

The BULB HORN

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CHEVROLET CAPRICE



Photo by Jon Wessel

AN ARRESTING CAPRICE



By Jon Wessel

Jon's 1988 Chevrolet Caprice C91 police vehicle is pristine inside and out.

In November of 2019, I was surfing eBay looking at cars. I do that often in the late night hours, just looking and admiring. But that night I ran across a car that piqued my interest. It was a 1988 Chevy Caprice with the 9C1 police package.

In the '70s and '80s I was a deputy sheriff with the Greene County Missouri Sheriff's Department. We drove all manner of patrol cars, most of them bought second-hand from the state Highway Patrol. Of all our vehicles, the square-body Caprice was my favorite. It handled the best and was the smoothest coming out of a corner under full power. It was a sad day for me when Car 9, our last Caprice, was removed from service.

Seeing this Caprice on eBay brought back a lot of memories. The seller advertised it as an all-original car with original paint and only 33,000 miles. I've heard two stories about its history, but the undisputed version is that it never saw police service. That accounted for its immaculate condition and low mileage. I contacted the seller, and we had a pleasant conversation. He was the former police chief of a small southern town. He spent considerable time and money outfitting the car with period-correct radios, scanners, lighting, and siren. He was also very meticulous with his installation. Ultimately, I made him

an offer. He declined it and suggested I bid on eBay. I made a bid and won the auction. During our subsequent conversation, he said the eBay rules required him to remove the police equipment. Because I was a former deputy sheriff he could leave the equipment in the car. Everything in the car is fully functional. He offered to deliver the car to me for a very reasonable sum, and I agreed. I was glad to be able to meet him. He brought the car to me and turned out to be a very nice fellow.

Once I received the car, I found out it needed very little. The tires were in good condition but were old, so I replaced them. The wheels had some rust spots in places, so I had them sand-blasted and powder-coated. The seller had the car decaled with the graphics of his department, so I broke out my heat gun and spent an evening removing the vinyl graphics. He used a special low-tack vinyl, which made removing them easier. Several years later, en route to a vintage car meet in Texas, the front and rear bumper fillers blew out at 80 mph. Fortunately, reproductions are available. Those, along with a new battery, are all I have had to do to the car. It has been extremely reliable.





The green radiator and heater hoses are silicon, which are much more durable than rubber hoses. They are believed to be the original hoses.



Left to right: Police cars were much simpler in 1988. There are no laptops and no banks of switches to control fancy light bars. All the equipment, including the radar gun, is period correct and functions properly. The police package included a vinyl rear seat for easier clean up. The interior door handles are inoperative, and the doors cannot be opened from the inside.



1988 SPECIFICATIONS

MODEL AVAILABLE

- Caprice 4-Door Sedan — 1BL69

STANDARD MODEL FEATURES

- AM/FM Stereo Radio with Clock
- Power Steering
- Tinted Glass
- Automatic 4 speed Transmission with Overdrive
- Full Wheel Covers
- Power Front Disc/Rear Drum Brakes

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT OPTION 9C1 — POLICE VEHICLE

SEO 9C1 — INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING FEATURES

- Full perimeter frame with increased gage of certain frame members
- Firm feel steering gear and linkage
- 8.50" ring gear rear axle
- Temperature controlled fan
- Large bolt circle 15" x 7" wheels
- Special police pursuit suspension includes front and rear stabilizer bar, special springs and shocks
- Larger radiator (same as RPO V08)
- Fuel vapor return system on V8
- Special balanced drive shaft
- Heavy duty battery equivalent to 69 amp-hour, 730 CCA, 115 minutes RC
- Special calibrated transmission and torque converter with V8
- A/C WOT cut-off switch (V8 only)
- A/C head pressure switch (V8 only)
- External engine oil cooler
- Anti-Corrosion hot melt pads under driver & passenger's floor insulators
- Heavy duty front & rear brakes with semi-metallic front brake lining and 11" x 2" rear brake drums
- Specific body mounts
- Dual outside rearview mirrors left and right hand remote



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ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT OPTION AVAILABILITY

- 1Z2 Anti corrosion - hot melt pads driver/passenger (included with 9C1)
- 6F8 Ashtray relocation from under dash to front door
- 6C9 Conduit — 38.1mm diam. conduit routed inside from dash to trunk
- 7L8 Cooling heavy duty — transmission oil
- 7L9 Cooler — power steering fluid
- 7P8 Cooler — engine oil auxiliary (included with 9C1)
- 7Z5 Fuse block — auxiliary provides six additional fused circuits at 20 amps each
- 7Z4 Gauges voltmeter, oil pressure, and water temperature
- 7L1 Generator — 120 amp Delcotron 50 amp at idle (required with 9C1)
- 6B2 Handles inoperative rear door
- 6N1 Handle — Inside LH door and lock release
- 6N5 Handles inoperative rear window
- 6B7 Hole in roof panel — one 16mm hole
- 1E2 Hose clamps — worm drive
- 1T1 Hoses — Silicone radiator & heater
- 1V2 Hubcap Unit
- 6E2 Key single locking — fleet coded alike (3 keys)
- 6A4 Key single locking — single vehicle (3 keys)
- 7Y2 Lamp door ajar warning
- 6C5 Lamp dome and reading
- 6C7 Lamp extra dome between visors with switch attached
- 7Y1 Lamp underhood
- 6N6 Locks inoperative rear door
- 6A3 Mat H.D. rubber one piece floor front and rear
- 6G2 Roof reinforcement (longitudinal on roof centerline from windshield to first roof bow)



SPECIAL EQUIPMENT OPTION 9C1

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Clockwise from upper left corner: Chevrolet specified the standard features available on their 9C1 Caprice Police Vehicle. There was a multitude of special equipment options available. The special equipment list continues. A photo shows the fully operational Falcon radar equipment.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT OPTION AVAILABILITY

- 6C1 Seat construction heavy duty front bench
- 6C4 Seat construction heavy duty front 45/45
- 6F3 Seat construction heavy duty front 50/50 (w/o armrest)
- 6G3 Seat construction heavy duty front split (50/50) with armrest
- 6C2 Seat construction heavy duty rear bench
- 6R6 Seat upholstery — seamless heavy duty vinyl dark blue or light brown
- 6R7 Seat upholstery — seamless heavy duty cloth dark blue or light brown
- 6R8 Seat upholstery — seamless heavy duty cloth front with seamless heavy duty vinyl rear in dark blue or light brown
- 7X1 Speaker, radio, dual, dash mounted (42" lead)
- 6Z1 Speedometer cable two-piece
- 9A3 Speedometer gear change
- 7Z8 Speedometer production type (85 mph maximum)
- 7Z9 Speedometer police type — 2 mph increments, 120 mph maximum
- 7X6 Spotlight L.H. (Unity 225, 6 inch halogen)
- 7X7 Spotlight L.H. and R.H. (Unity 225, 6 inch halogen)
- 7Y6 Switch door jamb inoperative for dome light
- 6C6 Switches rear door jamb (door ajar)
- 6B4 Tire relocation — spare tire relocated in horizontal position on LH side rear luggage compartment floor
- 5AN Tires, P225/70HR15 SBR white stripe All Season (5 tires alike) police service — requires 9A3
- 5AQ Tires, P225/70HR15 SBR blackwall All season (5 tires alike) police service — requires 9A3
- 5JJ Tires, P225/70HR15 SBR white stripe (5 tires alike) police service — requires 9A3
- 5JK Tires, P225/70HR15 SBR blackwall (5 tires alike) police service — requires 9A3
- 1K5 Transmission low gear blackout
- 6H6 Trunk opener electric in dash (right of steering column)
- 6C8 Wiring, RG58 A/U coaxial radio antenna cable (behind dome lamp to trunk)
- 6F5 Wiring — eight 12 gauge and two 10 gauge from dash to roof



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Above: Jon poses for a snapshot with his 1988 Caprice 9C1.

Below: A view of Jon's 1988 Caprice police car.

The push bumper and blue lights were on the car when I received it, along with the blue and amber lights in the rear deck. I found a blue dash light and period-correct radar gun and put those in place for car shows. In Missouri, it is legal to have blue lights as long as I don't turn them on while driving on public roads.

1988 was the last year for the carbureted engine in the Caprice. The next year, 1989, saw the advent of fuel injection. Only the 9C1 Caprice was available with the 350 cubic inch engine in 1988. It was not available in the civilian model. For 1988, the 9C1 police package included over a dozen upgrades over the civilian model.

The 1980s were dark years for performance in the domestic car industry, and this car is no exception. Zero to 60 times are in the 10-second range, and the top speed is only 118 mph. It struggles to get there. For all-out pursuit vehicles, most departments turned to Camaros or Mustangs. Where the Caprice shines is in its room, comfort, huge trunk, and handling ability. Its handling was at the top of the scale for a domestic 4-door sedan of that year. This car is tight and solid and is a joy to drive. I have driven the Caprice to two out-of-state car shows, and it has performed flawlessly.

For some trivia, the under hood photo on page 27 shows the green radiator and heater hoses. These are the original silicon hoses that were an option on the police package. The Crown Victoria police package also used these hoses.

I love this car and drive it often. Not only is it a lot of fun to drive, but it brings back many memories.

(Photos by Jon Wessel)

