

Giving Cadillac a Run for Its Money

BY BOB TOMAINE

CADILLAC HAS HELD THE BEST SEAT in the General Motors family since the day it entered the fold, but not always by much. While LaSalle was in many ways a less-expensive Cadillac, Buick was cause for a different kind of concern.

"Buick was making a strong run for the prestige market in the late '30s, early '40s," says Geoff Bridgman of Canadensis, Pennsylvania, whose 1940 Buick Limited Model 91 formal sedan is shown here.

William C. Durant made Buick a key component in his young General Motors in 1908 then followed with Cadillac in 1909. Other names appeared and disappeared as a maturing GM sought to cover every level of the market from Chevrolet through Cadillac. Smaller steps might reduce defections, so companion cars filled the gaps.

Cadillac's companion car was the 1927-40 LaSalle. Buick's was Marquette, built only in the 1930 model year. Unlike LaSalle, the Marquette is mostly forgotten. Cadillac, with its V8, V12 and V16, is deservedly remembered for high-end customs that the Classic Car Club of America recognizes as Full Classics, but the CCCA also recognizes 1931-42 Buick Series 90s and Limited models.

The Series 90's 344-cid overhead-valve straight-eight produced 104 hp at introduction. It was available in anything from a sport roadster at \$1,610 to a seven-passenger limousine at \$2,035, not cheap cars.

Buick dropped several Series 90 body

styles for 1933 and added the Limited name in 1936, when a new 320-cid, 120-hp engine appeared. Styling was gradually changing from upright boxiness to horizontal smoothness, and by 1939 Buick replaced its narrow grille with a wide, gentle waterfall and moved the headlights from the grille's sides to the fenders.

For 1940 a horizontal-bar grille and better-integrated headlights combined with a 140-inch wheelbase and side-mount spares to create a subtle dignity. Higher compres-

sion rings and valves. Bridgman says these cars were often chauffeur-driven and kept in the garage, which is why their survival rate is fairly good.

Beyond the engine work, this car needed only maintenance and replacements ranging from compounding and waxing to brakes and a clutch. Driving it is almost effortless, without the loss of road feel. The large steering wheel and long-throw column shifter are well positioned, in front of the high seat. Both move smoothly and easily. Add in acceptable visibility and this Buick would be a great car to drive across North America, despite its 10 mpg.

The Limited's pluses would more than offset that cost. The ride is so quiet that picking up cues is difficult, but the 320 produces 141 hp and 269 lb-ft of torque, so moving 4590 pounds actually produces few cues. While driving in the Pocono Mountains, the Limited easily pulled in third gear with no struggle. Bridgman says

you don't need first gear unless you stop.

Most interesting, though, is that the car doesn't seem as large as it is. The ride is soft by modern standards, but not soft enough that it feels ponderous. At the speed limit on secondary roads, the Buick doesn't send that uncomfortable signal that maybe it isn't going to go where it is pointed.

World War II put an end to Buick production on Feb. 2, 1942, and in 1958 the Limited returned as the top dog at Buick. ■



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sion meant the engine now made 141 hp. At \$1,942 to \$2,199, Limiteds still weren't cheap cars. Bridgman's Limited would have been more discreet than a Cadillac in 1940, but not necessarily invisible.

Among the knowledgeable, rarity alone would draw attention, just 417 formal sedans were among 1739 Limiteds for 1940. Bridgman's car is mostly original with 67,000 miles showing. He bought it with 54,000 miles in 1989, and the only major work since was replacement of

| MARKET |

Barrett-Jackson
Palm Beach, Fla.
April 1

1963 Triumph TR4 roadster

2138-cc four-cylinder, four-speed, left-hand drive. Wedgewood Blue with black leather. Thorough two-year restoration, with no expense spared and all phases photo-documented. Very good, even gaps, great paint and no flaws to the chrome, including the wire wheels. Inside is just as nice, with excellent



leather and gauges. Underhood is as clean as possible, and looks great with the polished Triumphtune valve cover. As close to perfect as you're ever going to see on a TR.

Sold at \$97,200

Lest you think this is an indication of where TR4 prices are headed, think again. This car is proof that any car can be brought to concours standards if you're willing to spend enough. The seller was lucky enough to have two well-heeled buyers in the audience. Without one of them, it could have sold just as easily for \$50,000 (and we still would have been astounded). This will be a hard car, and a hard sale, to duplicate.

—KEITH MARTIN