



*Spring 2004
Volume 6, Number 1*

Custom Safari Chapter



***Put Me Down Right Now!!!
I Wanna Go Cruisin!***

Pontiac Oakland Club International

From the President's Garage

By Mark Petry

In the Shadow of the Bowtie

In this newsletter, I'd like to discuss how we as Safari enthusiasts are often placed in the shadow of the "Bowtie"...namely...the Chevrolet Nomad. Recently on Ebay, I came across a February 1990 Issue of Special Interest Autos that featured a comparison of a 1956 Nomad to a 1956 Pontiac Safari. I was able to buy it and it in turn made for some great reading. I am passing the article on to Rich to reprint in our newsletter for the club to enjoy.

Owning, driving and showing our Safari for the last 12 years has been a rewarding and at times very interesting experience. I would guess that some of you have had the inevitable experience of having your car compared to a Nomad.

At total production of 9,904 for its three-year run, it has got to be among the rarest of Pontiac body styles. Other than at a National POCI convention, we have never driven our Safari onto a show field where there was another. Because of its rarity, it always draws a crown with the inevitable question...What is it?

I remember several years ago we showed our '56 at the Annual Brunswick Georgia Labor Day Car Show. A middle-aged man walked up to me and started a conversation. "Your car?", he asked. I answered yes and then he responded, "It's a beauty and I want to congratulate you on being one of the best customizers I have ever met." I told him the car was stock so what did he mean? He replied, "Why turning a Nomad into a Pontiac...of course!" After several fruitless minutes of arguing with him, I brought out a dealer's brochure to prove my point. He was truly amazed saying that he had attended car shows for many years and had never seen or heard of a Safari before. I told him that was most likely due to their low production numbers. His last words to me were that he loved the car but "when all is said and done I'd rather have a Nomad because after all it's a Chevy".

Another story to illustrate my point is the following: In GaSCar, our local AACA chapter, a fellow member and long time friend, Leon Helmly, owns a perfectly restored, national show winning, 1957 Nomad. He and I thought it would be an interesting program to park our cars side-by-side to do a comparison. After I methodically pointed out the obvious Safari advantages over the Nomad...such as better power to weight ratio, four-speed versus two speed transmission, and a plusher interior. Leon went on to describe Nomads. Shockingly, when he was through, he announced to the group that although he's a Chevy guy, he had to admit the Safari was a better all-around car. However, I polled the members with the question...If you had to go back in time and buy one new which one would you choose? Surprisingly, only five of thirty members attending stated they would buy a Safari stating, "After all it's a Nomad".

I think the last paragraph of the Special Interest Autos makes my point better than I ever could. It read, "The Nomad and Safari are comparable in so many ways, both are highly desirable, but although the Safari was costlier when the cars were new, and despite the fact that it is more powerful and much rarer, on the collector car market the Nomad is more than half again more valuable. Now how do you figure that?"

Well that's about it for now. Enjoy the article. I hope to see as many of you possible at the POCI National convention this July in Joplin, Missouri. Don't forget the Custom Safari Chapter meeting on Wednesday, July 7th, 9am in the Chestnut Room at the Holiday Inn.

Thanks, Mark Petry

Behind the Wheel in the Editor's Seat

By Rich Pye

Hello Everyone,

Well as you can see by the front cover, I still don't have that '57 on the road yet. It's been up and down on my lift a few times, but time has been at a premium and there's too much to do to get it going. I did find a neat pair of 1957 New York "Suburban" license plates for it on eBay and registered it as a Vintage vehicle. You can see one of them in the picture.

Trying to get it on the road as soon as possible, I started with the brakes and thought the brake booster was shot, but it turned out to be the pedal was bound up and wouldn't spring back. A little teflon grease and that was fixed, but the brake cylinders are messed and I have to replace at least two of them because they won't bleed. Also the engine sounds and runs like crap and I'm hoping that's carburetion. I did get the fender off to bang that out and to straighten out the stainless, but that's where it sits. Does anyone have any of the fender stainless or know where you can get the engine paint? NAPA used to sell the Olds/Pontiac green #7888, but it's been discontinued. If you do have any of these parts or info, please contact me. After the 4th of July I'm hoping to spend some concentrated time on it. I'm also going to be throwing one of my '55 Safaris on eBay, so if anyone's interested, let me know. It is all original, but in need of total restoration. It's also buried in my barn, which is another story for later.

Thanks to Mark Petry for sending the article on the 1956 Nomad to Safari comparison. The article is a good one and a long one also. It's from a 1990 Special Interest Autos magazine and contains some neat information. I retyped most of it so that you could read the text better. Scans often make the text very difficult to read. Therefore, it didn't all fit into this issue, so I'll finish it up in the next one.

On the convention front, I am not going this year for the first time since 1998. I desperately need somebody or somebodies to volunteer to take a good sample of digital pictures or film ones for that matter. I'll need shots of the Safari Class and any other Safaris in the points judging or modified classes. Also pictures from the Chapter Meeting and the Breakfast Cruise if one gets organized. I'd also like any of the concept cars, swap meet, etc. I will be using them in the next article for everyone to enjoy. Maybe somebody can even write an article about the convention highlights..... A room has been reserved at the host hotel for Wednesday, July 7th at 9am for the Chapter meeting, (note the time change from the last issue). It is in the Chestnut room at the Holiday Inn. They recommended for our Safari Cruise Breakfast: Granny Shaffers on 707 Illinois Ave, Joplin, MO. Check the message board at the convention for exact info on that or hunt down Mark Petry or Starr Evans!

Speaking of articles. You are all going to get bored to death with me giving you a blow-by-blow description of my adventures with my cars. Please, Please send me some information and stories about your car. Every time I sit down to write the newsletter I have no clue where to start. That's why each seasonal issue comes out at the end of the season! I don't want to dread doing this. Please send me some info.

New member Thom Outen is currently working on a new T-Shirt for the chapter. If you have any ideas on designs, please forward them to me. Otherwise we'll be going with the logo on the web site, (the design from the golf shirts), or something similar with the cars at a better angle. These will be actual T-Shirts and be considerably less expensive than the golf shirts.



Pontiac's flair for years-ahead styling was never more evident than in the fabulous all-new Safari.

Have Fun at the Convention!!

Rich

Safari Member of the Quarter

Your Name: Rich Gabrielson

Spouse's name: Pam

Child(ren)'s name(s) and age(s): Jane, Carolyn, Julie, Ken, Valerie, Debbie, Rob, Lyn, + 15 Grandkids

Safari(s) Owned: My Rusty '55 and a rust free body and frame

When/Where did you acquire your first Safari? See the March 1995 Smoke Signals

What was your first car? 1938 Chevy Coupe – Paid \$49.00 for it with money from my paper route. I was 13.

What was your first Pontiac? 1957 Super Chief – lowered, tuck and roll, chrome wheels and a Chevy overdrive transmission in 1962.

Reason for “collecting” Safaris: I remember loading groceries into one owned by a Doctor's wife....Love at first sight.

Reason for joining the Custom Safari Chapter: To meet other owners and expand and share knowledge

Favorite Safari Accessory owned: Lighted hood ornament purchased at a Swap Meet for \$40.00

Most wanted Safari Accessory: Power Antenna

Do you have “other” Pontiacs? If so, list model and year: My bright orange '55 Chieftain 2 door post – See March 1995 Smoke Signals

What are your favorite non-Pontiac hobbies? Buying cheap old cars, fix them up and sell them to build-up my Safari fund, also EBay buying and selling

Least favorite car task: Rust

Most favorite car task: Detailing

Best thing about being a Pontiac Custom Safari Owner: It's an exclusive Group

Favorite non-Safari car: '55 Chieftain, '61 Ranchero, '57 T-Bird (our other cars)

Favorite car-related web site: Wheat's Nostalgia

Favorite parts vendor: EBay

Best car care tip to share: Check your hood safety latch – I lost my hood on the freeway because the return spring was rusted and the square hole had worn a notch.



Safari Member of the Quarter

Rich and Pam Gabrielson



Above is Rich and Pam Gabrielson's 1955 Safari, Ponchita, hanging out in the driveway.

If you look closely in the picture above, you may be able to see the silver loving cup sitting on the hood of Rich and Pam Gabrielson's '55 Safari. Yes, their rusty Safari's fame is spreading, earning them first place in the "Under Construction" class at the Long Beach Western Regional car show in 2003.

Also, if you still have your January, 2004 issue of the Smoke Signals, check out page 22. Rich says that he "almost" feels guilty that out of the 6 or 7 beautiful Safari's in attendance, they printed the photo of the ugliest one. It was probably the duct tape over the rust holes in the roof that caught their attention. Rich says that he used a Sharpie marker to write the following ad on the duct tape: "Safari Winterizing Kit, call 1-800-GOT RUST for pricing and instructions". Pretty good attention getter, I'd say. They were also surprised that he had driven over 400 miles each way to the show. Rich claims that "Ponchita's" looks are deceiving, as mechanically she is pretty much done. Her gas mileage was averaging between 15 and 17 miles per gallon. That's important these days with gas prices through the roof. The only sweating out they had to do was during the trip home when the left front inner wheel bearing was growling toward the end of the trip, but they got home fine.

Rich really enjoyed the show and not just because they won. They were able to renew friendships and meet new Safari owners. The show was well thought out and put on. Pam particularly liked being able to pick what she wanted to win in the raffle. The silver loving cup isn't as nice as an illuminated hood ornament, but it's better than a trophy with a Ford on top of it!! Congratulations Rich and Pam!

'56 Chevy Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

Special Interest Autos #115, Feb, 1990

SIA comparisonReport

GM's High-Styled Wagons



1956 Chevrolet Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

by Arch Brown
photos by Bud Juneau

'56 Chevy Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

Special Interest Autos #115, Feb, 1990

Those of us who visited the nation's automobile showrooms during the mid-1950s found plenty of excitement awaiting us. For after a very long dry spell, the result of wartime restrictions and the "seller's market" that followed when hostilities ceased, the industry was on the move once more. Styling was fresh, new body styles had appeared, and many of the cars fairly bristled with engineering innovations, not the least of which was a new breed of powerful, highly efficient V-8 engine.

- Headlining the latest styling trends were the "hardtop" convertible – a misnomer, of course, since they didn't convert at all. But with the elimination of centerposts they bore at least a superficial resemblance to the fashionable ragtops, while avoiding most of the latter's squeaks, rattles and water leaks.
- Station wagons, whose share of the total market had been almost negligible prior to 1949, had suddenly caught on. Partly the difference was due to the lower cost and simplified maintenance of the all-steel body, popularized during the postwar era by Willys-Overland and Plymouth. Partly the shift had to do with America's move to the suburbs. And partly it was simply that, for the time being at least, big families were in vogue once more.
- V-8 engines had come to dominate the scene. By 1955 Chevrolet, Hudson, Nash, Packard, Plymouth and Pontiac – the last of the holdouts, apart from the moribund Kaiser-Willys combine – were offering modern, short-stroke, overhead-valve V-8s either as standard equipment or on an optional basis.



Above: Judging from the front end designs alone, it would be hard to believe that these two cars came from the same corporation. Below: Positions of model i.d. script are totally different, too. Pontiac's goes on the sides, while Chevy stick theirs on the tailgate.



Perhaps it was predictable that it would be General Motors that would combine these trends – station wagon utility, hardtop styling and V-8 engines – in one handsome vehicle. Or rather in two of them, representing the Chevrolet and Pontiac Divisions, respectively.

'56 Chevy Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

Special Interest Autos #115, Feb, 1990

The concept came from one of Harley Earl's legendary "dream" cars, the 1954 Corvette Nomad. First displayed at the year's Motorama, the prototype bore a fiberglass body patterned after Chevrolet's recently introduced sports car, though its chassis was that of a conventional 1953 Chevy station wagon. The front clip was pure Corvette, while the passenger and cargo areas were surrounded by expanses of glass not unlike those that characterized the sporty hardtop coupes of that era. Quite unlike anything ever before seen on a station wagon!

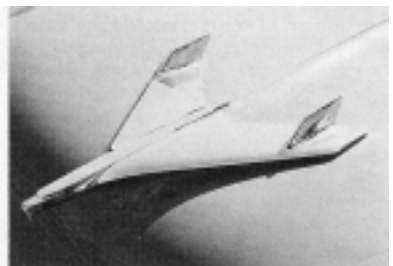
Reportedly Harley Earl, General Motor's veteran styling chief, took a particular interest in the development of the Nomad. It is said that at one point he toyed with the idea of a stainless steel roof that would telescope, after the fashion of the old-fashioned aluminum drinking cups that we used to take on camping trips. That notion, however, was deemed impractical, partly because a stainless steel roof of any kind is too expensive a proposition for a "low-priced" car and partly because it would almost inevitably leak.

Earl did, however, adorn the Nomad's roof with nine grooves running the width of the car. In an interview with the Saturday Evening Post, quoted by Pat Chappell, he explained why: "I was observing the [Corvette] Nomad station wagon in the 1954 Motorama, and it was clear that my long-time effort to lower American automobiles had indeed succeeded. I was looking right across the top of the Nomad's roof. And there was visible evidence that every accomplishment can raise a new problem. To an average man, the Nomad's roof was now visible as a part of the car's conformation. So, for perhaps the first time in automobile history, we had to give this unbroken roof expanse a decorative treatment. We grooved it. I hope designing is always like that."

The Nomad was not, of course, a true hardtop, either in prototype form or in its production guise. There was a stout, forward-sloping "B" pillar just behind each of its two doors, and in order to avoid the hazards of a cantilevered roof, slim pillars were used at the rear corners as well. The panache and the open feeling of the hardtop were preserved, however, resulting in what many observers still regard as the smartest station wagon styling of all time.



Above and below: In profile their common corporate origins become much more apparent. Above right: Pontiac's hood ornament antedated the Stealth Bomber by over three decades. Below right: Chevy's ornament is recognizable as modernized eagle.



'56 Chevy Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

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1956 Pontiac Table of Prices, Weights and Production

	Price	Weight	Production
Chieftain 860 Series (122" w/b)			
Sedan, 2-door	\$2,201	3,436 lb.	41,908
Sedan, 4-door	\$2,259	3,496 lb.	41,987
Catalina Coupe	\$2,331	3,496 lb.	46,335
Catalina Sedan	\$2,404	3,561 lb.	35,201
Station Wagon, 2-door	\$2,529	3,596 lb.	6,099
Station Wagon, 4-door	\$2,613	3,691 lb.	12,702
Chieftain 870 Series (122" w/b)			
Sedan, 4-door	\$2,374	3,496 lb.	22,082
Catalina Coupe	\$2,441	3,496 lb.	24,744
Catalina Sedan	\$2,279	2,495 lb.	25,372
Station Wagon, 4-door	\$2,709	3,641 lb.	21,674
Star Chief Series (124" w/b)			
Sedan, 4-door	\$2,448	3,561 lb.	18,346
Convertible Coupe	\$2,818	3,781 lb.	13,510
Star Chief Custom Series (124" w/b)			
Catalina Coupe	\$2,626	3,551 lb.	43,392
Catalina Sedan	\$2,696	3,631 lb.	48,035
Safari Station Wagon*	\$3,089	3,626 lb.	4,042

1956 Chevrolet Table of Prices, Weights and Production

	Price*	Weight	Production
Series One-Fifty			
Utility Sedan	\$1,799	3,095 lb.	11,196
Sedan, 2-door	\$1,891	3,130 lb.	66,416
Sedan, 4-door	\$1,934	3,170 lb.	29,898
Station Wagon, 2-door	\$2,236	3,310 lb.	17,936
Series Two-Ten			
Sedan, 2-door	\$1,977	3,160 lb.	205,545
Sedan, 4-door	\$2,020	3,195 lb.	283,125
Delray Coupe	\$2,036	3,160 lb.	56,382
Sport Coupe (hardtop)	\$2,128	3,200 lb.	18,616
Sport Sedan (hardtop)	\$2,182	3,260 lb.	20,021
Station Wagon, 2-door, 6-pass.	\$2,280	3,330 lb.	22,038
Station Wagon, 4-door, 6-pass.	\$2,328	3,380 lb.	113,656
Station Wagon, 4-door, 9 pass.	\$2,413	3,425 lb.	17,988
Bel Air Series			
Sedan, 2-door	\$2,090	3,170 lb.	104,849
Sedan, 4-door	\$2,133	3,210 lb.	269,798
Sport Coupe (hardtop)	\$2,241	3,200 lb.	128,382
Sport Sedan (hardtop)	\$2,295	3,265 lb.	103,602
Convertible Coupe	\$2,409	3,325 lb.	41,268
Station Wagon, 4-door, 9-pass.	\$2,547	3,450 lb.	13,628
Nomad Station Wagon	\$2,673	3,400 lb.	7,886

* Prices are shown are for eight-cylinder models. Six-cylinder cars were price \$99 lower.

Note: All prices shown are f.o.b. factory with standard equipment, federal excise tax included.

(Prices and weights were taken from *Automotive Industries*, March 15, 1956. Production figures are from Jerry Heasley's *Production Figure Book for U.S. Cars.*)

'56 Chevy Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

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A number of Chevrolet staffers wanted to see the Nomad produced as a station wagon version the Corvette, using the latter's 102-inch wheelbase and fiberglass construction. In the end, however, that idea was deemed impractical, partly because the Corvette chassis – more than a foot shorter than the “regular” Chevrolet – was regarded as too small, and partly as the result of what was perceived as the Corvette's limited sales appeal. So the Corvette Nomad, with its 115-inch chassis, might be thought of as a brilliant compromise.

The handsome wagon was so enthusiastically received at the Motorama that Harley Earl tried grafting the Nomad greenhouse to the lower body of the forthcoming 1955 Chevrolet station wagon. The mock-up looked sensational, and the directive came down: Build it! It was January 1954 by the time – scarcely nine months to go before the scheduled 1955 model introduction. No way could the car be ready that fast, particularly since it was found that from a practical standpoint very little of the standard station wagon's sheet metal could be shared with the Nomad.

The delay may have been a blessing in disguise. There's more than a touch of drama in the mid-year introduction of a new model, especially if it is a uniquely styled, head-turning beauty like the Nomad. A crash program was undertaken, and by January 1955 some 300 prototypes – partially hand-built – were ready for display as part of Chevrolet's Bel Air series. The formal introduction came at the 1955 Motorama, held as the 1954 show had been at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City.

By that time, the recently introduced 1955 Chevrolets had already created considerable excitement. Nearly an inch shorter overall than their 1954 counterparts, they somehow seemed longer than they really were. Probably the principal factor in creating this illusion had to do with height. For at 62.1 inches the 1955 cars stood 2.7 inches lower than the '54s. Lines were sleek and smooth, while the new grille had clearly been inspired by that of the Ferrari.

And of course the new model's striking good looks were only the beginning of the story. For although the hoary “stove-bolt six” was still the Chevy's basic power plant, a sensational new V-8 engine was available on all models. Not since the unlamented Series “D” of 1917-18 had Chevrolet built an eight-cylinder automobile. And this time, as every car enthusiast knows, they got it right. Designed by Ed Cole and Harry Barr, Chevrolet's chief engineer and assistant chief engineer respectively, the new engine was 41 pounds lighter than the company's six-cylinder job. Displacing 265.1 cubic inches (compared to 235.5 for the six) it was rated at 162 horsepower – or 180 with an optional “power-pack” consisting of a four-barrel carburetor and dual exhausts. No previous Chevy had ever developed more than 136 horsepower.

Chevrolet billed the new V-8 as “The Hot One,” and the motoring press agreed. Motor Trend tested the 162-horsepower version, tied to the Powerglide automatic transmission. Some months later their crew made a similar test of a six-cylinder car, fitted with the standard transmission and overdrive. The difference in acceleration times was substantial – and doubtless would have been much greater had the two cars been equipped with comparable transmissions:

	V-8 Automatic	6 Cyl./Overdrive
0-30 mph	4.3 seconds	4.7 seconds
0-60 mph	12.3 seconds	15.3 seconds
10-30 mph	3.1 seconds	4.1 seconds
30-50 mph	4.4 seconds	7.2 seconds
50-80 mph	15.5 seconds	17.7 seconds

'56 Chevy Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

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And with the 180-horsepower engine, the figures looked even better: zero-to-sixty in 11.4 seconds, 50-80 in 12.9.

Tom McCahill, writing *Mechanix Illustrated*, called the new Chevy V-8, "the most glamorous looking and hot-test performing Chevy to come down the pike." *Popular Mechanics*' Floyd Clymer called it the "best-handling Chevrolet I have ever driven." Even *Consumer Reports*, generally the industry's severest critic, had praise for the new car's handling and performance.

Pontiac, meanwhile, was endeavoring to create a new image of its own. It would be two more years before a new general manager, Semon E. "Bunky"

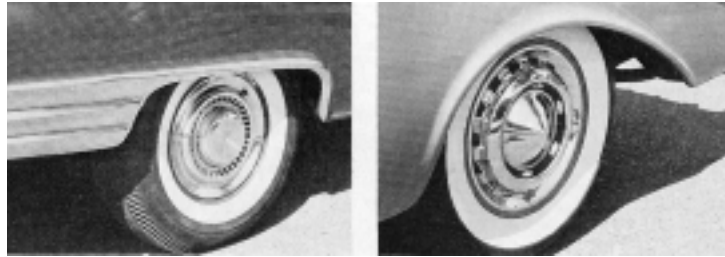
Knudsen would strip the Pontiac of its familiar Silver Streaks and go after the burgeoning youth market. But already Pontiac was increasing its appeal to the younger driver. Like the Chevrolet, Pontiac's 1955 line was completely restyled, using the new General Motors "A" body on a larger, heavier chassis than that of the Chevy. Lines were smoother; more rounded, and well, sexier. Naturally, when the Pontiac people saw the Corvette Nomad and learned that a production version was in the works, they wanted a "Nomad" of their own.

The result was the Safari, combining the Nomad's smart "hardtop" design with typical Pontiac styling touches.

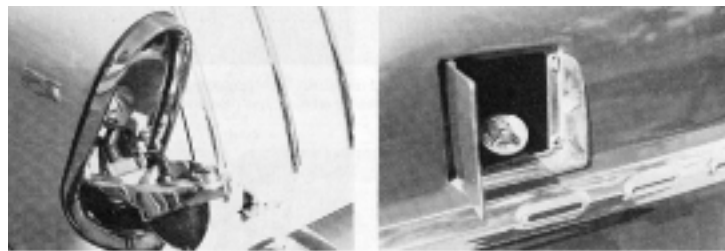
Nor was performance neglected. Consider how the 1955 Star Chief's performance compared to its 1954 counterpart, the last in Pontiac's long line of flathead straight-eights (figures taken in from road tests by Motor Trend):

	1955	1954
0-30 mph	4.4 seconds	5.0 seconds
0-60 mph	13.8 seconds	17.4 seconds
10-30 mph	3.7 seconds	4.4 seconds
30-50 mph	6.2 seconds	7.8 seconds
50-80 mph	17.4 seconds	19.6 seconds
Top Speed	100.3 mph	92.8 mph

Like Chevrolet, the 1955 Pontiac had a brand new, state-of-the-art V-8. Only in Pontiac's case, the new mill replaced both the six- and eight-cylinder engines of the previous year. It wasn't the first time the division had used the V-8 configuration. Often forgotten is the fact that in 1932, the senior Pontiac had been powered by an engine of that type, inherited from the recently discontinued Oakland automobile. That model had been produced for only three short months, however, for a total of just 6,281 units; so the 1955 car represented the first Pontiac V-8 to be built in substantial numbers.



Above: Pontiac's wheel covers could belong to Anycar, while Chevy's bowtie design provides brand identity to their covers. **Below:** Chevy's fancy hidden filler cap contrasts with Pontiac's fundamental fender door.



'56 Chevy Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

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Above and below: Due to shape of body and window, rear passengers get sliding glass in place of roll-ups. Right: Pontiac cargo area treatment is much more posh than Chevy's.



Developed under the leadership of staff engineer Mark Frank, Pontiac's new engine was – like that of the Chevrolet – of oversquare design. In an effort to reduce manufacturing costs, the division had experimented for a time with L-head V-8s. But the project went nowhere because the breathing characteristics of a side-valve engine do not take kindly to the higher compression ratios that were coming into general use at that time. So, following the lead of sister divisions Cadillac, Oldsmobile and Buick, Pontiac – like Chevrolet – settled on a 90-degree monobloc of over-head valve design.

A unique feature of the Pontiac V-8 engine was the elimination of the rocker arm shafts, a move which resulted in a substantial savings in weight, and in manufacturing costs as well. The new valve gear was developed by assistant staff engineer Clayton Leach, working at home on his own time. Some reviewers, notably Floyd Clymer, were skeptical, but the mechanism proved to be both efficient and durable.

Norbye and Dunne have explained its function: "Each rocker arm was individually mounted on a ball pivot mounted on a stud extending from the cylinder head... The studs were pressed into the cylinder head, with the ball bolted on. Stamped steel rocker arms were cyanide-hardened before being mounted on the ball pivots. By alignment with the pushrod, the rocker arm was able to square itself on the end of the valve stem. Thus, misalignment of the rocker arm relative to pushrod and valve stem was eliminated automatically...." A built-in automatic take-up precluded the need for tappet adjustments, and hydraulic valve lifters, together with a large quench area in the combustion chamber, combined to make the engine extremely quiet.

Among those impressed by Clayton Leach's lightweight valve gear was Ed Cole, who wanted it for the new V-8 that he and Harry Barr were developing for Chevrolet. As a rule, when any General Motors Divisions comes up with an important innovation, it has exclusive first-year rights to the development. In this instance, however, Pontiac agreed to share the valve gear with its rival division. Whether or not heavy corporate pressure was behind that generous gesture, we can only conjecture. Perhaps Pontiac owed Chevy a favor in any case, in return for the right to use the Nomad styling theme for the new Safari.

'56 Chevy Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

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Not that the Safari was a Nomad clone. True, the basic body was shared just as the sedan and hardtop bodies were. But there were substantial differences between the two cars:

- The Safari's 122-inch wheelbase was seven inches longer than that of the Nomad, and its overall length was greater by 7.6 inches.
- The Pontiac version was heavier by 476 pounds than the Chevrolet.
- The Pontiac's new V-8 displaced 287.2 cubic inches and developed 180 horsepower, as fitted to the HydraMatic equipped cars. (A 173-horsepower version was teamed with the three-speed synchromesh gearbox, and a 200-horsepower "Power-Pack" number was available at extra cost.)
- An automatic transmission was operational at extra cost in either the Nomad or the Safari. The price, in each case was \$178. But it wasn't the same automatic. Chevy used its familiar Powerglide, a torque converter hooked to a two-speed planetary gearset. Pontiac, on the other hand, used – as it had since 1948 – the HydraMatic, a four-speed planetary with no torque converter. Both were sturdy, dependable units. We'll compare them when we come to the driving impressions.
- And finally, the Safari's trim marked it unmistakably as a Pontiac.

Incidentally, the Safari was listed as a member of the Star Chief series. But unlike the balance of that line, which employed a 124-inch wheelbase and measured 210.2 inches overall, the Safari used the 122-inch chassis of the less expensive Chieftain series and retained the Chieftain's overall length of 202.9 inches. The added length of the Star Chief sedans and hardtops took the form of additional rear overhang, which of course was not suitable for the Safari's configuration. But on the other hand, since the Safari was the most expensive of all Pontiacs – ten percent more costly, even, than the Star Chief convertible – it would have been inappropriate to class it with the cheaper Chieftain models.

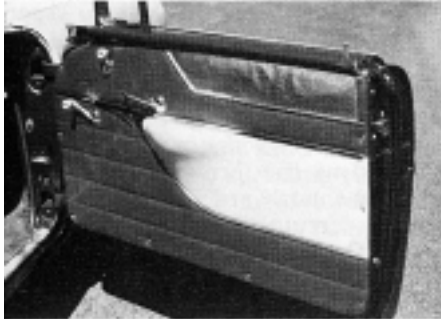
Like most of the industry, General Motors in those days employed a three-year styling cycle, offering little more than a facelift during the intervening seasons. Both Chevrolet and Pontiac added four-door hardtops to their respective lines in 1956, however. Nothing wrong with standing pat on a winning hand, of course, and this was a time when public acceptance was high. At Chevrolet, the Ferrari-like grille, which had never been as popular with the public as it was (and remains today) with professional stylists, gave way to a wider, glitzier unit. Rear wheel openings were revised; the hood was lengthened; and on the Bel Air models – including the Nomad – a contrasting-color spear swept up and forward from the rear bumper, ending at a point just behind the headlamps. Overall it was a much flashier rendering of the 1955 theme. Mechanically the '56 Chevy was nearly identical to its predecessor, although the V-8 engine, as installed in the Powerglide-equipped cars, now boasted 170 standard horsepower. The 162-horsepower edition was still used in combination with the stick shift, and for the performance-minded, 204- and 225-horsepower versions were available at extra cost.

Pontiac's styling changes were more subdued than those of the Chevrolet. There was a new bumper grilled, and the bodyside moldings were revised, but except to the really sharp-eyed observer the cars looked nearly the same. More important was a change that took place under the hood, for the engine was bored an extra 3/16", raising its displacement to 316.6 cubic inches and its horsepower, as fitted to HydraMatic equipped Star Chiefs, to 227. Then in March 1956 an optional engine was released. This one, fitted with 10.0:1 heads and dual four-barrel carburetors, delivered a neck-snapping 285 horsepower, but only about 200 of the '56 Pontiacs were so equipped.

There was one more edition before the Nomad and the Safari, as originally conceived, went out of production. Like all 1957 Chevrolets, the Nomad was given an oval-shaped bumper/grille and a pair of broad, flat tailfins at the rear. Highly prized by collectors today, the 1957 Chevy was not particularly well received in its own time, probably because its principal competitors, Ford and Plymouth, had both been fully and rather spectacularly restyled.

'56 Chevy Nomad vs. Pontiac Safari

Special Interest Autos #115, Feb, 1990



Above: Pontiac door panel gave anodized trim for the extra dough you spent. Cars share same door hardware.

Time has dealt kindly with the '57 Chevrolet's styling, however. And its performance was better than ever, thanks to the advent of the famed "283" engine, available in several stages of tune ranging from 185 to 283 horsepower – the latter with the rear fuel injection system. And once again, as it had from its introduction, the Nomad represented the top of the Chevrolet line.

At Pontiac, "Bunky" Knudsen stripped the car of its familiar Silver Streaks, and in a move that has created some confusion over the years he applied the Safari name to all Pontiac station wagons. There was just a suggestion of fins at the tips of the rear fenders, and smaller (14-inch) wheels helped to lower the car's profile, HydraMatic-equipped Star Chiefs produced 270 horsepower in standard trim, though a variety of optional engines were available with ratings as high as 317 bhp.

But the sales of both the Nomad and the Safari had failed to live up to expectations. No doubt their comparatively high prices had something to do with the matter, or perhaps there was an identity problem: Were they to be considered "sporty" cars, or utility wagons? Classed as the former, they were up against smartly styled hardtop coupes that undercut their prices by more than \$200. On the other hand, as wagons their tailgates tended to leak in rainy weather, and with their two-door configuration they were not easy to load. In any event, sales were not great enough to be profitable.

Here's how the model year production figures looked:

	Nomad	Safari
1955	8,386	3,760
1956	7,886	4,042
1957	6,103	1,292
TOTAL	22,375	9,904

To be sure, there were Nomads and Safaris in 1958 and beyond. But they were simply dressed-up versions of the "regular" station wagons. The smart little numbers that had sprung from Harley Earl's original show car were no longer with us.

Except, that is, in the hands of devoted collectors like the owners of our comparisonReport cars.

To be continued in the next issue of Safari News

Safari Search

Cars for Sale

1956 Safari, nearly complete, asking \$4000.00. Located in central Texas. Contact George Green (682) 465-5134



Parts for Sale

Donn Fallenbuchel has the following 1957 Pontiac Parts for Sale, Priced by fair offers plus shipping:

Radiator – Needs boil out	(2) Complete 3.90 Rear Ends
Power Steering Pump and Brackets	(2) Steering Columns
Front Brake Drums	(4) Chrome Rims (near new) 5x5
Heater and miscellaneous tin	Generator and Brackets
(2) Floor Mount Radio Speakers	Power Supply for Wonderbar Radio (only)
4 BBL Manifold and Carburetor for 347 engine	
Radio Delete Dash Fascia	Power Brake Booster and Pedal
Dual Exhaust Manifolds and Elbows	347 Chrome Valve Covers – Used

plus other parts.....just call **(928) 855-5494 after 12:00pm**

Wanted

1957 Safari: Stainless Spear, front of gas door. Trim under the tail lights. Call Donn Fallenbuchel, (928) 855-5494.

1957 Safari: Front fender trim driver's side. Email Rich Pye @rpye@rochester.rr.com or call (585) 637-2720.

1956 – 58 Safari Photos and Literature. Editor needs more photos and literature regarding the 1956 through 1958 Pontiac Safaris. Send copies or e-mail scanned items to Rich Pye.

To place a free ad to sell a car or parts or to place a want ad, send your request to Rich Pye. Your ad should be related to 1955-58 Pontiacs, and it is recommended to include photos (electronic or paper). Ads are also welcome, send a business card for Pontiac related items or services to Rich.

POCI Chapter #10

www.customsafari.org

The Custom Safari Chapter is an official international chapter of the Pontiac Oakland Club, International, Incorporated. The POCI headquarters address is: 2017 Manatee Avenue, West, Bradenton, Florida 34205

Annual Dues are \$18.00. Renewals are due January 1st of each year. New member dues are prorated quarterly from January 1st. Applicants must be a current member of POCI prior to joining the chapter. Send payment to Starr Evans.

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