

SEA GOING BUICK

Members have discussed over the last few months the '59 Buick which attempted to sail from Cuba to the US Mainland with some eleven Cuban refugees (or illegal immigrants) and what happened to it.

This event was covered briefly in Time Magazine, London Times, BBC, Australian, New Zealand and Singapore sources, on the internet and lately an excellent article in the Buick Bugle. For those people who have no access to any of these media outlets, here are the bones of the story.

A group of Cubans converted a 1959 Buick four-door hardtop into an ocean going craft. This Buick "boat" sailed from Havana on 2 February 2004 from a beach east of Havana, Cuba heading towards Florida in the US. A vigilant American Coastguard spotted the Buick about 30 miles off the American coast and intercepted it. Eleven people were on board and they were interred, processed and eight people returned to Cuba.

Most Buick owners initial reaction was "Yeah, yeah the refugees are safe, but what about the car?"

The Coastguard decided that this engineering marvel was a navigational hazard and also set a bad example to other enterprising car/boat builders. They sank the Buick!!

The Buick (green in colour) had belonged to Cuban Rafael-Diaz Rey. He had worked on earlier cars which had been made in a raft style for an illegal entry to the US, without much success.

This time they converted a 1959 Buick four-door hardtop into a boat by welding the lower portions of the car tightly sealed and waterproof. They also constructed a metal double hull and boat-like prow, using the Buick's original V8 engine as motive power, now converted to a propeller drivetrain of the boat-like structure. Phil Campbell (Buick Bugle) thinks the car was either an Invicta or Le Sabre.

Phil mentions in his article that after the revolution in Cuba in January 1959, all imports of US cars were prohibited. He feels this car would have been one of the last 1958 or early 1959 cars imported into Cuba.

Cuban authorities are trying to stop additional "autonauts" from making any further attempts.

Perhaps in the years to come some quirky intrepid person with a few bob will attempt to raise the Buick from the seabed. I'd like to see that.

L Haime (WA Buicks)