

## BUICK SUPER SERIES 40..... A PROCESS OF DISCOVERY

How many of you have bought a car on a whim?.....Having just finished the restoration of the '26 Chevrolet it must have been time to buy my next piece of madness!

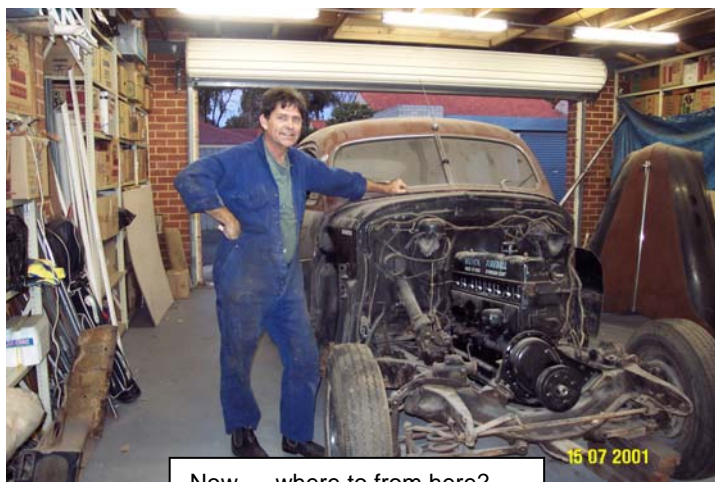
It wasn't planned...Marg and I were on a little jaunt up to Toodyay for a jazz concert...but I had done my usual scan for bargains in the Readers Mart and spotted an advert for a Buick sedan in Northam....worth a look I thought as we were driving past!

So we dropped in and had a look at the beast....The owner was selling up and moving somewhere and didn't have the space...at least, that's the story he gave us... the car apparently came from Meckering....where the earthquake was in 1969!....according to the owner the car was stored under a verandah at the side of the house but sealed up so they had to demolish a wall to get it out!

This would make sense as there was little rust anywhere in the body or frame except for on the drivers side where there had been a leak in the windscreen...there were no big dents and all the instruments were still intact.

I am diverted!....I was impressed and said we would think about it!....off we went to the concert but I couldn't concentrate....I said to Marg..."what do you think"?.... she said "buy it"!....what's a bloke to do then!....check the bank balance...hmmm seems too good to miss this one....rang back in the middle of the concert and offered him a price which he accepted!

The car was in pieces so I had to get the motor back in to make it easier to transport...of course when I came to shift it I hadn't reckoned on how big this car really was and this without the front end on!



Now.... where to from here?

Now I don't know what happened between 1993 and 2001 but I seem to have lost 8 years...mind you we were building a house during that period so that probably slowed me down!

So in 2001 I started to strip the vehicle down to see what I had ...the motor was inspected to see what had been done to it which was basically a short motor rebuild with new pistons bearing shells, etc.

I found the clutch plate in need of repair and had a new V8 Holden plate fitted to it. I also found the exhaust manifold to be warped and ill fitting. The Buick has sleeves that must be accurately aligned with recesses in the head otherwise you can't get a close fit. I took the whole thing off to a cast iron welder in Welshpool to fix. Not an easy job...he found numerous cracks under ultra violet light that he then set about cutting out and welding. The next challenge was to iron it out....which required heating it up to red hot and clamping it to a heavy steel girder and allow it to cool back to get it straight. It was then machined to fit the cylinder head.

In hindsight it was a waste of time as after its first real rally it cracked again in a number of places and actually blew out a chunk the size of a 50 cent piece! Luckily we have a bloke in Queensland who is recasting them!

As with any restoration I have found it is more efficient to have many projects going at the time, this means if some things take a little time or you have to wait for parts you can progress with some other restoration work.

Of course it is absolutely critical to label everything that you pull apart and store logically in boxes and bottles as when you have to work out where everything goes 5 or 6 years down the track you need a pretty good memory to piece everything together! Thank God for digital cameras as the photos I took at various stages of disassembly became invaluable later on.

Having said that I have a few bits left over and the car seems to go ok without them so I hope nothing falls off suddenly! Of course I have replaced every bolt and nut with new in many cases as they were quite rusty.

The Buicks have some 36 body bolts holding down the body to the chassis, these are isolated from the steel by rubber washers each held in metal sleeves. This became one of my early little projects (one of hundreds!) as I thought the cost of the replacement part from the US was ridiculous. Mind you if you worked out the hours I put into fabricating these little parts it wasn't very cost effective.

Fabrication involved sourcing some conveyor belt rubber (thanks to Dave Reid) and purchase of high tensile steel bolts with nyloc inserts. Then cutting round shapes out of the rubber with a hole saw.

I found that I had to destroy the originals in the process of removal as they were heavily rusted together and by applying an oxy to the nuts and squelching I could enable release of the parts. I subsequently was able to remove the body using two chain blocks set up in my shed to lift off the chassis and then roll the chassis out from under.

I made up a trolley to suit the size and shape of the body on large swivelling wheels to make it easy to move around the workshop and also capable of rolling on to a car trailer for transport to get work done. I found this to be a great aid to the restoration as it meant I could work on the vehicle at a good height and also meant I could work on the chassis independently of the body.

I then proceeded to spend the time and effort stripping the paint off the body using some 8 litres of chemical stripper. I found that I had to tackle layers of paint at a time and used numerous heavy duty wire brushes on an angle grinder to get down to bare metal.



Ready for the painter

Some of the panels such as the bonnet and the internal fenders I couldn't get into with the wire brush so I decided to get them blasted. I also had a few complaints from a neighbor who was upset about the noise. As an aside my workshop adjoins a typical Subiaco laneway and I designed the shed to open on two sides with roller doors...I quite often had these open to increase the amount of light and ventilation. As a result my neighbors took a great interest in the work poking their noses in occasionally to see the progress....the other day one of them came in when the car was getting its finishing touches and said he felt very honored and chuffed that he had been given the opportunity to see the project through all its stages.

Back to the restoration...When the time came to take the body to the painter I loaded it on the car trailer still on its trolley and off we went. My painter Rob Swann found a few faults with my panel work so worked on a few of them to get it to his satisfaction. I spent a week of my annual leave in his workshop rubbing and rubbing between coats of primer and the final coats. I don't know how many litres of paint we used on the entire car but I do know we used over twice the painter estimation!

All panels were treated with a high quality Wurth rust convertor. This is a water based product that turns the steel to a blackish grey colour and protects the steel from rust over a long period of time. I found this to be particularly good for us part time restorers who have to leave the panel work for long periods in between other demands. I tried other products but found the panels rusty within a few weeks.

I didn't know whether the instruments worked or not so I took them along to a semi retired Instrument maker that works out of a back shed in Leederville. I was impressed with all the equipment this fellow had and let him weave his magic. Well the speedo was seized solid and he managed to track down some new internals for that and replaced the numbers which had deteriorated beyond recognition. Did you know that there are number tapes that suit different sized speedometer wheels?

He also fitted a new copper temperature line to the thermometer as it had been snipped off and recalibrated this and the oil gauge. Similarly he found the fuel sender to be out of whack and restored that to read correctly. The Clock he said was beyond repair and couldn't find any parts for it...strangely enough though on our recent run to Quairading it all of a sudden started working...for how long who knows!

Stainless steel restoration is a laborious job, and whilst a lot of the trim (and believe me this car has a



Body back on chassis

lot of it!) was in good nick other SS mouldings were not so good particularly those closest to the road which were stone damaged. I asked around and eventually came up with the name Les Rowe Well this guy is a master craftsman ....what he can do with metal! Anyway Les took on the job of ironing out all the dents in the trim and those that were beyond redemption he made new ones.

The chrome work was another challenge. This I did

in bits to ease the load on the pocket! Some of the finer bits like the chrome ring surrounds and taillight assemblies for instance were done by Ultra Chrome in Balcatta. Some they did twice as I was unhappy with the result...the alloy that they used on many of these vehicles seems to disintegrate and I am not aware of any way to stop it popping. This is particularly annoying when you are paying so much for the chromework!

The bigger items such as the bumpers were done by Premier Plating in Bentley ...I can recommend them. I found out later that they also sent my bumpers off to Les Rowe to have some panel work done before they were plated. I treated all the rears of the bumpers with rust convertor and painted them to avoid rusting.

One of the bonnet leavers was cracked right through and was unserviceable. I took it to Ray Tillbrook...a specialist welder who said he could fix it! I understand he collects alloy material to make welding rods to have a compatible material. Unfortunately he passed away a couple of years back so I don't know where you would go to get this done now! Whatever he did was a fantastic job and he guaranteed it would last!

Tyres were of concern to me as I wanted a road car that would be suitable for long distances and would hold the road well. I was advised by a number of people to go for radials and I am so glad I did because the car just sits beautifully on the road and the steering is effortless and I know I can get replacements quite easily. Getting tyres with the right rolling radius was a challenge though and whilst I haven't checked my speed accuracy yet I would say the speedo is faster than it should be.

I recently took the car in to have the steering adjusted to Glide in Newcastle Street. I took in all the original specifications for the vehicle which took the fellow by surprise, but amazing how that little bit of effort paid off. I waited while the job was done and at the end of it he came out all smiles saying how well it had adjusted up spot on the original tolerances now would I take it for a drive please as he wouldn't want to damage the car and tell me if it was ok!

When I first got the car it was in pieces and not having any previous experience with Buicks I was unsure whether everything was original or not. One thing I had to change was the carburettor as the one on it was a Ford make. This may have been done to improve fuel consumption, however I was keen to get the car back to original so in a bit of good fortune I was able to purchase the exact Carby off Les Woodruff. Then Kevin Cochrane weaved his magic with a rebuild...what would we do without guys like these to help us?

I decided to convert to 12v so whilst I had a fully restored 6v generator I have fitted an alternator that I picked up from a swap meet at some stage. It was one of those Bosch replacement units still in its box and I had it checked out as A1 before fitting. Of course this meant I had to convert all the globes to 12v and we are lucky to have someone like Bob Beames who seems to have all the gear! In fact the headlight are quartz halogen conversions apparently made in Pakistan or somewhere...the end result is I have excellent night lighting comparable to a modern car.

The vehicle was previously registered in Cunderdin in 1972 so I presume that is the last time it was on the road...I have kept the windscreen sticker intact on the quarter window.

At one stage I borrowed Adrian Barnes 47 Buick for a couple of weeks so I could make up a few parts that were not obvious from the American Shop Manual...it is amazing what is not in there!...Using his vehicle as the template I made up linkages for the Carburettor which of course had been modified by the previous owners. I also fabricated a support arm that was missing under the front grille and a support for the manifold...also missing.

Rubbers...I bought all my rubber through Clark Rubber initially, however I had to shop around for some of the stuff, but 99% is Australian made or supplied. I had help from Howie Windscreens who provided the new glass for the front windscreen and fitted the glass at my workshop...what a job!

I made up the new rubbers for the quarter vents and fitted them back in. All the window wind moulds had to be replaced and I had to teach myself some new skills in bending the moulds so that they were



uniform. To facilitate this I set up a jig in timber which was shaped to the form of the window...the rears were the hardest to bend because of the tight corners. At one stage I thought I would never do it but perseverance paid off in the end

The upholstery was another challenge. I decided to revert to leather for all the seat facings and went off to select some hides armed with a matching vinyl material. The result is a perfect match in both colour and texture. I remade all the door panels in a thin MDF board which I then lacquered to stop any swelling from moisture. We were

able to source original woollen head lining in a complimentary colour and I volunteered to fit it! Well its times like this that you pay people who have these skills, but in the end it came out ok but not a fun job.

One could go on and on about the various discoveries involved in restoring a completely unknown vehicle and the trials and tribulations involved but then how can one describe the sheer satisfaction of getting it on the road and enjoying the pleasure of driving one of the best cars on the road! (The smile on my face says it all!)

To top it all off the Veteran Car Club awarded the car with the ultimate recognition as the best restored post vintage for 2007!....Now for Queensland and the Nationals!.....**Ian and Marg Baxter**



The finished product!