

Back in the 1950's automobiles were anything but basic transportation. A car gave you status, freedom and personal identity. Thanks to the depression and then the war if you had a car it was probably an old crock and almost ready for the scrap heap. But the 50's brought rising incomes and easy credit and by the end of the decade 4 out of 5 American households were mobile.

Typically in the 50's most suburban drive-ways would sport a gleaming automobile, which was lovingly washed and polished each weekend and then taken out for a satisfying Sunday drive. But even though the Americans loved their cars, they did not tend to keep them long. On an average car owners in the 50's traded their old cars in for new approximately every 2 years.

Cars of the 50's had so much character and could easily be recognized. A high roofed Chrysler was not going to be mistaken for a long flat Ford or a muscular General Motors car.

Two of the most distinctive American cars were sports cars; the Chevrolet Corvette and the Ford Thunderbird. The Corvette had curving European lines and the thunderbird had a simple shape, almost no chrome and huge taillights.



1953 Chevrolet Corvette



General Motors stylist, Harley Earl, decided back in the late 40's to add airplane style details to general Motor's cars. He first added small fins reminiscent of a twin-tailed fighter plan and then he added grilles that looked like jet-engine intake ducts. It wasn't long before other manufacturers followed suit and in 1957 Chrysler took the fins to new extremes. The fin frenzy reached its height in 1959 when Cadillac's had rear ends that stood three and a half feet tall, protruding taillights and pointed aft like afterburner flames.



1959 Cadillac Deville (pink of course)

The public were in their element and car design had become a business style over substance and safety issues were just not a popular thought.

Every year of the 50's saw Americans driving several hundred billion miles. This brought about the burst of road side business such as McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge and Holiday Inn.

This decade also saw drive-in theaters flourish and at a time when conventional theaters were being closed down the 50's saw drive- in movies increasing in number from just a few hundred to more than over 3,000.

Entrepreneurs also had fun in the 50's thanks to the automobile explosion and they founded everything from drive-in restaurants to drive-in banks. The possibilities were endless.

The biggest legacy of the automobile decade came about in 1956 when Congress authorized the construction of the inter-state highway system.

Source: The American Dream- The 50's



In the 1950's America was the unquestioned leader in the world; economically, militarily, and technologically. Heads were spinning as new ideas, new products, and new life styles constantly came forth. Even the sky was no longer the limit! Proliferation of television, jets, rockets, atomic bombs, and Rock n Roll all came within a decade.

Where would it end? What was next?

Perhaps it was the automobile?

