

DISCOVERED!



photos courtesy of the author

THE MOTORAMA CHEVY V-8 CUTAWAY

by Duane Carling

IT's a cold winter night in the small town of Logan, Utah. The local vocational school is discontinuing its Automotive Trades Department and my friend Tom Peterson is there looking through old shop manuals to add to his collection. His question of, "What's that under the tarp?" was met with, "just a cutaway of an engine from the fifties."

Pulling the cover back, he could barely see the words "Motorama Turbo Fire V-8." Could it be? The granddaddy of all V-8s...from the granddaddy of all car shows?

The story really begins almost 40 years ago in January at the New York City opening of the 1955 Motorama. Harley Earl and GM's Art & Colour Section had penned a dramatic new Chevrolet body for '55. Ferrari was the inspiration for the "egg crate" grille. The chassis engineers had started with a clean sheet of paper also, dropping the

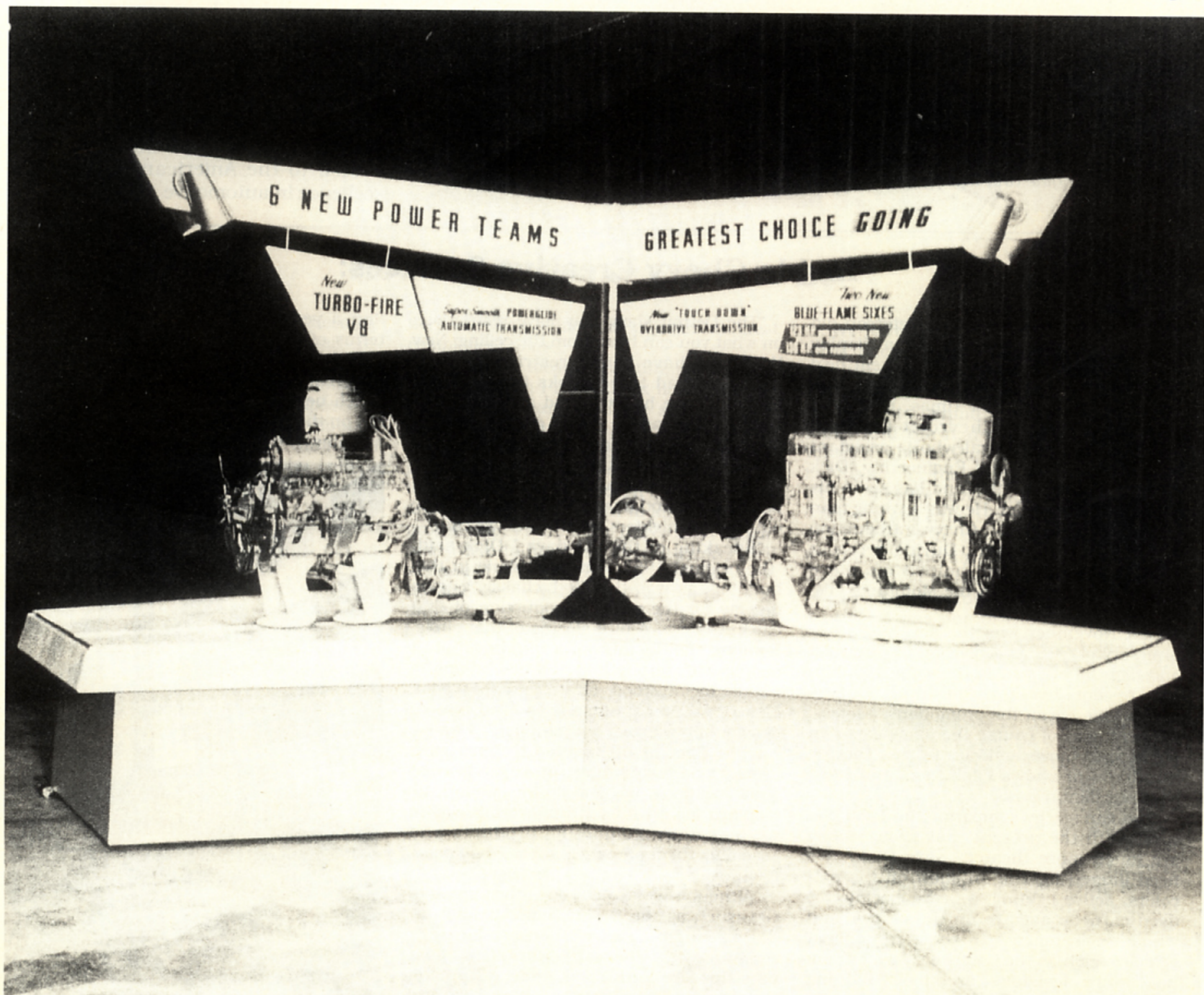
old frame and king pin front end in favor of a new "Glide Ride" chassis with ball joints. But the heart and soul of the Chevrolet effort was their new overhead-valve V-8, and the dramatic cutaway had been built to display it.

The V-8 was available across the line: in the Corvette (starting it on the road to becoming a real sports car), in the full line of sedans and convertibles, and even in the stunning Nomad station wagon, making them all instant classics. The new V-8 was also available in Chevy trucks, including the new fiberglass Cameo (see *SIA* #43), perhaps the first "sport truck."

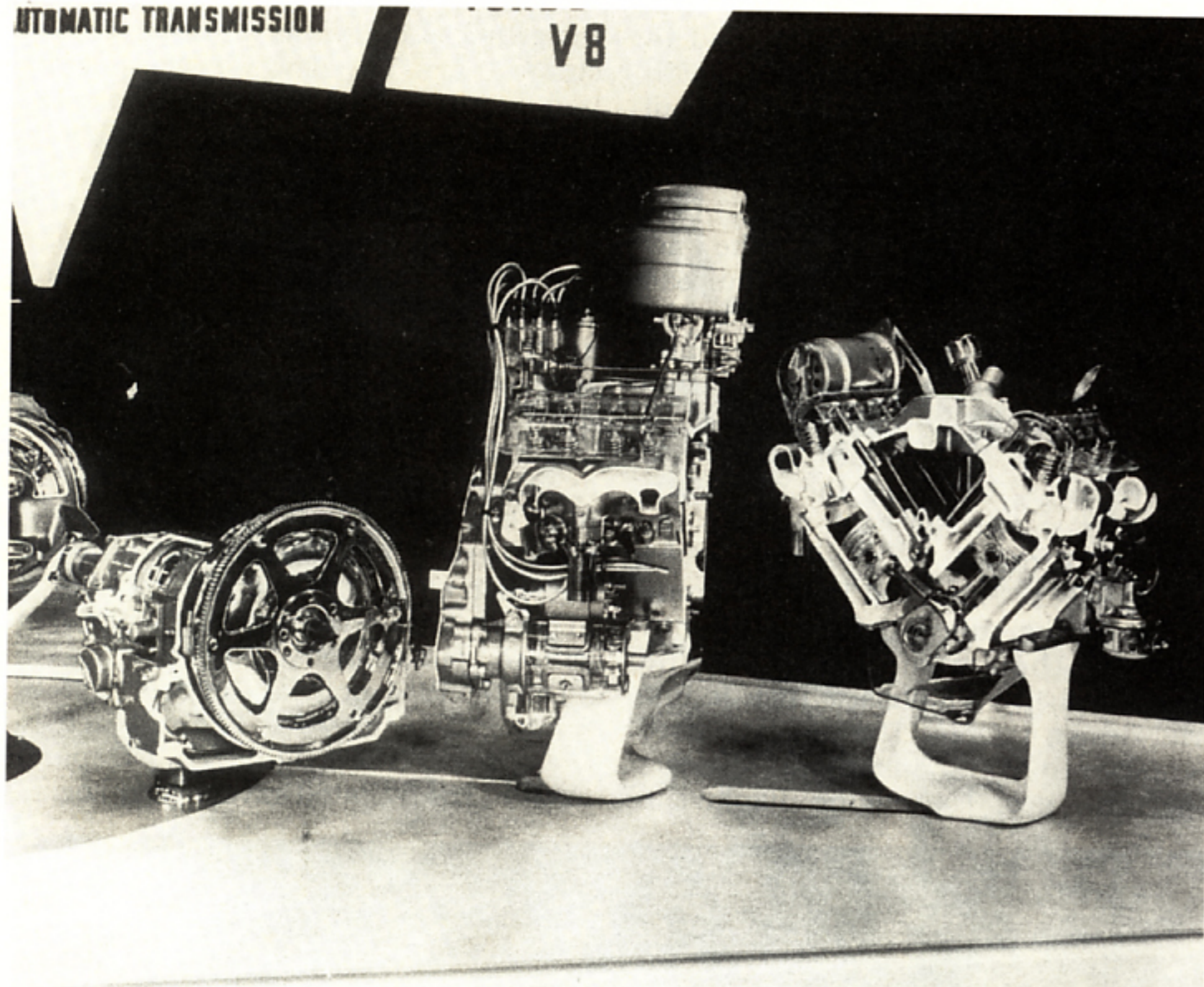
Chevrolet's "Show and Display" group had built the cutaway, having recently changed their name from "Art and Chart" to better emphasize their industrial design talents. The displays used cantilevered lights illuminating the cars on turntables. The engine display, in

the center of it all, was a masterpiece of cutaway art. The new V-8 was motorized by turning the generator into a 12-volt motor, driving the rest of the rotating parts through the fan belt. The engine split down the middle (!) and moved apart so you could see the crankshaft rotating, then moved back together so the back half of the motor started spinning again. Each of the three transmissions available then moved into place, mated with the crankshaft, and started to spin. Every assembly was cut away to show its function. Each casting was hand polished to a smooth finish inside and out, and then either chrome plated, painted in pearlescent white or burgundy mist with red pin stripes.

During 1957 one of the designers at Show and Display left GM to teach in the Automotive Engineering Department at Utah State University in Logan.



Facing page: The '55 GM Motorama in Boston. In foreground is 50 millionth GM car, a metallic gold Bel Air hardtop. **This page:** Motorama engine display featured both six and new V-8 in see-through guise.



Above: Motorama V-8 broke away into two V-4s for a better look at the inside story. **Facing page:** Engine and tranny display was a prominent part of the Motorama presentation for Chevy.

CHEVY V-8

continued

It was common practice for GM to donate working models, even very elaborate ones, to schools for instructional purposes once they had outlived their usefulness. The new professor asked his friends in Detroit if he might have the '55 Motorama cutaway for the department, and got it!

It was used there until the program was dropped in the mid seventies when the cutaway went to the Bridgerland Vocational School. After a few years there, where it fell into further disrepair, it was put in storage, and there it sat until Tom Peterson rescued it. The display is mostly complete, but rough. At today's labor rates, we estimated it would take at least \$200,000 to duplicate it, and months to plan and build. Things must have been very different in 1954.

It's an amazing piece of engineering, and an amazing find! You'll see it at the various '55-57 Chevy meets once it's restored. It will probably find a permanent home in one of the museums devoted to the American tradition of excellence in automotive design. □

Inside Chevy Creative Services:

One of the first things Tom Peterson did when he obtained the Motorama display was call General Motors to tell them he'd found it. After being put on hold and transferred more than a few times, he finally was connected to Chevrolet Creative Services and Dick Royal who is assistant manager of Design and Engineering. Dick is going to retire in 1994 and has spent his career with Chevrolet. He was a young man in the days of the '55 Chevy introduction and remembers it well. During a recent visit to his office, he helped me piece together the creation of the Motorama cutaway.

Last November was the seventieth anniversary of CCS as a division of Chevrolet and their fiftieth year in the same 150,000-square-foot, five-story building. CCS is responsible for all the promotions, posters, banners, and of course the show cars you see at auto shows and race tracks. They do hundreds of shows each year and have kept excellent records.

"You can see by comparing the 1955 pictures with the present that shows today are much more theater," says Dick. "We need filtered lighting to show off the new colors, active lighting systems, backdrops, dyed carpets, signage on the carpet, and whole environments to show off concept vehicles such as the Conestoga. We have to have stage designers, architects, lighting designers, and packaging designers to make today's shows. The monthly work load of 32 events in February 1992 was about average and kept about 20 designers, engineers and 115 others very busy.

"The Detroit show may have restrictions on what you can hang from the ceiling; New York may have height restrictions; and where we had three weeks to set up for Frankfurt, we had two and a half days in Detroit. We can be doing eight shows at once. The '92 New York Show took 25 trailer loads; so we can't waste space in a trailer. Everything has to be designed so it can be packaged and moved. We try to avoid the old-time 'all nighters' as much as we can."

"Speaking of the old days," Dick said, "the original 1953 Vette was done in this building, as was the ZR-1 chassis/engine display for the world introduction of that car in Geneva. A nice closing of that circle. Imagine this facility as a building full of people with specialized abilities, shops to handle metal, wood, plastics, sewing, trim, electrical, paint, signage, sound, video, design, engineering, and shipping. We also have a fleet of 30 tractor trailers with drivers who turn into set-up supervisors at show locations. We also do the 'Mona Lisa' displays for Advanced Engineering, where we tear down competing products and assemble them on panels for our engineers to study.

"Although we do jobs for other areas of GM (such as the Desert Shield exhibit we did for Hughes Aircraft), our major work remains with Chevrolet Marketing. Last year the New York show drew 1.2 million people, and Detroit drew 700,000 during its run. Our cost to reach potential customers can be measured the same way direct mail or any other form of advertising can be measured. We spend over \$100 mil-

lion a year on shows, but our value in terms of advertising our products is amplified by TV coverage and as features in magazines. We also are the conduit by which new styles and designs can be tried out on the public.

"Some of the things we do can't be mea-



The home of Chevrolet Creative Services, where all the auto show displays begin. It's been in the same Detroit location for 50 years.



How the Cutaway Came to Be

sured so easily, but we do them because we can react *fast* and it keeps the staff creative. We did a cover in our sewing room for the GM Sunracer that won in Australia. The solar-powered cars could be exposed to the sun for recharging for only four hours a day, and they had to be covered the rest of the time. We also helped on the college solar-powered race from Florida to the GM Tech Center. We did the public relations, helped plan the tour route and the advance preparation, all things we do every day to create a successful car show.

"We like to think the *quality* of our exhibits, such as the '55 cutaway you found, reinforces the customers' image of the quality in our cars. The story goes that William Clay Ford saw one of our exhibits at a show in the forties or the fifties, and it was so much better than the Ford show that he said, 'When you have the steak, you don't



Dick Royal, assistant manager of Design and Engineering, has been with CCS for decades; will retire this year.

need the sizzle.' That was, of course, a great compliment to us."

One of the most interesting parts of my visit was when I asked Dick how Chevrolet gets the old cars we have seen in their recent advertisements. "The fellow who does our 1/25-scale models is a retired IGA grocery executive named Pinky Randall; he is our historian. He doesn't work for GM and never did. If we want to know what the proper colors were for a 1927 Chevy truck, and where to find one, we call Pinky. He'll say something like, 'Let's get so and so on the line down in Florida. He has one and knows all the people in that end of the hobby. He'll know all the data and who are the good people to deal with, and who to avoid.'

"Pinky is involved in the Hershey, Pennsylvania, activities, and if we need a car to display, we call him and he knows where things are. He knows people who have one of everything that has come off the Chevrolet line for many years in warehouses. GM, of course, carries all the insurance required for these very valuable older cars, but you can't be too careful. Some of them, and some of the parts for them, are almost irreplaceable. Where, for instance, would you find an original, mint-condition 1927 ignition key if you should happen to lose one. A typical response from people when we ask them to loan us their car is, 'I'll get my car in to your location, drive it in, and I'll take the key. I don't want you moving my vehicle, and it must be under 24-hour guard, insured for X dollars, and you pay all expenses.'

"We have certain inventories of vehicles," said Dick, "but for the seventy-fifth anniversary, Chevrolet wanted 10-year spans of vehicles with photo backgrounds in segments behind the cars. We went to Pinky and the real connoisseurs for the vehicles, and to Campbell Ewald advertising agency for the period photos. Campbell has a sheet on every ad they've done for Chevrolet since the 1920s.

"In contrast to the history of Chevrolet, we did a dealership convention at Opry Land in Nashville, which featured a 30,000-square-foot 'dealership of the future.' It was one of the most intensive efforts we have ever done. The first day down there we unloaded 20 of the 28 truckloads of equipment. We showed how satellites and computers will allow marketing links to be set up at GM instead of at the dealerships. We will be talking directly to the customers, and how EDS (Electronic Data Systems, division of GM) will relate to it. Feeding, housing, entertaining, and educating 1,500 people for three or four days was a massive undertaking.

"Basically, we try to reinforce whatever the advertising agencies are trying to get across to the consumer, which is the same thing we were doing in 1955. It's much more sophisticated now than it was then, and much more diverse with more types of vehicles. The message still has to be simple and effective, and the process of communicating through design is really still the same. I have great respect for the people who started that tradition of excellence here at Creative Services."