

1936 CHRYSLER

Airflow

CUSTOM IMPERIAL

SERIES C11, SERIAL NO. 7803920

by **JOHN BOYD**

Photos by THE AUTHOR AND ANDREW N. BOYD

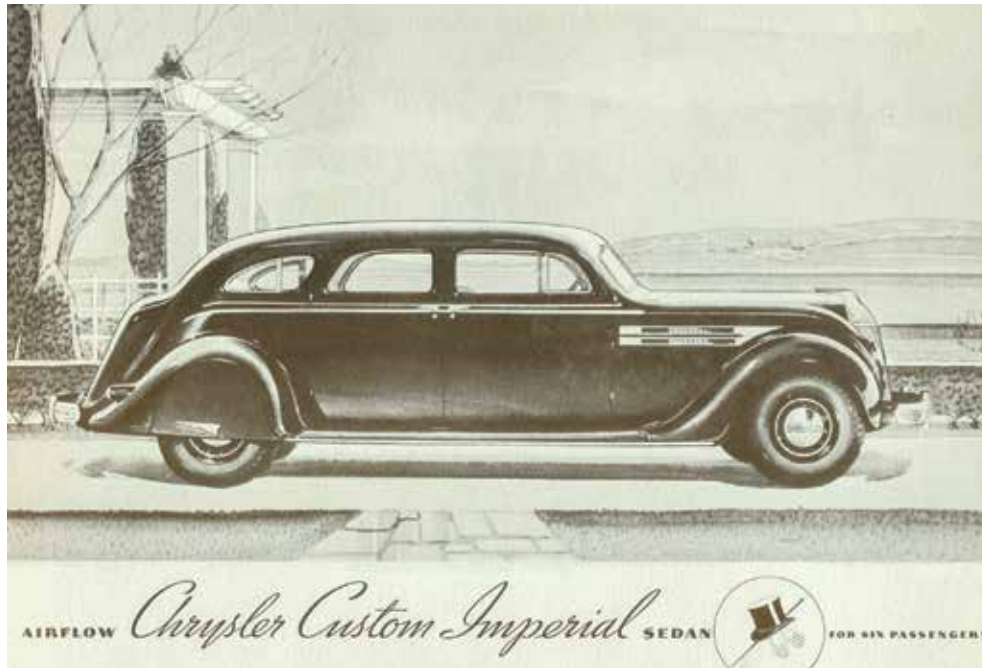
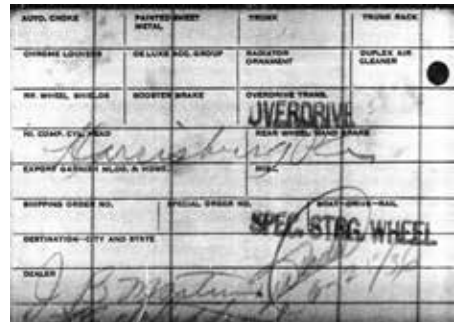
AIRFLOWS

In 1934, Chrysler Corporation introduced an entirely new kind of automobile, the Airflow. Its design anticipated the higher driving speeds related to improved roads and more people driving longer distances. Recognizing the steep increases in power required to move a conventional vehicle at higher speeds, Chrysler engineers moved to streamline the new car, testing configurations in a scaled wind tunnel designed with the help of Orville Wright. In addition, theoretical studies led these engineers to rearrange the structure of the new car for improved riding comfort. By moving the engine forward and increasing the length of the front springs, road shocks were sharply reduced on the passengers. With the engine moved forward, both seats could be positioned between the axles, further reducing shock to rear seat passengers. Structural wood was eliminated from the body, which now was built around an internal-truss, bridge-like frame. Six-cylinder Airflow DeSotos were available in two-door coupe and four-door sedan configurations. The larger Chrysler Airflows with an 8-cylinder engine had similar body variants, and a Chrysler Imperial model with slightly longer wheelbase and corresponding improvements in engine power and wheel and tire size was also offered.

A variety of factors limited the market success of the new cars: the national economy was weakened by the Great Depression, the cars were rather expensive to build, the appearance and style were unconventional and not well accepted by the buying public. The smaller DeSoto Airflows were discontinued after 1936, and the 8-cylinder Chryslers after 1937. In all, only about 55,000 Airflows of all kinds were sold during the four years of production. Of these, perhaps 2,000 survive. The Airflow Club has reports of about 1,300. >

Photo right:
1936 Chrysler Custom
Imperial C11 AirFlow





WHAT KIND OF AIRFLOW IS THIS C11?

Chrysler offered custom versions of the Airflow Imperials. The Custom Imperials were of two types. The larger, designated Series CW, were taller, wider and longer than the production cars. They were equipped with a larger engine and heavier running gear, and they shared almost no components with the other models. Up to 100 Airflow CWs were built, and about eight are known to still exist.

Aside from the CWs, Chrysler set aside a few of the Airflow Imperial models for LeBaron conversion to Custom Imperial. This conversion consisted of a nine-inch stretch of the chassis and an equivalent lengthening of the Imperial body, with the extra length

Photos this page clockwise from top left: C11 build cards; Custom Imperial Sedan brochure cover; The C11 is second from left in the barn.

going into the rear passenger area. Wider doors from the Airflow Imperial Coupe were used in front; the rear doors were the same as those on the Imperial. The engine and transmission were the same as the Imperial. For 1936, the LeBaron cars were named Series C11.

Chrysler historical records show that 75 serial numbers were set aside for the C11, 38 of them for the sedan and 37 for the limousine, which had a divider partition with roll-down window separating the rear passenger compartment from the driver's seat. Chrysler shipping records, however, indicate that only 62 were actually built and shipped. The Airflow Club of America, established in 1962, has reports of only three C11s. One was reportedly dismantled before 1968. One is a limousine currently in Australia, and the subject sedan is the third. It's likely this car is the only surviving C11 sedan, and one of two surviving C11s.

Chrysler's LeBaron models (for 1936, the C11s and the CWs) were sold as special-order cars. Dealers or purchasers could order cars with interior appointments and paint color they preferred. Instead of the usual exterior and interior trim codes on the body data tag, this C11 shows only the order number. Authentic restoration therefore permits use of any period-appropriate paint color as well as fabric or leather trim. Surviving information about C11s includes sales brochures, maintenance manuals and parts lists, each of which provides specific details of the cars.

CAR HISTORY

The build card for 7809320 was obtained from the Fiat-Chrysler Historical Society. It shows the car was originally shipped to J. B. Martin, a Chrysler dealer in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Build date was June 22, 1936. The body, number 231-64, was built by Briggs, and shipment was by boat. It was equipped with engine number C11-1072 and an overdrive transmission. Gear ratio was 4.33:1. Options on this car included a special steering wheel and six road wheels. Like all Airflows, it had Duplate safety glass.

According to Airflow Club records, 7803920 was first reported to the club sometime before 1969 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. From at least 1969 until 1975, it belonged to Airflow collector and dealer Paul Stern, who sold it to Ken Curtis of Raleigh, North Carolina. Ken reportedly sold it to Ray Harmuth Sr. in 1992, 17 years later. In a conversation with Ken in 2021, he recalled that the car ran like new, but was quite rusty at the time he sold it. Mr. Harmuth senior had restoration work performed on the chassis and body by Gary Hoover of Alliance, Ohio. In approximately 2004, Ray Harmuth Jr. inherited the car from his father. When Mr. Harmuth Jr. passed in 2019, his widow sold the car to its present owners, Jon Clulow of Pasadena, Maryland, and John Boyd of San Diego, California. Included in the sale were many new and used replacement parts for the Airflow.

At the time of the last sale, the C11 had >



Photos clockwise from top left: The C11 first arrives in Maryland; 8-cylinder engine block; the reassembly begins; engine ready for installation.

been parked in a barn for about 15 years along with three other Airflow parts cars. Although disassembled and dirty, evidence of previous repair work was obvious: glossy paint under the accumulated dirt and grime on the frame and suspension; new metal in the trunk floor; new, rust-free rocker panels. The engine was out of the car and the cylinder head was off, but the serial number was C11-1072, matching the build report. The C11 is second from left in the barn photo.

RESTORATION

Jon Clulow has been a member of the Airflow Club for many years and is experienced in Airflow restoration. He undertook to assemble the car using parts that came with it. In cases where he had equivalent parts in better condition from his own collection (for example, dashboard instruments and brake drums) he used the best parts he had. All told, the only missing part was one rear-seat cigar lighter. A replacement was found on eBay. Jon oversaw the complete professional engine overhaul, performed by Rockville Ring & Bearing in Rockville, Maryland. New cam, crankshaft and rod bearings, valves, tappets, guides, pistons, and rings were sourced from Kanter, Bernbaum, Egge, and eBay sellers. Thorough cleaning and machine work was performed by the shop. Rebuildable water pump, fuel pump, exhaust system, and clutch were found with the car as purchased. The block was thoroughly cleaned and checked for cracks, cylinders were bored .020 over, crankshaft bearings were replaced and line-bored, and the block was decked. A newly cast, original-mold alloy Airflow cylinder head was obtained from the Airflow Club parts store. The transmission used was an overhauled unit taken from a driving Chrysler Airflow. New rubber parts, brake shoes, weatherstrips, motor mounts and miscellaneous other bits collected by the previous owners and provided with the car were used.

When the car was completely assembled, Jon drove it a few miles to meet a professional car transporter who delivered it to John Boyd, who drove it from the unloading point to his home. John then commenced disassembly for body

AIRFLOW PRODUCTION

	MODEL	PRICE	2-DOOR	4-DOOR	TOTAL
1934	Chrysler CU	\$1,345	1,038	7,351	8,389
	Imperial CV	\$1,625	212	2,064	2,276
	Custom Imperial CX	\$2,345*	-	106	106
	Custom Imperial CW	\$5,900	-	-	-
	DeSoto	\$995	2,106	11,932	14,038
1935	Chrysler C1	\$1,245	379	4,617	4,996
	Imperial C2	\$1,475	200	2,398	2,598
	Custom Imperial C3	\$2,245*	-	124	124
	Custom Imperial CW	\$6,000	-	32	32
	DeSoto SG	\$1,015	488	6,309	6,797
1936	Chrysler C9	\$1,345	110	1,590	1,700
	Imperial C10	\$1,475	240	4,259	4,499
	Custom Imperial C11	\$2,495*	-	62	62
	Custom Imperial CW	-	-	-	-
	DeSoto S2	\$1,095	250	4,750	5,000
1937	Chrysler C17	\$1,610	230	4,370	4,600
	Custom Imperial CW	NA			3

*Limousine \$100 higher.
 CW cost varied with body style and equipment. Prices given are nominal.
 Source: Standard Catalog of Chrysler, 1924-1990.

C11 CUSTOM IMPERIAL SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	323.5 CID inline 8-cylinder L-head 130 HP @ 3400 RPM, 250 lb-ft@1600 RPM Bore 3-1/4 in. Stroke 4-7/8 in Main bearings: 5 Compression 6.5:1 std; 7.45:1 138 HP optional Material: cast iron block; aluminum alloy cylinder head Lubrication: pressure to all bearings excluding wrist pins
Carburetor	Stromberg EE-22
Transmission	3-speed manual Warner automatic overdrive
Differential	4.33:1
Wheelbase	137 inches
Brakes	4-wheel hydraulic with vacuum power assist. 13" drums.
Tires	7.50 x 16
Price	\$2,475 - \$2,575

Photos opposite page clockwise from top: Restoration complete; The signature Chrysler badge; close-up of tail light; the spacious interior; LeBaron body tag.



repairs and refinishing. The body repair and refinishing were done by AG Body in El Cajon, California, who had previously done exceptionally fine work on two other Airflows. The repair began with complete removal of the old paint and body filler. Inspection revealed residual pitting, and the car was then sent to a specialist sand blasting shop, where it was completely sandblasted. Once done, it became clear that most body rust damage had previously been satisfactorily repaired. After required dent removal and minor additional metal repairs, the body was aligned, filled, blocked, and painted with two-stage paint in a metallic bronze-gray, a period-appropriate color, yet contemporarily stylish. The paint was color-sanded and buffed to a high gloss. While this work was progressing, exterior bright metal was sent to professional polishers and platers.

In July 2021, the owners met in San Diego for two weeks of Airflow reassembly. Exterior trim was installed. New Airflow Club reproduction hubcap skins were installed. New tires were purchased and mounted on the refinished wheels.



Interior brightwork, finished in the Custom Imperial-appropriate satin chrome by Artistic Silver Plating in Long Beach, was installed and the dash was reassembled with refinished instruments and brightwork. Wheel trim and original-style

Photos from top: First place for the 1936 Chrysler Custom Imperial C11 Sedan at the Rancho Santa Fe Grand Classic; C11 dashboard.

sunbursts in Casino Red were applied by CSNRS Color Studio in Santee, California, who also refinished the steering wheel and radio blanking plate.

A new interior was constructed by Armando Moran of San Diego. Seat cushions were rebuilt and upholstered in a blue-gray leather. Matching door panels and wool headliner were also fabricated and installed. A coordinated dark gray was selected for the new carpet. Interior metal trim (dash and window garnish moldings) was refinished in Tuxedo Black. Armando followed the detail patterns from two original door panels that came with the car, and he fabricated windlace, arm rests, visors, and rear-seat passenger grab straps to the original patterns. He also finished the trunk interior panels and installed correct matting.

THE RESULTS

The photos show the progress of restoration from the as-found state to completion. The car has now been shown at two Spring 2022 judged shows: The first in Lake Las Vegas (Antique Automobile of America) and the second in Rancho Santa Fe, California (Classic Car Club of America). The car won firsts in class at both shows, qualifying it for Senior Division in both clubs. The owners are planning for its first appearance at an Airflow Club show in July 2022 in Independence, Missouri. •



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