

**WE SPECIALIZE IN HARD TO FIND RESIN KITS  
IN ALL SCALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD**

**BBR • MG • Q-Model • Fisher • Black Box • Profil24  
ABC/Brianza • Renaissance • Le Mans Miniatures  
Scale Kraft • Sakatsu • Studio 27 and many others**

**IF YOU DO NOT SEE IT - ASK US CUSTOM HAND BUILDING SERVICE**

**PLEASE VISIT OUR ONLINE CATALOG FOR A COMPLETE LIST**



**Island Collectibles, Inc.**

431 Pacific Street Massapequa Park, NY 11762  
516-795-3020 • Email: ed427vette@aol.com