

1956-1957 CORVETTE "PAPERWORK" VIN#'S:

The 1956 Corvettes were numbered from E56S001001 through E56S004467, while the 1957's ranged from E57S100001 through E57S106339. Note the sequential format change, from 001001 to 100001 for the first vehicle built. The VIN# (Vehicle Identification Number) will be found stamped on the small metal tag, attached by phillips screws to the driver's side door-hinge pillar. Also it is stamped less conspicuously in two spots atop the frame rail, ahead of the left rear wheel kickup. Although the vehicles were actually stamped "E56S00..." or "E57S10...", imagine our surprise when the "VE" paperwork vehicles began showing up. No Chevrolet Motor Division documentation hinted at this phenomenon, and the hobby was largely unprepared for its appearance.

BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING.

Now bureaucrats are funny folk. And jobs over at the Division of Motor Vehicles were created only to serve the motoring public. But it's a cruel world out there, and bureaucrats soon become hardened, and by golly, they end up putting more faith and trust in their sacrosanct paperwork than in the data and numbers taken from actual vehicles. The "E" versus "VE" question tends to surface when a 1956/57 Corvette buyer approaches Vehicle Registration with the paperwork for a vehicle he has recently purchased in another state. The entry of such a vehicle into a given state generally requires a comparison by a law enforcement officer of the paperwork accompanying the vehicle with the VIN# actually appearing on the small metal VIN# tag. A minor discrepancy here can cause some tense moments. RP56/57 has heard numerous "horror stories" wherein an innocent purchaser of a 1956/57 "VE" paperwork car received a hostile reception from a vehicle registration or law enforcement employee who just could not cope with the "VE" on the paperwork and the solitary "E" on the vehicle itself. We dedicate this article to the reduction of such hostility; hopefully it will reduce some of the "E" versus "VE" confusion.

THE SURVIVOR "VE" VEHICLES.

RP56/57 has now logged-in forty 1956 "VE" paperwork Corvettes and fifty-one 1957 "VE" paperwork cars. These figures represent approximately 13% of the 300-plus 1956's and 5% of the 1000 1957's thus far recorded by RP 56/57. Since the "VE" paperwork vehicles have been turning up more frequently of late, we expect even more during future months. The following list indicates the "VE" cars reported to date. Readers should note the VIN# format change (from 001001-on-up to 100001-on-up) which occurred after the 1956 model run.

A review of the VIN# list on the following page suggests several characteristics:

1. Random placement: The random placement of the "VE" VIN#'s throughout the 1956 and 1957 model runs demonstrates that the "VE" phenomenon did not occur only briefly after the end of the 1955 Corvette production (V-8 1955 Corvettes do have a "VE" prefix stamped on the VIN# tag).
2. 1956 % is greater: With 13% of the surviving 1956's and 5% of the surviving 1957's being "VE" prefix cars, it appears that use of the "V" diminished as time passed.
3. 1957 % drops after car #3000: The 1957 "VE" usage declines noticeably in the last half of the 1957 model run.

The diminishing appearance of the "VE" as one moves from the start of the 1956 model run to the end of the 1957 model run suggests that the persons who were inserting the prefix on the paperwork began to realize that it was not necessary, and abandoned the practice.

THOSE TIN CARS.

Those 1956/57 tin Chevrolets (genus: Rustus Metalus) did have "V" prefix VIN#'s when V-8 equipped. And Corvettes are titled as Chevrolets in most states. This feature helps to explain the phantom "V" prefixes seen on some 1956/57 Corvette paperwork. But it is not conclusive. To date RP 56/57 has seen no Chevrolet Motor Division documentation using the "VE" VIN# format. And importantly, none of the "special" 1956/57 RPO/CPO/LOPO Corvettes (i.e., S-R taillined cars, Sebring team cars, Styling Studio cars, and other one-off cars) surveyed to date have a "VE" VIN#. The fact that Chevrolet did not use the "VE" on its own 1956/57 special Corvettes supports the theory that the "VE" did not originate with the manufacturer. Also the inconsistent and random appearance of the "VE" supports this theory. When the "VE" cars were first noted some years ago, we suspected that perhaps the paperwork "VE" originated at St. Louis. There the MSO (Manufacturer's State of Origin) and the infamous windshield-affixed Build/Delivery Sheet were prepared by clerical personnel. But we have carefully studied this matter, have reviewed all available paperwork, and we no longer support the St. Louis-origin theory.

"VE"—A CHILD OF THE AGENCY LEVEL?

It is now our thinking that the 1956/57 Corvette paperwork "VE" originated at the Chevrolet agency/dealership level. We began to suspect this when we gained access to a number of original invoices for 1956/57's, and we realized that important documentation did originate at the agency level. The invoices were agency-generated, thus the agency/dealership was a crucial link in the development of 1956/57 paperwork. After receiving the MSO which accompanied each vehicle; 1) the agency drew up the invoice (upon which it, the agency, inserted the VIN#), and 2) the agency forwarded the MSO plus supporting vehicle-sale documentation (upon which it, again, inserted the VIN#) to Vehicle Registration for the generation of a registration title. The crucial positioning of the agency in the paperwork flow strongly suggest that only the agency could have caused the insertion of the "VE" on the paperwork.

What could the motive have been? No motive—at least, no ulterior motive. Just familiarity with those aforementioned 1956/57 tin Chevrolets, with their "V" VIN# prefix when V-8 equipped. And while agency clerical personnel were handling V-8 1956/57 Chevrolet paperwork on a daily basis, a 1956/57 Corvette new-car sale was a rare happenstance in the typical dealership. There were more Chevrolet dealerships than there were new 1956/57 Corvettes, so the average would be less than one new Corvette sale per dealership. Thus the typical dealership office clerk, out there in Podunk Junction, accustomed to handling the Chevrolet paperwork where the "V" signalled a V-8 engine, might easily have followed this routine with the V-8 Corvette.

YOUR GUESS?

Readers who have other theories on those "VE" prefix 1956/57 Corvettes are urged to write to Research Project 1956/1957, c/o Michael Hunt, 5405 Shaw Ct., Madison, WI. 53705. Be sure to enclose a SASE if a reply is desired.

1956 "VE" PAPERWORK CORVETTES

VE56S001145
VE56S001361
VE56S001590
VE56S001619
VE56S001733
VE56S001748
VE56S001775
VE56S001792
VE56S002018
VE56S002023
VE56S002037
VE56S002200
VE56S002210
VE56S002219
VE56S002426
VE56S002450
VE56S002458
VE56S002465
VE56S002585
VE56S002689
VE56S002811
VE56S002943
VE56S003033
VE56S003060
VE56S003067
VE56S003138
VE56S003422
VE56S003488
VE56S003528
VE56S003553
VE56S003584
VE56S003633
VE56S003638
VE56S003694
VE56S003752
VE56S003888
VE56S003916
VE56S003949
VE56S004016
VE56S004340

1957 "VE" PAPERWORK CORVETTES

VE57S100126
VE57S100291
VE57S100337
VE57S100445
VE57S100449
VE57S100472
VE57S100527
VE57S100686
VE57S100771
VE57S100919
VE57S100927
VE57S101010
VE57S101018
VE57S101018
VE57S101098
VE57S101216
VE57S101222
VE57S101345
VE57S101448
VE57S101477
VE57S101699
VE57S101842
VE57S101874
VE57S101892
VE57S102041
VE57S102112
VE57S102301
VE57S102356
VE57S102404
VE57S102504
VE57S102514
VE57S102516
VE57S102755
VE57S102921
VE57S102946
VE57S103037
VE57S103486
VE57S103489
VE57S103654
VE57S103764

VE57S103777
VE57S103823
VE57S104050
VE57S104174
VE57S104314
VE57S104411
VE57S104538
VE57S104560
VE57S104589
VE57S105526
VE57S105637
VE57S106106