

STREET DRAGGING BUICK

Alan Haime, President of Buick Club of WA, drove up to Sydney and bought a 1970 GS 455 Buick after the National Meet in Tasmania. After the Buick Centennial Event in 2003 in the US, when coming down Route 66, Alan and co-driver Tony Howe called in at Buick Performance in Tuscon, Arizona to check on how to improve engine performance. Because of regular contact with this firm (mainly our money being sent to them), we get a magazine called Buick Performance Group which is devoted to racing Buicks. The following story is about one such 1970 GS 455 in its heyday - and living up to its reputation as one of the fastest muscle cars built.

The author, Rick Martinez, is a regular contributor to the BPG magazine.

“Most of us “old timers” can remember the days of good old street racing. Now much older and wiser we realise that racing belongs on the track only, but hell it was fun back in those days. Every Sunday night we used to gather in a Buy-Rite shopping lot, among 50 – 100 street racers and cruisers. The cars varied, mostly Chevies and Fords and I was the lonesome Buick, along with two friends who raced Oldsmobiles. It was so common when we raced that even a few gear head New York State troopers came by to watch.

After wheeling and dealing a race, we would set it at about 1 a.m. on that same night. We would then cruise about five miles into New Jersey and come up the entrance ramp to the Garden State Parkway where we would heat the tires and block the highway. The starting line was a “No U-Turn” sign and the finish line was exactly a quarter of a mile down the road where the “Welcome to New York” sign was posted. The highway continued about another half mile straight and then split, left to upstate New York and right you headed down south, and extreme right you headed back to the town where we were gathered. While we were converging and heating up the tires, any calls to the local PD would be confusing as to “who” covers the area. By then the race is long over and we’re back in the lot two towns over. This was a perfect set up when I started racing in 1984 and continued on into the 90s.

One particular Sunday night while hanging out at the lot, a race was set up with my 1970 GS455 against a 1967 Chevelle sporting a 454 tunnel ram motor and baby tubs and 4.56 gears. I figured why not? My GS looked stock, typical 455 build up for the time with a Mark De Conti TH400 with a 2.75 low first gear backed by 3.73 gears. We set up, heated the tires, and we were guided to the starting line. I had a blistering 30 bucks in the till that totalled about 300 bucks. You see, there were always a ton of side bets from the spectators.

The flag man checked and down he went. The Chevelle jumped out quick but by midway the rat motor was geared out. Good old Buick mid range torque caught and passed him by an easy car length. Win for the Buick!

The following Sunday came around and we were all back at the lot. The owner of the Chevelle wanted a rematch. I figured sure why not? This time the tunnel ram was gone, replaced by an L-88 hood. Hmmm, oh well, off we went. Again the flag came down and the Chevelle jumped out again. Like before I

passed him midway. Then all of a sudden the Chevelle was creeping by and beat me by a car length. What I later found out, he had pitched the tunnel ram in favour of a single four-barrel and nitrous oxide. The bum sprayed me. So back then, like that motto says "Race on Sunday, buy on Monday."

On Monday I bought a NOS Cheater kit and went back the following Sunday night. Unfortunately he caught wind that I had juiced my Buick. He declined to race again but that did start me on a wonderful trip on racing with the spray for the next six years or so until I kicked the habit.

In 1987 there was a cruise spot in Yonkers, New York at the Cross Country Shopping Mall. Every Friday night about 100 – 200 street rods would cruise in and park next door to a fast food joint that hired a live DJ to play tunes of the '50s and '60s. During the night people would walk around looking at the rows of glittering chrome or elect to cruise the boulevard in seach of some street light action.

One particular Friday night together with a bunch of my friends and some members from the North-East GS/GN club, we decided to bring our street machines to this local cruise spot. My intentions of doing any street racing that night were completely out, in fact I deliberately left my nitrous oxide bottle at home and only took \$20 for gas and food.



Parked in the lot waiting for some unsuspecting Chevy

We arrived about 9 pm, parked and walking around looking at the other street rods. It was at this time, unknown to me that one of my friends who owned a rat powered '67 Camaro was trying to set up a race with my GS Buick against a 350 Nova. He brought it to my attention after four or five guys started crawling under and around my GS. My first reaction was no, but let's see this Nova. Well this '72 Nova had a blown dual quad nitrous injected 350 engine with a

narrowed Dana rear with steam roller tires and chrome everywhere! My first thought was to punch out my soon to be ex-friend. Logic then prevailed and I replied, "I'd run him but I left my nitrous bottle at home." "No problem", said one of my other friends. "You can use my bottle, it's full." I quickly replied, "I only have 20 bucks." Well about an hour later my group collected 700 bucks. So what could I say? Let's do it!

By now the local Buick guys showed up and also added cash to the pot and much needed moral support. I quickly got my GS on the trailer and was ready to roll when the driver of the Nova started complaining. He said that if this is a street race, then both cars have to drive to the race location or the race was off. I thought how far can it be anyway, 10 –15 minutes tops? So off the trailer the GS goes. I was then told the race location was a service road at the Westchester County airport. Instantly I had heart failure! I shouted back "That's about a 50-minute drive!" The bickering continued until I jumped in my GS leaving my truck and trailer behind, starting my journey north.

About 50 minutes and half tank later we arrived. Already there were about 70 money hungry spectators. After a dry run to check the road condition, I lined myself up to the starting line. Quickly I heated the M & H DOT tires good and hot. Then next to me it sounded like an F15 fighter jet, the Nova easily fried the steam roller tires with a deafening roar. I thought, this is it, I'm dead meat! Well the flag man staged us when he dropped the flag the Nova leaped out a good car's length ahead. Still staying with it I hit the nitrous button, hit second gear and my mistake went into third (using a stock shifter with a reverse valve body trans), without batting an eye at the tach and letting off the nitrous, all the while cursing at myself out loud. I slammed the shifter back into first. Man what a ride, hit the red line, banged it into second and it started to happen. Slowly I was pulling on the Nova. Hit high gear and I was starting to nose ahead and held him off by less than a fender for the uncontested win!

After the run and prying my clammy and stiff fingers off the wheel, I got out and we were all standing around. I was told that was only the third time the Nova had lost a race and my Buick was the first Buick to do it. The Nova owners were shocked. Parked next to their beast was a stock looking GS that had cleaned them up!

I then proceeded to drive my GS back to my truck and trailer with 40 bucks in my pocket and I went home".

Submitted by L Haime (WA Buicks).