

## California Dreaming

By Courtney Shenkle

1967 was a very good year! Buick introduced a limited edition model, the California GS, to the western US market. It was touted as "The Distinctive Personal Car for Americans on the GO". The California GS was one of Buick's entries into the junior muscle car market niche. These cars were designed to provide the appearance and performance of the era's super cars, but with the low maintenance and price of more economical family transportation. The GS was equipped with a 340 CI/260 HP V-8 and Super Turbine 300 transmission. Bench seats were standard and accessories were at a minimum to keep the sticker price moderate.

In 1967 our family was living in the East Bay area near Oakland, CA. My father decided that it was time to buy a new car and on June 30, 1967 selected the California GS model; buying it from Turner Buick, which was located in Hayward. Our GS was built in Buick's Fremont, CA plant and was titled and registered in California – it was a true California car in all respects.



*1967 Buick California GS*

Subsequently, due to moves, Dad registered the GS in Oklahoma, and then Pennsylvania. Though it was his daily driver, I accumulated quite a bit of time behind the wheel. In 1974 Dad sold it to me, complete with all documents and records, and I moved it to my home in Maryland. It was kept outside, and I continued to drive it until 1976, when I moved to the town where my parents lived. The GS finally was retired into Dad's heated garage and driven only on special occasions..

During 1981 I grew tired of the Buick's dull, chipped paint, so I had the car completely painted. This was not a restoration quality paint job, but a well done repaint. Also, I had the engine completely cleaned and detailed. The GS' first car show and trophy was at a local show in Pennsylvania in 1984.

By that time I had married, and my bride and I soon moved to New York state. The Buick tagged along as a seldom-driven, big blue garage decoration. After a good clean-up, and some local shows for practice, the Buick placed third in class at the BCA 1989 National Meet in Batavia, NY.

We bought a house in Maryland in 1997. The car show seed planted in Batavia took another four years to germinate. By 2001 I began tinkering with the Buick, replacing hoses, plugs, wires, and the exhaust system; detailing the engine compartment and getting it professionally tuned up. Then we took the Buick to some local shows.

Our California GS was driven to the Buick 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary gathering in Flint, MI in July 2003. The following year, we participated in a Buick Driving Enthusiasts five-day tour. During both long distance events, the California GS performed well. However, its now-over-22-year-old paint was very tired, and had accumulated more dings and stone chips, so I finally decided to take the restoration plunge.

The Buick took up winter residence at a restoration shop in December 2004, for a complete repaint in the original color, with bumpers, trim, doors, trunk lid, and hood removed. Fortunately, there were no major body issues. There was some corrosion in the rear window trough, which is normal for the body

style. But I decided to expand the scope of the project (don't we all?) and in addition to the repaint, the Buick's entire front clip was removed for painting (including the engine), and the front end was completely rebuilt.

Work and other issues permitted only one show during 2005 (resulting in a Second place at the Buick Owners of Maryland show in Baltimore), but we got further into the show and tour routine in 2006. The car received a Red Rose award at the Lancaster Museum of Art Concours d'Elegance, a First at the AACA Bull Run Region show, and a Third at the AACA Bay Country Region fall meet. In addition, we participated in the Buick Driving Enthusiasts tour to Kentucky. It has received other trophies at AACA, BCA, and local shows

After recent cruises to Indiana and Ohio, the odometer shows 115K miles, all driven by me or a member of our family. The engine and drive train have never been rebuilt, although the transmission finally needed new seals. Other than replacement of typical

wear items, it has been a very reliable vehicle – no major mechanical or body repairs have been needed. The interior is original, and the vinyl top, trim and road wheels are original, as well.

The only enhancements to-date have been red-line tires, re-chromed bumpers, a speed-minder speedometer, and a passenger side rear view mirror from a Buick Special.

Dad's final ride in "his" Buick took place in July of 1997, the day before we drove it away from his house for the last time. Unfortunately, he was hospitalized shortly thereafter, and passed away in December of 1997. Since then, all of my activities with "his" car are entirely "in his memory." And I know he would be pleased! We're looking forward to enjoying our Buick for many years to come.