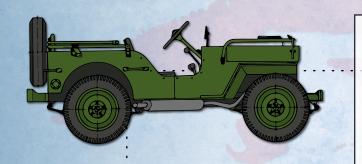
A Short History of Cuban Cars

THOUGH CUBA RANKS 138TH IN THE WORLD in vehicles per capita—only 38 per every 1000 residents, just ahead of Tajikistan—the automobile has become emblematic of this island's nation turbulent history over the last seventy years. Following the revolution, the United States halted all auto exports to Cuba, a move Castro embraced by famously declaring "We need tractors, not Cadillacs!" Time effectively stood still on the streets of Havana, as mechan-

ics found ingenious ways of resuscitating '57 Chevys by swapping out its V-8 for a Soviet diesel engine. Today, only one in six cars is an American classic from the '50s—the vast majority are improvised Ladas and Fiats, leftovers from the Cold War. Now that a ban on foreign auto imports has been lifted, a new era is beginning for Cuban drivers, but the price of globalization may still prove to be an insurmountable barrier. Here are six cars that tell Cuba's story:

1950

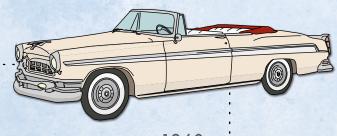


1951 WILLYS M38 JEEP

Originally designed for the US Military during WWII, the Willys Jeep quickly became popular among the Cuban revolutionaries due its ease on rugged terrain and relatively few moving parts. Upon liberating Havana in 1959, Fidel Castro rode into the city on the back of a US Army surplus Willys-an ironic image, the signifigance of which was not lost on Castro.

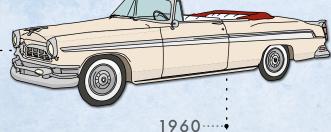
1955 CHRYSLER NEW YORKER

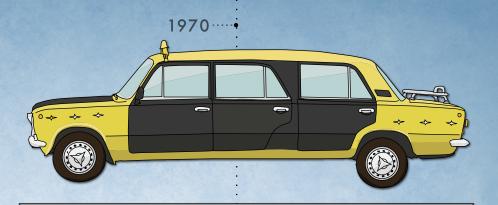
In 1955, Ernest Hemingway, who had been wintering in Cuba for over a decade, traded in his 1947 Buick Roadmaster for this two-toned New Yorker. When Hemingway fled after the revolution, his driver, Agustín Núñez Gutiérrez, hid the car. The New Yorker's whereabouts remained a mystery for fifty years until 2011, when it was miraculously found. The car, which was in complete disprepair is currently being restored for the documentary Cuban Soul.



1960 CHEVROLET BEL AIR

Though the '57 Bel Air was perhaps the most popular American car in Cuba, this particular 1960 mint green edition belonged to Che Guevara. After the revolution many wealthy Cubans fled the country. Their fancy cars were seized and handed out to government officials. Che chastised another minister for driving around in a Jaguar XK, calling it "a pimp's car." His Chevy was seen as a more populist choice.





1977 LADA-2101 (STRETCH)

After Cuba suffered through a decade of auto-import stagnation, the Soviet-made Lada became the car of choice during the 1970's. In a bit of Cold War gamesmenship, the USSR even built a Lada plant on Cuban soil. Castro's government gave out Ladas to important officials; driving one was seen as a sign of status, even though the state technically still owned all vehicles. By the 1980's, 1 in 3 cars in Cuba was a Lada, including most police cars and taxi cabs. This "Lada limousine" taxi was custom made by welding two cars together.

1980

1984 POLSKI FIAT 126P

Known throughout the island as the "Polaquito," the Polish-made 126p quickly became a favorite among the underground racing scene for its ability to be modified with an array of eclectic parts. Today you can attend all-Polski races, where drivers can show off their tricked-out rides, bedecked in decals and featuring much more pop than the Poles ever anticipated.



..... 1990

• 2000

• 2010



2013 PEUGOT 508

A series of recent reforms have changed the face of the car market in Cuba: foreign cars can now be bought and sold and Cubans no longer require a permit to acquire a new car. However, the state runs all car dealerships, which exclusively sell Peugots, and the cars are sold at eight times their market price. A 2013 Peugot 508, normally \$29,000, costs over \$262,000. Perhaps Cuba's venerable auto culture is not in jeopardy just yet.

