

A VENT WINDOW VIEW – *Color Sells Cars*

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With memories of yesterday already fading it is doubtful that my certainties about events and items in the late Forties are anywhere near the ballpark of truth. Nonetheless, what I recall seems to have some validity, although I must admit that many folks of that era who might argue with me are no longer around to pester me with facts.

Therefore, with that alert posted on this doorway into times past, let me ask you to think back to your observations and memories about those post WW II days and try to recall what you can about the paint choices determined by the marketing staffs advising America's primary car-makers.

Now, there is no reason for any of you reading this to feel embarrassed; like you, I was too young to really pay attention to what colors were popular and certainly few of us ever considered that color popularity had anything at all to do with sales. That was an inescapable fact, at least in the Midwest, where a few years earlier a white horse might have been seen as ostentatious if one had used it as transport to a Sunday Go To Meeting affair. In fact, as I think back to the mid-Forties, the preeminent description of car colors seen on most new models would include the words "somber" and "funereal."

I'll admit that in states such as Michigan and Indiana, places where the snow comes early and sometimes stays longer than anyone wants to hibernate, there may have been some excuse for thinking dark and drab was the right way to go with car paints. Me? Well I'd have certainly been leaning toward something brighter than the dull hues that were the standard back in those days.

I do recall that by 1947 a variety of brighter colors began appearing on the new units arriving from the automobile manufacturers, colors seldom seen prior to December, 1941. Dad, more than a bit careful with his cash, finally traded his never-been waxed, weather-dulled black 1941 Ford for a 1947 Chevrolet in late 1948. The "new" car was blue, a sky-blue that on the car's rounded silhouette tended to remind one of an oversized Easter egg. Still, just like a new box of Crayola crayons dressed up one's desk on the first day of school, it added some needed color to our farmstead.

That Chevy was the most "colorful" rig I'd ridden in since an afternoon way back in 1943 when an uncle rolled into our driveway in his a wine-colored '41 De Soto.

Not only was his De Soto colorful on the outside, its interior trim on the dashboard resembled what one might expect to find in a Buck Rogers spaceship. There is no way for me to know if the same designers who did the exteriors selected the interiors in those years, but they surely had some input on colors. Still, it makes sense to assume that factors such as cost carried equal if not more weight on choices for those finishing touches. That may explain why most cars produced by the "Big Three" offered a rather limited number of interior colors.

Probably their reasoning had as much to do with the fact that husbands, who in that era were usually the ones who chose which vehicle to buy, cared less about a car's interior than its maximum speed as suggested by the numerals printed on its speedometer. Of course, as time moved on, it seemed that fellows who once adored only speed and power were gradually undermined by their, ahem, feminine side. That's when bright colors in stylish combos began to arrive in new car showrooms. And, nobody appreciated that more than me! I've owned cars in that shamed rainbows for color. My favorite was the pink and white Ford convertible that once graced my garage; I wish it still did!