

OOCC CORVETTE TRIP Part 5 Buick Performance Group, National Trails Raceway, OH

Written by Double Dragon

Friday, 23 December 2011 21:16 - Last Updated Saturday, 01 April 2017 22:45

One Owner Collector Car- CORVETTE TRIP Part 5 Buick Performance Group, National Trails Raceway, OH

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As you see above, the original factory prototype Buick GSX was on hand for this edition of the Buick Performance Group get together. Note the body colored front spoiler which was changed to black on the production cars.

The theme for this year's show was a celebration of the amazing Buick GSX. The GSX is one of my favorite cars of all time, so my excitement level was high. The BPG people were aiming to gather more GSXs here in one spot than at any other time since the cars were first produced nearly 40 years ago.

DAY 35

Volo, IL

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I spent a day in Volo, Illinois revisiting the famed Volo car museum. The food court right at admissions had a good 6 inch turkey sub sandwich for decent price. The guys were pretty friendly and directed me to the ONE OWNER cars they had on hand and provided as much history as they knew. I headed north to sleep at Marie's house in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

_____ DAY

38 _____

Milwaukee, WI

VetteCo from Bogart, Georgia shipped 4 power steering hoses to the house. Tom replaced the power steering hoses so there was no more need to constantly refill the awkwardly placed reservoir. He ended up using a gigantic plumbing wrench to stabilize the body of the pump while threading on the new hoses. The end of leaking power steering fluid saved me a lot of time on future trips.

_____ DAY 39 _____

Milwaukee, WI

_____ DAY

40 _____

Milwaukee, WI/ Gary, Lafayette, IN

I turned around and headed south again on my way to the Buick Performance Group Nationals. Following roads that hugged Lake Michigan heading south soon I was at the bottom of the Lake

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and going east blasting straight through to Ohio. The trip was simple this time.

At 3 PM I paid 50 cents toll to the Indiana Toll Road in Gary.

Around 6 PM I pulled into Lafayette, Indiana for dinner in a Bob Evans restaurant. I filled up with gas at a BP Circle K around 7 PM and hit the road.

_____ DAY

41 _____

Springfield, Hebron, Dayton, OH

At 9:30 AM I bought some milk from a Springfield, Ohio gas station named Hank's BP. Like so many other stations I'd encountered in the USA the magazine selection was tremendous. I picked up a Corvette Trader. Interstate 70 flashed through Columbus and I quickly made it to the Buick show.

It was very humid as the Vette rolled down a country road deep in corn fields of Hebron, Ohio. A big green grassy field still wet from a rainstorm opened up to reveal classic Buicks on the side of the road. The registration table sat one hundred feet in from the road beneath a shade tent. Very friendly officials outlined the highlights of the show to me and generously issued a ONE OWNER COLLECTOR CAR website guest pass to their event. Thanks again guys, and I hope you enjoy my coverage of the show.

I drove into the grounds of the National Trails Raceway and parked my Corvette beside a 1986 Grand National. It occurred to me that I was parked beside the only General Motors Corvette performance rival during the 1980s. Car magazines compared the smoking fast Grand Nationals with the C4 Corvettes several times. Although the Grand Nationals were given lower spec ratings than the Corvettes, brutal acceleration was the domain of the GNs, while finesse remained the Corvette specialty. Car magazines that tested the GNs questioned the Corvette's spot at the top of the GM pyramid.

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The C4 Corvette had morphed into a true world class sports car with modern chassis and high tech handling capabilities. The Grand National was using old school sedan suspension, but car magazines evaluating cars in straight line acceleration discovered that the Grand National was seriously fast in the quarter mile. It was just like the 1960s all over again when a Pontiac Tempest GTO was capable of trouncing sophisticated European supercars in a straight line.

The 1970s era Trans Am/ Corvette feud actually carried through the mists of time to land some animosity on my head when I drove my Vette into a sea of Pontiacs last month at GTO Nationals. Could the Grand National/ Corvettes contest still be on anyone's mind here?

Before I gave serious thought to the laughable possibility that once again I had shown up in the wrong place in the wrong car I reasoned that my car was a C3, so it was effectively removed from a direct pipeline back to the late 1980s comparison. The Shark is clearly of another era with its extravagant 1960s body evoking a curvy swinging sixties babe or possibly a sinister Mako shark coming to menace James Bond in the film Thunderball.

The C4 is a stripped down purposeful techmobile cast in the space age era RX-8 mode. Granted, the C4 is bigger than some foreign whizmachine, but it is just as advanced and of course faster. Despite being smaller and lighter, foreign cars couldn't dethrone the Vette, but the Darth Vader Grand Nationals won 0 to 60 and quarter mile contests against C4 Vettes and obliterated every other car out there in the 1980s. A speed governor on the Grand Nationals left the Vettes as top speed and handling winners.

The owner of the Grand National parked beside me began telling me about some of the turbo tricks he had performed to tighten up his game. I noticed the entire spectator parking lot was awash in Grand Nationals. Other GN owners standing around joined us in a detailed discussion about popular stealth turbo modifications and other invisible tweaks.

I told them about the time I got shut down in a street race by a tubbed, roll caged Grand National with back tires the size of steamroller wheels.

"Did the guy keep it six?"

"I'm not certain of that, but he definitely kept it turbo because I heard the spool up hissing at me like a mean snake."

A tubbed GN didn't sit well with the guys. Just like 1960s muscle car guys, no one likes to see a nice car cut up. They were in favor of pulling more performance out of their cars while maintaining a factory appearance. This level of appreciation is a solid indicator that Grand Nationals enjoy true full collector status just like the 1960s musclecars.

I pointed out some interesting time frames,

"The GNs are now the exact same age that the original 1960s muscle cars were when the muscle car collecting revival took off. Funny to think that the GNs were brand new cars when the first wave of muscle cars became collectible."

There were some nods of agreement, but one of the guys pointed out that,

"It's a little different, because a lot of guys recognized the collectible nature of the GNs right out the gate. Back in the 1960s no one thought of the future, but there are a lot of low miles original Grand Nationals out there."

"Hmm, but from the looks of the drivers in this parking lot most of them lived a full life just like the 1960s musclecar cruisers and daily drivers. I think they have reached the same point the first wave of muscle cars hit back in the 1980s. They are still drivable but due for restoration."

He hemmed and hawed. "Yes and no. You're right that the daily drivers have reached the same wear points that the sixties musclecars hit during the 1980s. But that is just from the looks department: seats are worn, the doors are sagging, paint and undercarriage is tired. But fuel injection engines don't need a rebuild every 60 thousand miles like the old carbureted musclecars do."

I saw where he was going with this. Fuel injection measures out the exact amount of gasoline needed, keeping extra gas out of your crankcase so it can't dilute the oil and wear out your cylinder walls. Modern cars easily pass the 100,000 mile mark without anything more than a new set of plugs.

He continued, "If you can get by with a repaint and your drive train is ok, why take it down to a frame off? Besides, guys still like to tinker with them and improve their times. No one really wants to go back to factory spec. It's just like the third gen Camaros and Firebirds. No one saves those 305 smog motors. They all switch it up with crate motors to make them into real musclecars the way they should have been first time out."

"I've seen a lot of hot rodded F bodies as well as G bodies out there, that's for sure. The unique thing about the GN is that there is no need to swap engines to bring them up to snuff."

"Yep. Not only that, but these were the first high tech daily driver musclecars. They can go fast all day long without overheating or fouling plugs and give you good gas mileage in a work commute. I get 16 to 18 city miles out of mine with A/C on. It's a usable musclecar."

I agreed with the Grand National owner's warranted pride in the car. Aside from the user friendly owner experience, the GN image is really important. It was all black every year once the Grand National identity was established. It had seats reminiscent of the seats used in the Prototype GSX from back in 1970. The body recreates the classic lines of an intermediate musclecar from the mid 1960s just on a slightly smaller scale.

The ponycar Mustangs, Camaros and Trans Ams were quick and eventually became the sole muscle machines of the 1990s, but they were much smaller cars inside, with small trunks and virtually nonexistent backseats. Hatchback F bodies helped the cars achieve more utility but still didn't fully solve the space issue.

The 'G' cars evoke the original 'intermediate musclecar formula' of a fast but practical daily driver. A GN combined those classic intermediate proportions with unique sinister all black kick ass looks.

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The other GM 'G' bodies had the shape, good looks and some performance, but lacked the full constellation of factors merging into a singular image that the Grand National enjoyed. That powerful image is the secret to the instantly recognizable Grand National.

The 1980s Monte Carlo SS relied on a smog motor 305, except for those really early rare Montes that used a Buick turbo. The Monte Carlo was a highly successful good selling car with a really good line from the nose over the fenders but lacked the instantly recognized identity of the GN.

The Monte Carlo Aerocoupe and the Grand Prix 2+2 had a NASCAR tie-in, but even with that wild fastback window, the image didn't really dent the public consciousness like an all black GN.

The Hurst/ Olds and the 442s also had the looks and started out right in the 1980s with a 350 but soon were trying to make it work with only 307 cubes. Olds came on with a quad 4 pipsqueek engine that managed to drag 160 HP out of a mere 2.3 L displacement. But by that time the connection to the old days was too tenuous.

The blank looks I got when I mentioned the other GM 'G' bodies drove home the point that out of the batch, the Grand National prevails due to its powerful image. Of course, the crowd was slightly biased because we were standing in an all Buick show, but these guys know all about Hemis and Cobra Jets. The G body 'almost cars' of the 1980s that didn't register on their radars are forgotten cars for reasons beyond Buick bias.

The Grand National stood out. That turbo V6 engine in a mean all blacked out Grand National is capable of blowing the doors off just about any new car of the time period. The last gasp GNX which was named in honor of the GSX set a high water mark for muscle cars of the 1980s.

Speaking of the original GSX cars, these cars set the muscle car high-water mark for 1970. Word was out that about seventy GSXs made it here including some cars from the rarer 1971 and 1972 model years. I wanted to see them all, but was sidetracked by other interesting cars as I made my way through the grounds.

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This was a huge mistake because a thunderstorm took a lot of cars off the tarmac later on. But for now I sauntered into the show slowly enjoying each and every car as if I had all the time in the world.

Having owned and driven Buick A bodies, I had to stop at just about every Skylark and GS enroute to the central area of the show where the GSX cars were gathered. One Skylark owner made an interesting comment,

"Every single 350 Skylark I've owned was able to do a true 120 MPH in totally stock set-up."

This might be due to the extra care Buick took in engine assembly and pre-installation testing. The factory put compressed air into the cylinders of newly assembled engines to ascertain proper compression balance across the board. It also could be due to the typical owner of a Buick being older and more careful with break-in and general driving habits. I agreed that I'd also seen a true 120 MPH in a Skylark 350 that didn't seem to be working hard to do it.

I had something to eat at the Sunset Inn Restaurant on National Road SE.

At 9 PM I gassed up at Certified Oil 423 on 10257 Lancaster SE in Hebron, Ohio and jammed the gas pedal down hard making incredible time to Dayton, Ohio where Lynn was waiting. I drove through the narrow opening to her building. The Vette engine announced my arrival. There was no doubt she was happy to see me. Her head popped out the window with a loud whoop. Before I could finish my car routine (hiding stuff under a black blanket that made the interior look empty) she had raced downstairs and leaped on me wrapping her arms and legs around me. We had a great reunion.

DAY 42

Dayton, Springfield, Millersport, Hebron, OH

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At 9:30 AM I loaded up on fruit at a Kroger on S. Limestone Street in Springfield, Ohio while waiting for my film to get developed in Walgreens nearby.

By 5 PM I was famished and ate a buffet meal in a Country Market in Millersport, Ohio.

Around 8 PM I gassed up once more at the Certified Oil and blasted out to Dayton again to spend the night with Lynn. The headers howled like banshees as I willed the landscape to vaporize in my hurry to get to her. The Vette shot past all the other cars on the highway like they were motionless stones. I passed through Kierkeville and soon came rumbling up to Dayton. The familiar streets passed by as I closed in on her place.

_____ DAY

43 _____

Dayton, Paris, OH/ Remington, IN/ Braidwood, Niles, IL/ Milwaukee, WI

Saying goodbye to Lynn I ate a good omelette. At 9:30 AM I picked up a pint of milk in at the Petro gas station in New Paris, Ohio and had some cereal in the hot sun.

Around 1 PM I gassed up at the Petro 75 Stopping Center in Remington, Indiana.

At 3 PM as i idled through Braidwood, Illinois a Dollar General attracted my attention. I had been conditioned by Lynn to spot them now!

At 5 PM I stopped for some food at Old Country Buffet in Niles, Illinois.

At 7 PM I gassed up at Sunrise on Howell back in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

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