

1919 CHEVROLET TOURING

1919 Chevrolet Model 490 Touring Sedan

Owner: Bernie and Janice Taulborg Collection

Original cost: \$735.00

Number made: 127,231 – Series 490

Engine, etc.: 4 cyl.; 3 speed; 171 cu. in., 26 hp; 102" wheelbase; 1,890 lbs.

This model had fixed center posts and a full frame door. Price included top, top hood, windshield, speedometer, ammeter, tire pump, electric horn, and demountable rims.

The first Chevrolet to go on sale in 1913 was a giant six-cylinder \$2,500 "beast". Few Americans could afford the Classic Six and it faced stiff competition from Buick and others in the small quality-car market.

The introduction of lower-priced H-series cars came in 1914. They were priced at \$750 – \$850 and Chevy began to gain ground.

Then came the 490, a car championed by Chevrolet chief Billy Durant and cleverly named for its \$490 price. Chevy was now able to compete squarely with the popular Ford Model T. The 490 was designed by A. T. Stuart, who left Buick in 1915 to become Chevrolet's chief engineer.

Durant, the ultimate salesman, pulled out all of the stops for the 490 launch: ads in New York newspapers, displaying a prototype at a New York auto show, and acquiring a plant in Tarrytown, N. Y., to build it. By June, 1915, there were 46,611 orders from dealers and distributors for the 490's.

The entry-level 490 was a strong seller from the beginning. A closed sedan was added in 1917 and a closed coupe the following year. Both were priced significantly higher than the "open" Roadster.

In 1917, sales of the 490 reached 57,000. For another \$60, customers could add electric lights and a starter. Like the Model T, it was offered only in black. It had only one door on the left and had no bright parts to keep clean, as noted in one magazine.

Aided by a rise in general prosperity and additions to the car's horsepower and features, demand for the 490 helped raise Chevrolet's output to nearly 60,000 units within several years. The success of Chevrolet, fueled by the 490, allowed Durant to take a controlling interest in General Motors in 1916.

In 1919 Chevrolet was second in sales only to Ford with the 490 remaining as popular as ever with sales of 127,231 units. The 1919 model was virtually unchanged from the 1918 model – Chevy apparently saw no need for to change a winning lineup.

GM launched the General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC) in 1919. Its establishment allowed for installment payments over time for financing the sales of GM cars.

It acquired sixty percent of the Fischer Body Corporation, the world's largest manufacturer of automobile car bodies in 1919.

In 1920 GM started construction of the General Motors Building, the world's largest office structure, located in Detroit, Mich. They also invested in other companies.

By 1921 GM was deep in debt, hemorrhaging money, and stuck with 150,000 unsold 490's. The public had realized the 490 was no match for the more durable Model T.

After a reorganization and appointment of a new boss, William S. Knudsen, the 490 was dropped after the 1922 model year.

Sources: Standard Catalog of American Cars, 1805 -1942. Beverly Rae Kimes, et al. 3rd ed. Krause Publications, 1996.

<https://www.conceptcarz.com/z28057/chevrolet-series-490.aspx>

http://www.oldcarbrochures.com/static/NA/Chevrolet/1918_Chevrolet/1918_Chevrolet_V8_Brochure/dirindex.html (Original brochure, 1918 Chevrolet V-8)