

# Keep on Truckin'

This Chevrolet 4109 belonging to **Stefaan Van Vooren** sports the livery of the US Navy

The militarised version of this one-and-a-half truck was the G7100. It incorporated all-wheel drive, two-speed transfer box, GM 'Banjo' axles and hydraulic brakes with servo power assistance.

It became the US Army's standard 4x4 vehicle in its weight class, but there is no doubt its design was derived from the civilian 4100 Series of Chevrolet trucks first appearing as a 4x2 in the 1940s – of which the one pictured is a late example.

America's automakers stopped building cars during World War Two, but truck production continued. All General Motors-built pick-ups produced during the war years were, by and large, 1941-1942 models; there wasn't the luxury of time to redesign, and function mattered more than styling.

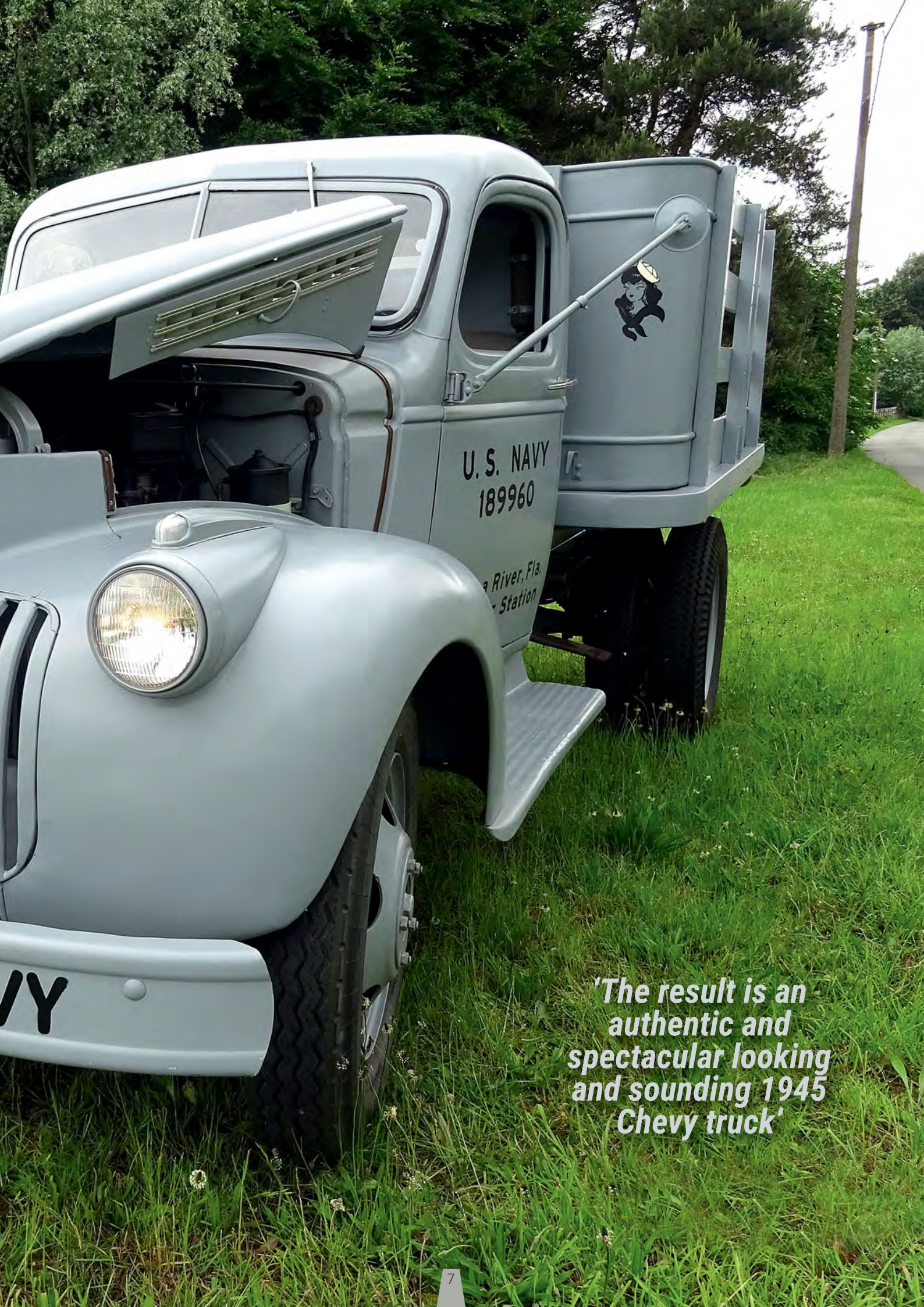
Keeping production numbers up was paramount and in that it succeeded. Some sources suggest that a total of 281,570 Chevrolet name-plated trucks were built, consisting of some 55,000 half-ton 4x2 trucks; a hundred or so three-quarter ton 4x2 trucks; 52,000 one-and-a-half 4x2 trucks; and 170,000 one-and-a-half 4x4 trucks.

During World War Two, Chevrolet had ten assembly plants building one-and-a-half ton trucks. Each plant had a code shown as the first digit in the chassis serial number, the one here has a '9' indicating it was built in Norwood, Ohio.

Despite being General Motors' largest division, record keeping was not Chevrolet's biggest strength, so information on production numbers can be difficult to establish. Perhaps given the scale of their operations during World War Two this can be excused, especially when you consider that by 1946, it was ▶

*Rolling curves, running boards and a split bonnet makes the pedigree of this truck clear*





*'The result is an authentic and spectacular looking and sounding 1945 Chevy truck'*





*Chevrolet coined the term 'the cab that breathes' in 1947 when it rolled out its new ventilations system. It dispensed with the manual screen openers*

## **'The steering and gearbox were completely overhauled'**



*Beautifully renewed dash, knobs and steering wheel*



*Of the era finishing touches keep the feel of this rebuild authentic*



*Gear lever, foot controls - without a synchro, gear changes aren't the smoothest*



*An under-mounted spare wheel kept storage capacity at its maximum*

claiming that one in every three trucks was a Chevrolet and it ran ads suggesting there were 99 models over nine chassis lengths.

Stefaan Van Vooren is no stranger to military vehicles, having been interested in them and their history for as long as he can remember. His first truck was a Dodge WC-51, then a Hotchkiss Jeep, after that a Willys Jeep he still owns, then came a Chevy pick-up truck and a Diamond T 980 tank transporter.

Stefaan lives and works from his home in Eeklo, a small town south of Ghent, Belgium. He runs a haulage business, but in his spare time he restores classic trucks in his workshop-cum-man cave: he has a well-stocked bar set up in the theme of Mogmog, the legendary recreational island 360 miles south of Guam, where the boys of the Pacific fleet spent their rest days.

Stefaan's handiwork was showcased on the cover of CMV 201, February 2018, with the 1943 Ford GTB-622 bomb truck he restored before selling it to Steve Bowens.

After its departure, Stefaan started looking for another project, preferably a naval vehicle and one in need of rescue.

This 1945 civilian 4109-model Stake and Platform truck came up for sale in 2010. Jaap Rietfeld, who owned it at the time, had imported it to Belgium direct from the US sometime in the 1990s. A civilian model, it appears that the US Navy had used this truck as, even in its dilapidated state, original markings were still visible.

While it is known that the navy often used (levied) civilian truck-types for general cargo duties on naval air bases, specifically where and when this truck was used is not known. Stefaan has painted it showing Banana River, Fla, a naval air station that supported seaplane patrol operations during World War Two.

Construction of Banana River began in December 1939 and the station was commissioned on October 1, 1940. It is now known as Patrick Air Force Base, but there is nothing to suggest that this was the vehicle's home at the end of the war.

As one can see from Stefaan's pictures, taken during its extensive and lengthy four-year restoration, the Chevrolet had seen better days. Decades of inactivity and neglect showed. Pretty much everything mechanical was seized or rusting away:



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SPECIFICATIONS	
<b>Make</b>	Chevrolet 4x2 1.5t Load Master
<b>Model</b>	4109 Stake and Platform
<b>Nationality</b>	American
<b>Year</b>	1945
<b>Production run</b>	1941-1945, Chevrolet built around 55,000 1-1/2t 4x2 trucks
<b>Engine</b>	Six-cylinder Loadmaster
<b>Type</b>	Valve in head
<b>Fuel</b>	Petrol
<b>Displacement</b>	235.5 cubic inches, 3,859cc
<b>Power</b>	81bhp
<b>Torque</b>	192 ftlb@1,000-1,900rpm
<b>Max Speed</b>	35mph
<b>Transmission Type</b>	Manual
<b>Gears</b>	five four forward, one reverse
<b>Suspension</b>	Leaf spring
<b>Brakes</b>	Hydraulic
<b>Wheels</b>	Dual wheels on rear
<b>Tyres</b>	7.50x20
<b>Crew/seats</b>	two-three
<b>Dimensions (overall)</b>	
<b>Length</b>	229.5in
<b>Width</b>	87.5in
<b>Height</b>	81in
<b>Wheelbase</b>	135in
<b>Weight</b>	1.5t

**Under German occupation from early in the war, Eeklo and the area in which Stefaan lives saw many German tanks roll though, including having a platoon of the newly issued Marder III's of 1. Kompanie, Panzerjäger Abteilung 19 (L) of Luftwaffen Feld-Division 19 stationed in Eeklo in 1944**

its original engine was a non-starter, it wouldn't even roll or steer.

Once it had been taken to Eeklo, Stefaan set about stripping everything down and restoring what was salvageable, cleaning

and repainting as much as possible and only replacing parts that were beyond repair and unusable. He did all the exterior bodywork himself, hours of welding, filling, sanding and painting.

Fortunately, the engine was not in too bad a shape – it was complete and original and after a strip down and rebuild with new gaskets was running OK. Stefaan conscripted his friend Dirk to fettle and fine tune it fully, at the same time as renewing the truck's electrics. The steering and gearbox were completely overhauled too. Finding parts wasn't difficult – a common enough truck (or at least common enough engine and drive train) meant that buying items to replace like-for-like was feasible and a preferred option over having to fabricate bespoke bits. He found [www.chevsofthe40s.com](http://www.chevsofthe40s.com) to be of great help, sourced some bits from local military vehicle enthusiasts and Jaap also had a few spares that he had imported with the load he bought from the US in the 90s.

One thing that was a challenge was the stake and platform truck bed. This had



Chevrolet's and GMC's 'Advance-Design' trucks were launched in 1947. It may seem strange that it was commercial trucks, not cars that manufacturers restyled first in the post war-years. Taylor Vinson, of the Society of Automotive Historians,

suggested that because truck production continued through the war, the body dies were probably worn out. Most had been used in production since before the war, and they would have been patched and repaired many times. Instead of continuing with the old

dies, manufacturers concluded that it was cheaper and easier to design and create entirely new sets, plus new designs had been in progress in 1942, but put on hold for the war effort. "Round and juicy" is the way retired GM design vice-president Charles M 'Chuck' Jordan

described the restyled trucks. It was this new look, along with the war time provenance of reliability and strength, that saw Chevy roar out of the 40s and boom in the 50s. From 1947 until 1955, Chevrolet trucks were number one in sales in the United States.





**ABOVE: The platform was protected by heavy duty steel rub rails all the way round. These rub rails formed part of the stake pockets to hold them rigidly upright**  
**BELOW: Tip top paint details complete this immaculate truck's exterior**

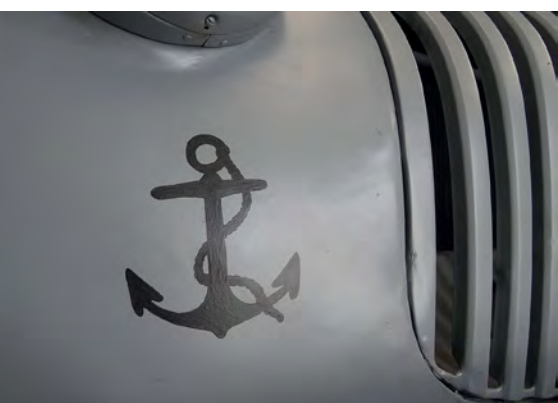
not been part of the shipment from the US so a new one would have to be found, or failing that, made. In the end, Stefaan did extensive research to find pictures and measurements so that he could faithfully rebuild one that was right. A local metal worker made the profile, while Stefaan did the woodwork. So much pride has gone into this work with endless patience and large helpings of attention to detail, but the result is an authentic and spectacular looking and sounding 1945 Chevy truck in mint condition.

The most difficult part about the restoration was persuading the authorities in Belgium to allow him to use it on the road. Restored to original production line standards, including only one rear light, one brake light, no indicators and no rear mud flaps for example, Belgian technical control was not happy.

After months of toing and froing, Stefaan



**The Chevrolet 235 cubic inches (3.9 L) is known as one of the great Chevrolet engines, noted for its power and durability**



managed to persuade it that it was built as per factory specification and so it issued the licence plate for the truck you see today.

Since 2015 Stefaan and his wife Els have been to a few shows, notably Wings and

**'Stefaan started looking for another project, preferably a naval vehicle and one in need of rescue'**

Wheels and War and Peace, but he is often seen in the old Chevy, nipping to the shops or out for a picnic.

This area of Belgium bore witness to the ebbs and flows of war in 1940 when towards the end of the Battle of the Lys,

the Germans attacked Eeklo. This was just two days before Belgian troops surrendered and Nazi occupation of Belgium was complete. By June 1944 the tide was turning, but Eeklo saw panzer battalions regroup in the town's cobbled market square.

They were on their way to reinforce tired troops who had been fighting on the invasion front since the beginning of that month.

The town was a hotspot for resistance and for many people the war is still within living memory. This may explain why this wartime US Navy truck gets so many looks and waves as it drives past – Eeklo was eventually liberated by Canadians in September 1944. They liberated the town as they cleared the way to the Scheldt estuary, while other Allied forces concentrated on the more lauded Operation Market Garden. ◀