

THE 34 AFFAIR

Stuart Syme WA Buicks

The interest is kindled.

I've played around with Buicks for almost as long as I can remember. First with my Dad's 1930 Sedan, then a 1928 Roadster, 1936 Aussie sloper, 1939 Sedan and a 1950 Super Jetback coupe.

I sold the 36 sloper and the 39 sedan 30 odd years ago thinking I would never get around to restoring them and was satisfied with my stable of 3 cars, being the 28 roadster, 30 sedan and 50 coupe.

In about 1980 I was at a property in Gidgegannup buying some GPW Jeep parts (another previous passion) and in the shed were a number of cars including a huge 1934 Cadillac Sedan. It was another car that caught my eye that I never quiet forgot. It was a 1934 Buick Series 40 Roadster and one of the nicest looking styles I had seen, sort of art deco and not huge, well at least not compared to the Caddy it stood next to. I can still visualise the car, painted blue and I seem to remember it had yellow NSW plates.

My next encounter with a 34 Roadster was 16 or so years later when Murray Bastian attended an early Buick Club run driving one. He had owned it for some years and he believed it had always been a West Australian car. Watching Murray drive this beautiful car down the road rekindled my interest in roadsters of that era.

1934/35 Buick Sedans seem to have survived well and a number of club members have beautifully restored examples.

I was very surprised when attending a Buick Club Committee meeting in 1996 or 97 at Dennis McGavigan's to see in his garage a 1934 Buick Roadster body. Dennis had been doing some work on it for another club member, Mike Stonehouse. Evidently this is the roadster I had seen in Gidgegannup back in 1980. I asked Dennis to see if Mike could be persuaded to part with the car but the answer was no.

By that stage I had done a little research into 34 Roadsters and discovered them to be a rare beast with only 45 being produced in 1934 and 5 only in 1935. Norm Darwin's book THE HISTORY OF HOLDEN SINCE 1917 has a nice photographic coverage of the 34 models which were sourced from GMH-A. They include front, interior and side shots (hood up and hood down) and they were photos I often found myself flicking through to look at and thinking what a great looking car.

Research also showed that the 1934 Series 40 was an important model in the history of Buick. It was this model that introduced the new style straight 8. The 8-cylinder motor introduced in the 1931 models were really an extension of the 6-cylinder motors. They retained the generator, distributor and water pump being driven from the cam/timing gear and the ghastly (thirsty!!!) Marvel updraft carburetor.

The all new Series 40 motor was really an experiment. It had a downdraft carburetor, distributor running directly off the cam shaft in the middle of the block and generator on the other side of the motor being run by a belt which also ran a water pump bolted to the front of the head. Sound familiar? It should because this motor with some further refinements made to the 1936 models is the motor used right up to 1953 when they were replaced by the common old V8.

Buick hedged their bets with the 34 models. The larger series cars all ran the old style straight 8, as did the larger series 1935 models.

This led to some interesting anomalies. The Series 40, the lightest of the series developed 93 bhp with its new 233 cubic inch motor. The larger/heavier Series 50 using the old style motor only developed 88 bhp while the Series 60 with its old style motor of 278 cubic inches only managed 100 bhp. If you wanted a bit more get up and go and use less fuel (it is a Buick remember) then the Series 40 was good buying.

Back to Roadsters!

I was also aware of a 1934 Buick roadster in Queensland. This had been restored by Wal Anderson in the early 1970's and I had seen a photo of it at an eastern states rally featured in Restored Cars magazine (Restored Cars did a feature article on the car some years later, Sept-Oct 2003).

So I knew of three 34 Roadsters, not a bad survival rate for such a low production number but I wasn't real hopeful of anymore turning up.

1934 Buick Roadster For Sale

Roll on to February 2000. Reading the For Sale/Wanted ads in the Buick News for that month I spotted an interesting entry:

1934 8/40 Roadster, 95% complete, partially dismantled. Complete details not known at time of writing, Bernie Higgins may have further info.

So that was the fourth 1934 Roadster I now knew of, pity it was on the other side of the country and I was sure those east coasters would be onto it like seagulls onto an old prawn!!!

Full details of this vehicle appeared in the For Sale column of the March 2000 Buick News:

1934 Buick 8/40 Roadster Holden body, chassis no. 2770924, engine no. 42932047 (appears to be a 1935 engine), motor turns but hasn't been run for many years, six wheel equipped with both wheel covers, all wheels and most hubcaps. Needs restoring. Basically 100\$ complete although some minor parts may be missing. Instruments are complete and working. Some NOS parts eg brake linings are included. A second chassis and two spare rear guards with step are included, roof hardware is complete and includes the remains of the roof with the rear window intact. Windscreen is intact, as are headlight glasses. Luggage rack and hardware is included - \$5,000 ono.
Derek Yarrow, 12 Webster Drive, Caboolture. Qld.
(07) 5495 4637, email: derek@caboolture.net.au.

It read really well, all the hard to get parts seemed to be there and I thought it would make a really great project – for someone on the east coast and resisted the urge to phone the seller, surely it would be snapped up.

I was very surprised when the advert appeared in the April issue of the Buick News. Curiosity got the better of me and I made the call. I had a lengthy conversation with the car's owner and he told me he had owned the car for the past 30 odd years and yes, it was pretty much 100% complete. The biggest issue was it was in pieces. It's very difficult to transport a basket case. I told Derek (the owner) I was very interested and he offered to send photos of what he had. I had a lot of frequent flyer points up my sleeve and said if I was still interested after getting the photos I might fly over for a closer look. Derek offered to pick me up if this eventuated.

The photos arrived. I was impressed with what I saw. The major drawback was that the body was removed from the chassis.

I phoned Derek and closed the deal after he agreed to put the body back on and have it on wheels so it could be transported. Containerised shipping was arranged after Derek had a few mates help him put the car back into one piece, well one major piece and he was good enough to box the rest of the items and secure them in/on and around the vehicle.

I got my first look at the car when I went to pick it up at the Kewdale freight terminal. Even though some people thought I was mad, I was more than pleased with what I had bought.



The first thing to do was get it home and see exactly what I had. After emptying the boxes of parts I went about completely assembling the car to see what was missing and needed to be sourced.

Derek was true to his word, the car was basically 100% complete, some of it pretty worn but plenty to work with. All the woodwork was present which was a relief. Although none was usable it was invaluable as patterns to have the replacement frame made.

The floor was badly rusted, no big issue as the floor panels are the same as the sedan and meant better panels could be sourced. The chassis was cracked in numerous places but Derek had supplied another and I later sourced a better one still (they are the same as the sedan except for two holes on the top of the rear chassis rail to accommodate a different style bracket for the luggage rack).

The only problem part missing was the taillight and bracket. Derek had told me this was a special light that bolted to the top of the luggage rack and had a swivel so when you lowered the rack the light swung out and still faced the rear, not the ground. I imagined this was similar to the hinged brackets found on early

station wagon tailgates. He said this had been lent to another Buick restorer many years ago and the car had since changed hands (I later discovered after reading the article on Wal Anderson's 34 roadster that this is in fact where the light and hinge was).

In fact this had been a makeshift arrangement by a previous owner of the car and not correct. The light stalk actually bolts to the right hand mudguard and during the cars tough life on a rural property it had rusted and dropped off.

The stalk is the same as used on the American bodied 1934 Series 40 (Australian bodies have a different stalk attached to the side of the boot) and I was fortunate to purchase one at the swap meet in Flint when I attended the Centennial Celebrations in 2003. What was even luckier was in the US you could get an accessory stalk for the other side giving you two taillights, how modern is that!! I got one of those as well (at great expense!!!) from the same vendor.

As I was half way through the restoration of the 1950 Jetback coupe I had to be satisfied with rolling the 34 into the corner of the shed to await it's turn for restoration.



The Restoration

TO BE CONTINUED!!!!!!!!!!!!!!