

Homely Virtues: The 1949-52 DeSoto Story

by Dave Duricy

In fall 1948, members of the Automobile Club of New York complained to the press. They couldn't see out of their new postwar cars. The hoods were too long and the seats too low. Worse, the new interiors were cramped, but the cars didn't fit in the family garage. Repairing a built-in fender cost the earth. Skirted rear wheels added insult to injury when changing a flat or installing tire chains. And the rising price of maintenance!

K. T. Keller heard the New Yorkers and agreed.

Kaufman Thuma Keller was a large man. The president of Chrysler Corporation from 1935 to 1950 resembled a Chrysler-built Pershing tank; K. T. stood wide rather than tall. *Time* once called him round-tummied and square-jawed.

Keller called himself a machinist. For relaxation, he tinkered in a basement machine shop at his home in Palmer Woods, a leafy, affluent Detroit neighborhood enclave. Most days he was "at the plant" visiting the engineering department or inspecting factories.

When Chrysler Corporation's first all-new postwar cars went on sale in March 1949, they would be roomy and practical, rather like Keller. Defying Detroit design trends, Keller told *Popular Mechanics*, "We had to make up our minds what course to take in developing these new cars. . . . [W]e wanted to build an outstanding car, a car that is easy to get into and get out of, that is easy to garage, to handle in traffic or when parking."

Chrysler's DeSoto Division distilled Keller's automotive philosophy into a one-line slogan: "The car designed with YOU in mind." The new DeSotos measured five inches shorter in length, four inches narrower, and two inches lower than the models they replaced. Despite lower rooflines, the '49s provided chair-high seats with cushions 15 inches above the floor. The driver sat comfortably upright with a clear view through a 24-percent-larger windshield.

Keller once remarked, "If the last word in millinery is knocked off the little wom-

Like other 1949-52 Chrysler Corporation cars, the DeSotos didn't look exciting, but their practical nature, comfortable interiors, and excellent engineering attracted plenty of shoppers.

an's head, and a superb hairdo is disarranged, the standing of the car that does this is impaired." In the new DeSoto, her hat never touched the headliner.

DeSoto chivalry extended to generous interior width. The front bench seat in four-door sedans stretched an extra six inches from side to side. The rear seat was widened by seven inches. Adding to the sense of spaciousness, DeSoto pushed the dashboard an extra four inches away from the driver and moved the heater core and blower from the front passenger's footwell to the engine bay.

DeSoto also created new interior space with two fresh body styles, DeSoto's first "woody" station wagon (ash framing over metal panels) and the Carry-All sedan. The Carry-All featured a folding rear seat that made the trunk and passenger area one huge storage space; it kicked off a brief boomlet—with the Kaiser Traveler/Vagabond and 1950-51 Chrysler Traveler—for hybrid sedan/wagons.

As for those hard-to-reach tires on other cars, DeSoto exposed its front wheels and hid only the top quarter of the rear wheels for a hint of streamlining. Fenders unbolted easily for replacement or repair. The Automobile Club of New York must have been delighted.

The shrouded tires and voluminous fenders of 1949 Nash Airflytes are prob-

ably what inspired DeSoto copywriters to say, "Come in and see a car that is truly modern without being freakish." Freakish sounds harsh, but it addressed the barrage of "modern" fetishes assailing car buyers. Even conservative Buick, DeSoto's rival, succumbed to postwar design fantasies. Buick stylists drilled "Venti-Ports" into the front fenders of their 1949 models. Although the Venti-Ports resembled exhaust pipes on a P-51 fighter, they served no practical purpose—at least not for people. In 1951, one owner of a '49 Buick complained to his mechanic about a "rattle" in the engine compartment that turned out to be nuts tossed down the Venti-Ports by opportunistic squirrels.

The worst that could be said of DeSoto was that the toothy grille grinned with a smug sense of self-satisfaction. Still, some critics slammed the 1949 Chrysler Corporation cars for poor styling.

Eliot Noyes hit especially hard with his column "The Shape of Things" in *Consumer Reports* magazine. An architect whose trendy buildings featured plate-glass walls and flat roofs, Noyes also was an industrial designer; you may know him as the designer of round gas pumps for Mobil Oil. He wrote, "[A]dvanced publicity on Chrysler, Dodge, DeSoto and Plymouth began sensibly promising headroom, visibility, and all the other practical virtues for which the public has been clamoring. . . . The four new lines made good on their promise to restore the good functional elements. In appearance, however, nothing much seems to have happened. All four resemble something out of the mid-Thirties—specifically the old Cadillac 60 Special. . . . These are all good cars, some of them top-notch, as the ratings testify. The lesson which Chrysler has not yet learned is that one need not be homely to have homely virtues."

Incidentally, Noyes had nothing nice to say about Buick Venti-Ports either.

At DeSoto, modernity meant a litany of well-engineered details. Little things like windows that lowered with two



The new postwar DeSotos weren't styling trendsetters, but they were fine cars. Well-trimmed, practical Custom four-door sedans—such as this 1950 model—sold the best. (Owner: Richard Leu)



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turns of the crank; electric windshield wipers rather than more common—and inconsistent—vacuum wipers; an inside hood release with an outside safety catch; doors that opened near 90 degrees, then held themselves open; and an engine that started with just a turn of a key. Non-Chrysler brands in 1949 still used an old-

fashioned pushbutton starter mounted on the dash, or a starter actuated by the clutch or gas pedal. Turn-key ignition quickly became the industry standard, and remained so until the twenty-first century.

If the DeSoto "Powermaster" L-head, inline six seemed old hat by compar-

ison, the impression was false. Long-standing engineering practices such as high compression, dual automatic spark control, low-friction Superfinish surfaces, aluminum-alloy pistons, exhaust valve-seat inserts, and full-pressure lubrication kept the engine in step with or even slightly ahead of the state of the art.



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Consequently, the 112-bhp 236.6-cid six rivaled or exceeded the output of larger engines such as the Mercury V-8, Pontiac straight eight, and Buick Special straight eight.

For 1949, DeSoto improved the ignition system with resistor spark plugs and a 10,000-ohm suppressor built into the cen-

1-3. The first all-new postwar DeSotos, the "Second Series" 1949 models, went on sale that March. Base DeLuxé and better-trimmed Custom models were on offer. The convertible was available only as a Custom. (Owner: Paul Barclay) 4-6. All DeSotos used a 112-bhp 236.6-cid "Powermaster" L-head inline six. Ragtops started at \$2578. (Owners: George and Nancy Wuszke) 7-9. The Custom club coupe was the second-most-popular '49 DeSoto with 18,431 sold. (Owner: Patrick Bisson) 10, 11. DeSoto introduced its first factory-cataloged station wagon for 1949. Done up in the "woody" style, it used ash framing over metal panels with grained appliques. A tailgate-mounted storage compartment housed the spare tire. The \$2959 wagon was part of the DeLuxé series; only 850 were sold.



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1, 2. After the short 1949 Second Series model run, DeSoto updated its cars and added body styles for 1950. Among the additions was the Custom Sportsman hardtop coupe. It injected a bit of style into the line for \$2489. Across-the-board updates included a new grille and hood ornament. There were new rear fenders and taillights, too. (Owners: Rudy and Carolyne Hester) 3. Coupes and sedans had larger rear windows. (Owner: Richard Leu)

ter brush of the new "Splash-Proof" distributor cap. The new ignition delivered smoother idling, better low-speed performance, and—as forward-looking DeSoto pointed out—reduced interference with radio and television. It increased plug life, too. *Ward's Automotive Reports* predicted, "There will be a mad scramble by the rest of the industry to duplicate the Chrysler advances in ignition design."

Maybe. Even in '49, some brands still relegated oil and air filters to the options

list. Those had been standard at DeSoto for years.

In an upshot, when the same publication that had derided the looks of K. T. Keller's cars tested a low-line DeSoto DeLuxe sedan against a Mercury, a Kaiser Special, and a Studebaker Commander, *Consumer Reports* rated the DeSoto second behind the Studebaker.

Production of the 1949 DeSotos started late due to labor unrest during the tooling period. As a workaround, 1948 models continued to be built into the '49 model year. DeSoto called these carried-over cars the 1949 "First Series." When the all-new models appeared, they were known as the "Second Series." The Associated Press declared the swift switch "the fastest changeover in [DeSoto] history."

If production had begun on time, the '49 would have been the best-selling DeSoto yet built. As it was, DeSoto factories broke production records three

months in a row to meet demand. When the lines shut down for the 1950 models, 95,051 Second Series '49s had been built—though, truth be told, the "freakish" Nash and the Venti-Ported Buick did better (much so in the latter's case).

Not surprisingly, the upmarket Custom four-door sedan was the most popular DeSoto, accounting for 51 percent of production. Closest to the "designed with YOU in mind" ideal, the \$2174 Custom sedan included turn signals, wall-to-wall carpet, Fluid Drive with Tip-Toe Shift semiautomatic transmission, and a warning light to remind you to release the parking brake.

The customer acceptance of the new Chrysler Corporation cars delighted Keller. During the 1950 model preview, he told the press, "When we introduced our last models some eyebrows were raised because we dared to reject what seemed to some people to be the accepted



trend design. The fact that more people bought our cars in 1949 than in any other year in our history seems to be pretty good proof that people like what we are doing."

DeSoto updated the successful 1949 bodies with a swank new grille that featured conquistador Hernando de Soto's coat of arms in the center on a vertical body-colored divider. A sculptural depiction of his armored head and torso replaced the circular '49 hood ornament. Rear fenders jutted more boldly. New combination brake/taillights were affixed to the trailing edge of the fenders (except on wagons), replacing the tacked-on tail-light fins and center brake light of 1949. Visibility in coupes and sedans was improved thanks to a larger rear window. Curiously, a version of the slow-selling eight-passenger sedan was added to the DeLuxe series.

Styling updates alone would have suf-

ficed in 1950, but DeSoto took its experiments in advanced body design further. Two new body styles joined the line: the Custom Sportsman hardtop convertible and the Custom all-steel station wagon.

Chrysler Corporation had tinkered with hardtops since the end of World War II. Chrysler Division advertised Town & Country hardtops in 1946, but built only seven. Hardtops planned for '49 didn't see production. Buick, however, didn't hesitate. The 1949 Buick Roadmaster Riviera started and popularized the hardtop trend.

Like the Riviera, the roof of the '50 Custom Sportsman didn't retract. Only the side glass lowered in the manner of a convertible. No door posts obstructed the view.

"For those who like the looks and sweeping visibility of a convertible, but prefer a solid top, the Sportsman is ideal," explained DeSoto. Naturally, wide white-

1. DeSoto's woody wagon became a Custom for 1950; it wouldn't return in '51. A one-piece tailgate with a retractable rear window was new. Sales sank to 600. (Owner: Jim Edwards) 2. Arriving late in the '50 model year, a mere 100 units of DeSoto's first all-steel wagon were produced. At \$2717 to start, it was \$376 cheaper than a wood-trimmed model. 3. The DeLuxe eight-passenger job was the cheapest of three long-wheelbase sedans.

wall tires, full wheel covers, and convertible-grade interior appointments came standard. DeSoto built 4600 Sportsman hardtops despite the \$2489 base price.

Chrysler pioneered all-steel car-based wagons in 1949 with the Plymouth Suburban two-door. (Inspiration for it came to K. T. Keller while in Africa. Keller met a plantation owner who had transformed his Plymouth into a safari wagon that gave him sleeping quarters and room to stow hunting gear.) The Suburban con-



cept was expanded in 1950 with a limited run of four-door wagons built to Dodge, Chrysler, and DeSoto specifications.

The DeSoto Custom all-steel wagon used the same 125.5-inch wheelbase as the six-passenger sedan. Rather than a third "spectator" seat behind the second seat, the wagon provided a rear cargo hold four feet long. Folding down the second seat expanded the cargo floor to seven feet. Opening the tailgate made it 10 feet. Best of all, the steel wagon required no seasonal sanding and varnishing.

DeSoto again offered a woody wagon for 1950, but it was the last. Moved up from the DeLuxe to the Custom line, it seated up to nine. Save for Plymouth, all Chrysler station wagons newly incorporated a one-piece tailgate with a retracting window—a feature destined to be widely copied.

On January 1, 1950; just in time to promote the 1950 models, DeSoto assumed sponsorship of the radio game show *You Bet Your Life* with Groucho Marx. When Groucho started needling contestants on television every Thursday night, *You Bet Your Life* became a national phenomenon. "Say the secret word," "Tell 'em Groucho sent you," and "drive a DeSoto before you decide" all entered the vernacular.

Perhaps thanks to television, DeSoto enjoyed the record-breaking sales it had anticipated in '49. Production soared by 43 percent with 136,204 cars built. Suddenly those resistor spark plugs didn't seem so nerdy.

1, 2. The Derham Custom Body Company of Rosemont, Pennsylvania, produced at least one rebodied 1950 DeSoto Custom. The exact details of the car are unknown, but these photos document the changes. The club coupe configuration and flat windshield show 1940-48 Lincoln Continental influence, the roofline recalls contemporary Chevrolet and Oldsmobile 88 coupes, and chrome window surrounds suggest hardtop styling.

Performance Anxiety? Not for This 1950 DeSoto

Imagine a vintage two-door car with an exotic foreign name. Six cylinders hum as it climbs the twisting seven-percent grade of U.S. 6 over the Rockies. The car has its original six-volt electrical system, drum brakes, and more than 280,000 miles on the odometer.

The driver stops at the Loveland Pass on the Continental Divide, elevation 11,990 feet. He doesn't stop because he must; he stops to look 1000 feet down at the newer cars driving through the Eisenhower Tunnel on Interstate 70. He has proven something—again. The driver is Jon Robinson. The car is his 1950 DeSoto.

"These cars are not lumps,"

Robinson says, "I'm not in anybody's way."

Robinson is an automotive journalist who has driven dozens of collectible automobiles, everything from a 1923 Franklin to a 1954 Lincoln and most cars in between. He bought his 1950 DeSoto Custom club coupe deliberately.

In 1990, Robinson had been driving a 1955 Chrysler Windsor Deluxe. The Windsor was the kind of "Forward Look" car that pushed 1949-52 DeSotos to the backs of car lots in the Fifties. It had power steering, PowerFlite automatic transmission, and a 301-cid 188-bhp polysphere V-8. However, the Chrysler was tired, and not the daily-driver Robinson wanted to keep.

"I wanted to get back to a six cylinder Fluid Drive car with more nimble handling and a lighter engine," he



Pausing along old Route 66 in Missouri.

explains. Thus, Robinson sold the '55 Chrysler to buy the '50 DeSoto, which already had 73,000 miles on it.

K. T. Keller probably would smile. Robinson gave up PowerFlite for Fluid Drive with Tip-Toe Shift. He gave up an overhead-valve "semi hemi" for an undersquare flathead. He gave up



1. DeSotos wore a new face for 1951. A sloping hood and a grille with nine prominent chrome teeth were among the big changes up front. Also, front wheel wells now had a flat top to accommodate a fender character line. 2, 3. The price for the Custom six-passenger all-steel station wagon jumped to \$3047 for '51. (Owners: John and Laura Fink)



Taking it easy on U.S. 6 in eastern Utah.

power steering for unassisted "Center-Line" steering. Robinson, however, gained a more serviceable automobile, and the freedom to drive anywhere.

The DeSoto has made more than six round-trips across the United States. It has wound its way down Lombard Street in San Francisco—the crooked-

est street in America. It has driven through a hurricane in North Carolina.

Robinson is a native of Apple Valley, California. His DeSoto has crossed the Mojave Desert with regularity that borders on boring.

"I routinely drove the Cajon Pass [elevation 4200 feet] in the left lane passing other cars," he recalls. That drive started at 1000-foot elevation in San Bernardino, but Robinson wasn't pulling a stunt. The DeSoto simply did what Chrysler Corporation engineered it to do.

Robinson has since moved to Nebraska, where the DeSoto makes 70-mile round-trips as a matter of routine. He plans on 20 mpg, assuming that the wind isn't against him. The DeSoto's record is 23 mpg during a run from Victorville, California, to Topok, Arizona.

The attraction isn't purely practical. Robinson also likes the way the 1950 DeSoto looks. He says that the grille is one of the prettiest on any car. In the end, though, it's substance that carries the day.

"Performance is not just who does the quarter-mile fastest," Robinson observes. "Performance is a package containing many important things. The '50 DeSoto doesn't do any one thing spectacularly, but it does everything really well. Considered as a whole, the DeSoto outperforms cars with more horsepower because they only have more horsepower."

Is Robinson right? With his 280,000-mile DeSoto parked at 11,990 feet on the Loveland Pass, Robinson looks down on new cars taking the easier way, and knows he's right.

Dave Duricy



1. All 1951 DeSotos, including the Custom Sportsman hardtop, used an enlarged 250.6-cid six-cylinder engine. Power output increased to 116 bhp. New Oriflow shocks helped to smooth out the ride. (Owner: Joop vanEgmond) 2, 3. In 1951, the popular Custom four-door sedan started at \$2438. An enlarged windshield and rear window improved visibility. (Owner: Larry Martin)



While DeSoto celebrated its best year, events took place that would stunt sales of the 1951 and 1952 models. On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, prompting U.S. intervention. The war sparked a flurry of government regulations, including a restriction on consumer credit called Regulation W that was intended to restrain inflation.

For automobile financing, Regulation W required a one-third down payment with the remainder to be paid within 21 months. In October 1950, the Federal Reserve tightened the payment period to 15 months. Many car buyers simply went away, and dealers of all makes found themselves overstocked just when the 1951 models came on the market.

As mobilization intensified, the National Production Authority regulated the distribution of raw materials. The government, not the market, set prices for new cars, and said how many could be built. The possibility loomed that civilian production would stop.

Fortunately, DeSoto's practical design and sound engineering required little change for '51. The engine was enlarged to 250.6 cid and horsepower increased to 116. A dashboard with a three-dial instrument cluster updated the interior, while the exterior featured a new sloping hood above a grille of nine prominent teeth. The windshield was widened; so, once again, was the backlight. New Oriflow shocks provided a smoother ride thanks

to sophisticated valving that adjusted resistance according to road surface.

Racer-turned-auto-journalist Wilbur Shaw proved the point with Oriflows installed in a 1951 Plymouth. He drove the car repeatedly over a ditch at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. As he crossed the ditch at 35 mph, Shaw told his tape recorder, "I'm releasing the wheel at the moment of impact—look, Ma, no hands . . . she [the Plymouth] keeps her head like a lady."

The most curious change for '51 came up front. The engine bay was bigger, as if to accept something other than the venerable Powermaster Six.

During the Forties, Chrysler Corporation engineers experimented with a variety of engine types. They found that hemispherical combustion chambers gave superior volumetric efficiency at compression ratios compatible with regular gasoline. The "hemi" head breathed easily, resisted carbon deposits, ran smoothly, and promoted long valve life.

The engineers then reasoned that a compact hemi-head V-8 would be the ideal modern engine. Keller agreed and gave approval for production. The Chrysler FirePower V-8 appeared in '51. The aptly named DeSoto FireDome followed for '52 and gave its name to a new line of DeSotos.

The 276.1-cid FireDome engine was manufactured in a highly automated 328,229-square-foot facility next to a new DeSoto body plant located in Dearborn, Michigan. It produced 160 bhp, the same rating as the 1952 Oldsmobile Super 88. The FireDome, however, was smaller by 27 cubic inches, used a two-barrel rather than a four-barrel carburetor, and didn't require premium gas as the Olds did.

Motor Trend remarked, "FireDome's surging delivery of power throughout the speed range is impressive and gratifying. Our test car's hydraulic tappets remained quiet at all times, which is more than can be said of some other engines so equipped. Torque is so good during hill-climbing that it is hard to believe that you're not in third gear, when you are actually in fourth."

Though the FireDome never achieved the kind of oval-track racing reputation held by the contemporary Rocket Oldsmobile, the FirePower Chrysler, or even the H-Power-six Hudson Hornet, it was capable. Stephens Motors of Phoenix, Arizona, entered a FireDome club coupe in a American Automobile Association-sanctioned 100-mile stock car race in that



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1, 2. Early production 1952 DeSotos looked much like the previous year's models. The few tweaks included a new crest and block-style DeSoto lettering on the hood that helped provide a bit of differentiation from the front. Prices for the Custom convertible coupe started at \$2996. 3. When the model year began, the trusty straight six was the only available engine. (Owner: Adrian Szwarcburg)

1952 DeSoto Body Styles



Four-Door Sedan



Hardtop Coupe



Club Coupe



Convertible Coupe



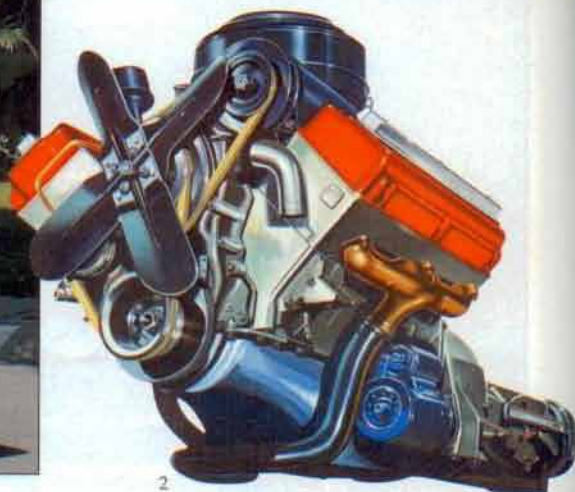
Eight-Passenger Sedan



Station Wagon



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city. Fifty-one miles in, officials called off the competition due to heavy rain—by which time Stephens's DeSoto was ahead by two miles.

Available in six body styles, FireDomes came to market in February 1952—three months after the Custom and DeLuxe sixes had made their debuts—and went on to account for 45,800 orders. New conveniences arrived with the new engine. Now DeSoto offered Solex tinted glass, power windows, power steering, Tip-Toe shift with Fluid Drive or a new "Fluid-Torque" torque converter. The FireDome came with a hood that incorporated a

functional air scoop, a feature that was then extended to the six-cylinder models. Aside from some new hood badging, there were new taillights for coupes and sedans that incorporated back-up lights.

Even with extra muscle and luxury, DeSoto retained Eliot Noyes's "homely virtues." One 1952 DeSoto owner, a minister from Durham, North Carolina, told *Popular Mechanics*, "The DeSoto is everything I want in an automobile—tough, economical, attractive, and it operates smoothly under all conditions."

If the minister backed into a fire hydrant, his body shop could still unbolt

the damaged fender. If his congregation thought the FireDome too flashy, he could trade down to a Custom or DeLuxe faithfully powered by the L-head six.

A housewife told *PM*, "This is my first DeSoto, but from now on it's DeSoto for me." She didn't know that history had already turned against her favorite brand.

In November 1950, K. T. Keller retired as president of Chrysler Corporation. President Harry Truman had called upon him to fix the U.S. guided-missile program. Chrysler Corporation at that moment was the second-largest carmaker in the United States. On a gross

1949-52 DeSoto: Models, Prices, Production

1949	Weight	Price	Prod
DeLuxe (wb 125.5; taxi 139.5)			
club coupe	3,455	1,976	6,807
4d sedan	3,520	1,986	13,148
Carry-All 4d sedan	3,565	2,191	2,690
4d station wagon	3,915	2,959	850
taxi	—	—	680
Total DeLuxe			24,175
Custom (wb 125.5; 8P, Suburban 139.5)			
club coupe	3,585	2,156	18,431
convertible coupe	3,785	2,578	3,385
4d sedan	3,645	2,174	48,589
4d sedan, 8P	4,200	2,863	342
Suburban 4d sedan, 9P	4,410	3,179	129
Total Custom			70,876
Total 1949 DeSoto			95,051
1950			
DeLuxe (wb 125.5; 8P, taxi 139.5)			
club coupe	3,450	1,976	10,704
4d sedan	3,525	1,986	18,489
Carry-All 4d sedan	3,600	2,191	3,900
4d sedan, 8P	3,995	2,676	235
taxi	—	—	2,350
chassis	—	—	1
Total DeLuxe			35,679
Custom (wb 125.5; 8P, Suburban 139.5)			
club coupe	3,575	2,156	18,302
Sportsman hardtop cpe	3,735	2,489	4,600

convertible coupe	3,815	2,578	2,900
4d sedan	3,640	2,174	72,664
4d station wagon, wood	4,035	3,093	600
4d station wagon, steel	3,900	2,717	100
4d sedan, 8P	4,115	2,863	734
Suburban 4d sedan, 9P	4,400	3,179	623
chassis	—	—	2
Total Custom			100,525
Total 1950 DeSoto			136,204

1951

DeLuxe (wb 125.5; 8P, taxi 139.5)			
club coupe	3,475	2,215	—
4d sedan	3,570	2,227	—
Carry-All 4d sedan	3,685	2,457	—
4d sedan, 8P	4,045	3,001	—
taxi	—	—	—
Total DeLuxe			—

Custom (wb 125.5; 8P, Suburban 139.5)			
club coupe	3,585	2,418	—
Sportsman hardtop cpe	3,760	2,761	—
convertible coupe	3,840	2,862	—
4d sedan	3,685	2,438	—
4d station wagon	3,960	3,047	—
4d sedan, 8P	4,122	3,211	—
Suburban 4d sedan, 9P	4,395	3,566	—
Total Custom			—
Total 1951 DeSoto*			—

1952

DeLuxe (wb 125.5; 8P, taxi 139.5)			
club coupe	3,435	2,319	—
4d sedan	3,540	2,333	—
Carry-All 4d sedan	3,650	2,572	—
4d sedan, 8P	4,035	3,142	—

taxi	—	—	—
Total DeLuxe			—

Custom (wb 125.5; 8P, Suburban 139.5)			
club coupe	3,565	2,531	—
Sportsman hardtop cpe	3,720	2,890	—
convertible coupe	3,865	2,996	—
4d sedan	3,660	2,552	—
4d station wagon	4,020	3,189	—
4d sedan, 8P	4,155	3,362	—
Suburban 4d sedan, 9P	4,370	3,734	—
Total Custom			—

FireDome (wb 125.5; 8P 139.5)			
club coupe	3,675	2,718	5,699
Sportsman hardtop cpe	3,850	3,078	3,000
convertible coupe	3,950	3,183	850
4d sedan	3,760	2,740	35,651
4d station wagon	4,080	3,377	550
4d sedan, 8P	4,325	3,547	50
Total FireDome			45,800
Total 1952 DeSoto*			—

*As with other Chrysler Corporation makes, DeSoto combined model-year production figures of carried-over models for 1951-52. However, production totals are known by series and body type for the two years, and include 6100 DeLuxe club coupes, 13,506 four-door sedans, 1700 Carry-All sedans, 343 eight-passenger four-door sedans, and 3550 taxis for a series total of 25,199 units; and 19,000 Custom club coupes, 8750 hardtop coupes, 3950 convertible coupes, 88,491 four-door sedans, 1440 station wagons, 769 eight-passenger four-door sedans, and 600 Suburbans for a series total of 123,000 units. Sources: *Encyclopedia of American Cars*, by the Auto Editors of Consumer Guide®, Publications International, Ltd., 2006; *The Plymouth and DeSoto Story*, by Don Butler, Crestline Publishing Company, 1978.



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1. In February 1952, DeSoto introduced a line of FireDome models. These V-8-powered cars included a different hood with a functional scoop and a wider crest. At \$2740 to start, the FireDome four-door sedan cost \$188 more than a six-cylinder Custom. (Owner: Bill Heard) 2. DeSoto's V-8, the 276.1-cid FireDome, produced 160 bhp. 3-5. The FireDome's scooped hood and hood badge were extended to the six-cylinder cars as well. (Owner: Dennis Wheat) 6. The Custom four-door sedan remained DeSoto's most popular model. In 1951 and '52 combined, it sold 88,491 examples. (Owner: Les Fairbanks)

of \$1,490,404,450 during the first nine months of 1950, it earned a record net profit of \$105,246,991. Chrysler-built automobiles accounted for 20 percent of the market.

Keller handed the Chrysler presidency to his handpicked successor, Lester L. "Tex" Colbert, a man *Time* magazine described as "a handsome, rugged Texan

with a quick smile, a quicker tongue and a big hello for everyone."

Unlike Keller, Colbert was a large man who minded his waistline. Colbert's lunch in the executive dining room consisted of soup, salad, and Jell-O.

Homely virtues were on the way out. DeSoto would go with them, and very nearly Chrysler Corporation as well. **CA**

Find Out More

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Clubs for 1949-52 DeSoto Enthusiasts

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