

Choo-Choo Customs El Caminos:

GM offered a separate, special package-version of an “SS” that was dubbed the “Designer Series”, and was introduced around the middle of 1983.

The custom pieces for the package were manufactured, and installed by a van conversion company in Chattanooga, Tennessee, called Choo-Choo Customs. This package design somewhat coincided with the introduction of the aerodynamic Super Sport Nose styling that was present on the Monte Carlo SS, released about the same timeframe, and appeared to be almost identical.

El Camino SS. The American Classic.

The Original El Camino SS was produced by Choo Choo Customs for GM from mid-1983 until the El Camino series was discontinued at the end of 1987.

In addition to the aerodynamic nose treatment that was the primary styling feature of all El Camino SS, all vehicles received graphics on the fascia, doors, and tailgate, and a small chrome train logo above the glove compartment door.

Vehicles manufactured in 1987 also have a Choo Choo Customs logo with train on the front fascia and tailgate. A limited number of El Camino SS had aerodynamic-ground effect style side exhausts with rectangular chrome exits.

In 1986, Chevrolet was the official track of the Indianapolis 500 and a specially developed El Camino SS was one of the featured vehicles that performed on-track services before and throughout the race. This one-only El Camino SS featured an aluminum 350 CID Chevy engine and functioning strobe headlights and tail lights, plus a roll bar mounted strobe light system.

The same high quality GM approved components that made the original El Camino SS unique are available for restoration, customizing, and crash replacement.

These components are now available for enthusiasts who want to create an El Camino SS of their own. All of the El Camino SS products in this catalog are made on original tooling to exacting specifications and standards.

The nose assembly and other components fit all El Caminos '78 through '87, and the popular Chevrolet Malibu '78 through '83.

Let us show you how to make your "Heartbeat" a little faster with genuine El Camino SS components only from Choo Choo Customs.

A special El Camino SS was the only truck to ever pace an IROC race. This IROC-S also featured the trademark aerodynamic front end design, IROC-S urethane paint in custom candy colors, and 16" aluminum wheels. Approximately fifteen IROC-S were built between '85 and '86.

Many El Camino SS were equipped with aluminum wheels. Early vehicles had center caps with styling holes. Later vehicles featured solid center caps.

Aluminum cargo rails were also installed on numerous vehicles.

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However, the Urethane Nose for the El Camino was slightly physically different due to the interface with the Fenders. It's a bit narrower across the top above the Grille, and the mounting flanges to the Fenders are angled as opposed to the MC's, which are straight vertical. Therefore, the Noses between the two are not interchangeable.



One rather interesting, and often overlooked tidbit of information appeared while looking all of this up. It seems that the Choo-Choo Customs special “Designer Series SS” models, are **NOT ACTUALLY** Super Sports...at least technically-speaking. Not as defined by the Regular Production Option Codes used by Chevrolet to designate the Super Sport models!

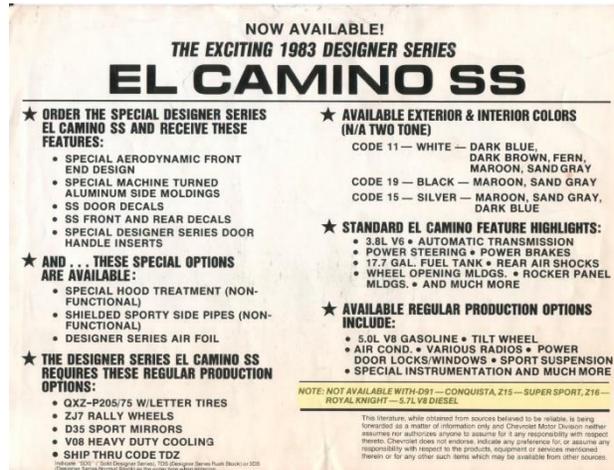
(Reference the separate article on the “Super Sport” Package, RPO Z15 for more information).

The Package information provided by Choo-Choo Customs in 1983 clearly, and specifically states: **“NOT AVAILABLE with D91 - Conquista, Z15 – SUPER SPORT, Z16 – ROYAL KNIGHT, or 5.7L Diesel”**.

Certainly, this could have possibly changed with later years as this was stated during, or shortly after their introduction, and/or maybe have been disregarded, but if true, technically-speaking, eliminates them from being actual “true” SS’s. I’m sure there are a few Z15’s Choo-Choo’s out there, but imagine that would be a rare occurrence!

Being that the Choo-Choo SS was not subject to the few restrictions that went along with equipping the Z15 RPO Code “SS” package, that means a few different things could also be true, as well as explain some of the variations seen on the streets:

- They were available with the Bright Rocker Panel Moldings, which explains why it appears that the Sides Skirts are mounted to/below the Rocker Moldings, which can be seen behind the Skirts in most instances they are present.
- They were able to be optioned with either of the two Body Side and Wheel Opening Molding variations:
 - The full-length Belt Line/Half-Fender moldings (BX8), as prominently featured on the Conquista models. This RPO could also be ordered independently of the Conquista package (D91).
 - Or the “Body Side, Deluxe” Moldings (BW2) that had adhesive plastic pieces that were Black Vinyl and trimmed with Chrome, and the full Wheel Opening Trim (B96). (The first year or two until around mid-’85, were fitted with “Special Machine-Turned Aluminum and Vinyl Side Moldings”, that took the place of the OE Black Plastic ones in most cases.)



- The Quarter Window Moldings were not all Black like the Z15 package mandated.



Additionally, the “SS” logo Decal styling used on the Choo-Choo versions, are unique to the “Designer Series” versions. They were not used on any of the Z15 Sport SS Décor models that came from the factory from ’84-’87, which, according to the sales literature, did not have exterior “SS” designations.

Verifying the authenticity of a “Choo-Choo Designer Series SS” can mainly only be done by referencing the Recertification Decal in the Driver’s Door Jamb. This shows the Model Year, the Sequence Number of the Recertification, and the VIN Sequence Number, which should obviously match the VIN of the vehicle.

One important note when verifying, also look for the word “Affect” to be mis-spelled with an “A”. The reproduction labels have been corrected to read “Effect” with an “E”, and can be made to read whatever numbers the label maker wanted it to look like, so buyer beware.



The package items often also used to identify a Choo-Choo SS are the “Special Edition” Door Handle Inserts. They were adhesive Emblems that fit the recesses of the Door Handles. They could also be added to the sides of the Bolt-On Hood Bulge/Scoop if requested.



Also, there was a small “Choo-Choo Customs Train Emblem” that was installed on the Dash above the “Super Sport” Nameplate on the passenger side trim panel.



It is important to keep in mind that the Urethane Nose Assembly, the Side Skirts, the Hood Bulge/Scoop, the Door Handle Inserts, and the CCC Train Dash Emblems, as well as the entire Exterior Decal Package...essentially all of the bolt-on parts, could all be purchased separately and in some cases, directly from Choo-Choo Customs, and added to virtually ANY El Camino. So, an original Recertification Decal is the key to verification!

Estimated Production figures for Choo-Choo Customs El Camino SS:

(*Not Audited):

1983: 587

1984: 1309

(120 of which were “special” St. Louis exclusive dealer release models that also had an “STL-XXX” number on the Recertification Label):

“Additionally, to create excitement for the Choo-Choo Customs edition El Caminos, Chevy hosted the 'St Louis Dealers El Camino SS Drive away' event in 1984. 120 brand-new white 1984 Choo-Choo Customs El Caminos that were distinguished by a special tailgate decal, were personally picked up by Chevrolet dealers.”

However, screen captures from the release event video show there may have been a couple of Silver and Black ones in the batch as well.

1985: 1198

1986: 995

1987: 861

(Total of 4950)

From an article by Hagerty:

“Founded in 1975 in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Choo Choo Customs turned utilitarian vans into luxurious conversions that made the highway miles soar by. It added second-row captain’s chairs, jazzed-up stereos, and eventually video game consoles to its freeway flyers. Soon, the company also began customizing short-bed pickups, crew-cab dualies, and Suburbans. The Suburbans could be optioned with many of the same amenities as the vans—including deluxe upholstery and high-roof conversions—on their way to becoming some of the ultimate road-trip machines.

SS conversions for El Caminos began in 1983 and lasted until the El Camino left production in 1987. Chevrolet had offered a factory version of the SS, but it looked just like every other El Camino, so the manufacturer contacted Choo Choo Customs to change that.

Choo Choo Customs started with regular El Caminos fitted with rally wheels and sport mirrors and replaced the stock El Camino fascia with a polyurethane nose like the one found on the Monte Carlo SS. Designers slapped decals on the tailgate, doors, and nose and added an emblem to the dash. The El Caminos were sold alongside the similar-styled Monte Carlo SS, although the coupes got a 180-hp, high-output version of the 305-cubic-inch small-block V-8 that was never offered on the El Camino SS.

The U.S. entered a recession in 1990 and van conversion companies suffered greatly. Choo Choo Customs went bankrupt in 1991, though it managed to rebound briefly. In the early 2000s the company went out of business for good and Honest Charley’s Speed Shop, part of the Coker Tire empire, purchased Choo Choo Customs’ remaining stock. The shop continues to offer the SS front-end conversion parts, only now they’re molded in fiberglass.”