



# Gateway Gazette

Monthly Newsletter of the St. Louis Chapter

## BUICK CLUB OF AMERICA

Volume XXVIII, No.5 June 2009

### Sinclair All Buick Show, Saturday, May 2

What a beautiful day we had for the 2009 Sinclair Buick Show. The weather was perfect and with 30+ Buicks showing up, it was a great day. I heard that the dealership gave out 600+ hot dogs, not to mention all the pretzels and soda. Hopefully, that will lead to a few sales for them.

Thanks to Steve Dodson for making the arrangements with Sinclair Buick. We also had a good turn out from the Buick performance club thanks to Scott Keller's promoting it with that group.

Thanks to all who attended. It made for a wonderful day.

Contributed by Bob Brasses

More Photos on page 4



### Upcoming Events

**Fenton Bar & Grill, 701 Rudder Road, June 4, 7:30 p.m.**

**Cruise to Bobby's Custard, Saturday, June 6**

**Display at Behlmann's with Pontiac, GMC, Saturday, June 13**

**Museum of Transport All Buick Show, Sunday, June 28**

**Details on Pages 3 and 4**

## Director's Message

Hi All,

May is here and we have no activities scheduled. However, it is a good time to get ready for the summer shows. The National will be here before we know it, and hopefully, you are planning to go. It should be a great event. Anyone interested in doing activities outside the planned ones, contact me. Barb and I have made several trips to the area over the years and plan on seeing some sights in our '55.

If you do go, make sure your car is ready for the trip! Tune 'em up and make sure you bring along extra fluids for both you and your Buicks if you plan on taking a few side trips. If you haven't been out to the area before make sure to pack extra water and drink often. If you can, take an extra day or two to get there early and get used to the altitude. I've never experienced altitude sickness, but Barb has and she was pretty miserable for a day.

As of today I'm hoping to take two to three days to get there, so if anyone is interested in seeing a few things along the way, give me a call.

We also have a Regional Show coming up. It is in Appleton, Wisconsin, which is not far from Green Bay. If we have any football fans, the Packers Hall of Fame is a must see. I have seen both the NFL Hall of Fame and the Packer's version. The Packers Hall is overwhelming and very family-oriented. There are lots of things to do to keep the young and young-at-heart busy. There is also a great railway museum in the area for those interested in trains.

On a car note, "Cash for Clunkers" is still in the news. Please take time and research the issue and contact your representatives. Hope to see everyone at the June meeting.

**Bob**

## Meeting Minutes, May 7, 2009

The May 2009 meeting was held on Thursday, May 7, at Fenton Bar & Grill. We had a good turnout with three guests, Tom Ralston, Bill Castinette and Jimmy Gehm. New members Tony Ingargiola and Steve Kramarczyk were also in attendance.

The Club meeting was facilitated by Bob Brasses, Director.

The minutes of the April 2009 meeting were approved as printed in the Gazette.

Pete Nathan was not present to give the Treasurer's report.

### **May Birthdays**

Judy Driscoll  
Cathleen Horst

### **May Anniversaries**

Steve and Sherri Dotson  
John and Kitty Lasinski  
Vic and Pat Panus  
Jim and Karen Poole  
Bill and Maggi Wester

### **Upcoming Events**

#### **May**

2 Sinclair Buick Show  
7 Regular Monthly Meeting - Fenton Bar & Grill  
8 Fenton Cruise - Life Christian Church  
17 Trip to Rolla to visit Bill Bicknell moved to the fall

#### **June**

4 Regular Monthly Meeting - Fenton Bar & Grill  
5 Fenton Cruise - Life Christian Church  
6 Bobby's Custard Cruise

Continued on page 3

## June Birthdays

Ralph Bauer	Paul Meyer
Bill Bicknell	Franco Palmeri
Gene Bossaller	Joseph Walchshouser
Mike Driscoll	John Midkiff
Doris Hall	Angie Midkiff

## June Anniversaries

Phil and Mary Berger  
Paul and Mary Ann Meyer  
Pete and Louise Smith  
Joseph and Janet Walchshouser

## Meeting Minutes, May 7, 2009 (Continued)

### **June (Continued)**

- 5-7 Olds Club Tan Tar A Show
- 13 Display at Behlmann Buick, I-270 & McDonnell
- 27 Antique Boat Show, Alton, IL
- 28 Museum of Transportation Show
- ? St. Genevieve Overnight Tour – moved to fall

### **July**

- 1-5 National Meet - Colorado Springs, CO
- 3 Fenton Cruise - Life Christian Church
- 9 Regular Monthly Meeting - Fenton Bar & Grill
- 12 Lion's Club Show - McNair Park

### **August**

- 6 Regular Monthly Meeting - Fenton Bar & Grill
- 7 Fenton Cruise - Life Christian Church

### **August (Continued)**

- 13-16 BCA Heartland Regional Show, Appleton, WI
- 29 Skyview Drive-In

### **New Business**

Alton, IL Trip?

Paul Meyer is running for the BCA BOD.

We're being asked to volunteer to help with the Heartland Regional Show.

We will sell three of the Arch Cable trophies to the Riviera Club.

50/50 drawing – Won by Adam Martin

### **Next Regular Meeting:**

June 4 Fenton Bar & Grill, 7:30

## 2009 Calendar

### June

- 4 Regular Monthly Meeting - Fenton Bar & Grill
- 5 Fenton Cruise - Life Christian Church
- 6 Bobby's Custard Cruise
- 5-7 Olds Club Tan Tar A Show
- 13 Display at Behlmann with Pontiac GMC
- 27 Antique Boat Show, Alton, IL
- 28 Museum of Transportation Show

### July

- 1-5 National Meet - Colorado Springs, CO
- 3 Fenton Cruise - Life Christian Church
- 9 Regular Monthly Meeting - Fenton Bar & Grill
- 12 Lion's Club Show - McNair Park

### August

- 6 Regular Monthly Meeting - Fenton Bar & Grill
- 7 Fenton Cruise - Life Christian Church
- 13-16 BCA Heartland Regional Show, Appleton, WI
- 29 Skyview Drive-In

### September

- 3 Regular Monthly Meeting - Fenton Bar & Grill
- 4 Fenton Cruise - Life Christian Church
- 6 Wheels In Motion - Westport Plaza
- 12 Wagner Buick Show
- 26-28 Route 66 Festival - Springfield, IL

### October

- 1 Regular Monthly Meeting - ?
- 2 Fenton Cruise - Life Christian Church
- 4? St. Charles Octoberfest Show
- ? Cruise to Bill Bicknell's
- ? St. Genevieve Overnight Tour

### November

- 5 Regular Monthly Meeting - ?
- 7 Fall Oil Change

## Museum Of Transport All Buick Show, Sunday, June 28, 11 am -2 pm

Buick owners are invited to bring their cars to the annual MOT/Buick Club All Buick Show at the Museum, 3015 Barrett Station Road (I-270 to west on Dougherty Ferry Road, about 0.9 mile to a left on Barrett Station. A \$5 entry fee will be collected with all proceeds split evenly between the Museum of Transport and our clubs charity. Dash plaques will be given to all entries and trophies will be awarded for the three "Best of Show" entries as determined by the Museum staff. Drivers and one passenger of entered cars will also be provided free admission to the Museum. Lets have a big club turnout!

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Sinclair All Buick Show



**Directions to Fenton Bar & Grill:** Take I-44 west from I-270 and exit onto N. Hwy Drive to Bowles Avenue. Crossover I-44, then turn left on S. Hwy Drive to Larkin Williams Drive. Turn right on Larkin Williams for 0.3 miles, then left at the stop sign onto Rudder Road.

**Directions to Bobby's Custard:** Take I-55/I-70 across into Illinois to IL 159 North. Continue north to Maryville. Bobby's is on the left; you can't miss the sign. Those wanting to go early to eat dinner at the Red Apple next to Bobby's, meet at the Koch Road exit on I-255 at 5 pm. ACA members will be joining us again. Park at the bank lot across the street from Bobby's. Live music will be provided by Bobby's.

## The Buick Nailhead

The 50s, *ah those glorious 50s!* America was entering into a decade unprecedented in world history for prosperity and change. The country had emerged from the Great Depression, and successfully, fought the world's greatest war. Now it was time to enjoy life and enjoy it big time! I can't even say the word 50s without feeling a great sense of nostalgia.

GIs had returned home to find plentiful employment opportunities and a comfortable life style. Babies were born at a rate never seen in this country and families were moving into suburbia and driving to work. Cars were needed to fulfill this new lifestyle and the money was available, so everyone was able to enjoy some decadence.

Car designers had played with some radical new concepts in automotive design. In the forefront of this effort was Harley Earle. He set the automotive world on fire with the 1938 Buick "Y" job. Being a shameless aircraft fan, his post war designs reflected the style and grace of WW2 fighter planes. The 1951 Buick LeSabre was the embodiment of his vision of a fighter jet that is land based. The P38 Lightning was his vision and the lines reflected that design. The rear bumper was circular in the shape of a jet engine exhaust. The sides featured the sweep spear design that simulated the blending of wings into a fuselage. The rear fins looked like the tailfins on that famous fighter plane that the Germans called the "Fork -tailed Devil". The power plant was fueled with either gasoline or methanol depending upon whether or not the supercharged was engaged. Can't you just picture Elvis Presley cruising down the boulevard in this magnificent LeSabre?

OK, concept cars were all good clean fun, but where would it lead to? Well, the Buicks of the 50s are where it all led to. Take a look at the original LeSabre and compare that with the Buicks of the 50s, specifically the later 50s. Sweep spears down the sides, front bumpers with bulbous tipped bumper guards. Rounded hoods blended into elegantly formed side panels and one-piece windshields.

This was a very special time for me to be a kid. I was born with octane in my blood and loved cars from my very earliest memories. My Mom says that I knew every car on the road by the time I was five. There were two annual events that remain in my memory and significance in my life. One was going to Wagner Buick on "A" street in Belleville around Labor Day to see the new Buicks for that year. I used to stand at the showroom window and just drool over these new beauties. The other was going to see my Dad's best friend, Al Daly, and his new Buick.

You see, Al was a salesman for the Curtis Candy Company, which made Baby Ruth and Butterfinger candy bars. Al got a new company car every year and that car was always a Buick. He liked the two-door hardtop Century. Perhaps it is true, or perhaps it is my memory's embellishment over the years, but I think he actually had a '54 Skylark. I used to dream of those cars and wish that I could own one when I "got big." Remember that Al was a candy salesman. Our annual pilgrimage led to a sampling of his products. What more could a kid possibly desire? A new Buick and a bag of Baby Ruths.

Unlike the utilitarian cars of the 30s and 40s that had preceded, the cars of the 50s were big and needed a big power plant. To answer that need, along came the Buick Nailhead engine line. Buick was unique among car manufacturers in that it never produced a flathead engine. Even from the get go, the engines were always overhead valve designs. Unfortunately, however, Buick had stuck with the venerable Straight 8 for too long and was being overtaken by their competitors who had introduced V8s. This was a deficiency that Buick shared with Packard. In the case of Packard, it was one of a series of events that led to their demise.

The first Nailhead was introduced in 1953 with the Skylark. The design evolved from the 215-cubic inch engine from the original LeSabre. Looking in retrospect, probably the most serious shortcoming of the engine was the valvetrain. The pushrods came through the cylinder head and actuated the valves on the outboard side of the engine. This had never been done before, nor since. The result of this "backwards actuation design" was a very restrictive exhaust port which prevented the engine from breathing at higher RPMs. I've never understood why this was done, but it was probably not considered a serious deficiency at the time since it was to power a premium car that would never be used in a performance application. More on that later.

The backward valvetrain resulted in the valves being nearly vertical. To look at an engine with the valve covers removed, the valves stick straight up like nails hammered into a two-by-four. Thus, the nickname "Nailhead" evolved.

In its original form, the Nailhead had a displacement of 322 CID. In 1954, there were 322s in all but the Special line that utilized a smaller bore configuration that displaced 264 CID. The 264 only lasted for two years and was discontinued. The 322 was available from '53 thru '56.

Along came the much bigger '57 Buick that would have been underpowered with the 322. Both the bore and stroke were increased to yield a 364 CID. The longer stroke dictated an

Continued on page 6

## **The Buick Nailhead (Continued)**

increase in the deck height of the block. Buicks of '57 and '58 only had 364 CID engines, coming on both low compression two-barrel and high compression four-barrel configurations. At its highest end, the engine produced 300 HP, a pretty impressive feat in its time.

A further increase in displacement came in the '59 model year with the introduction of the 401 CID engine. This also involved an increase in the bore and stroke and a further increase in the block deck height. The 364 co-existed through '60 when it was then discontinued. There were more 401s produced than any of the other Nailhead engines since it was in production for eight years until its discontinuance after the '66 model year.

Late in the life of the Nailhead (probably too late) the 425 CID was introduced. This was a larger bore than the 401, but the stroke was the same, thus no change in block deck height was required. The blocks were, indeed, different to provide sufficient cylinder wall thickness required for the larger bore. These 425s had some pretty impressive performance characteristics. Adding dual carburetion and some pretty wild cams, they sent the GS's down the road without undue delay.

Some of the 425s actually ended up on drag strips across America. Some in stock form in the Riviera and Skylark Gran Sports, but also in some rail dragsters. Most famous of those was "TV" Tommy Ivo. If you remember, Tommy was one of the original "Mouseketeers" and appeared in over 100 movies. Tommy loved cars and liked to go fast. He had several dragsters built and raced in NHRA. His ultimate was the four-engine powered dragster he named "Showboat". His car had four 425s decked out with superchargers and Hilborn injection all mounted in the center of the car.

The two right mounted engines were connected nose to tail and powered the rear wheels. The two left mounted engines were also connected nose to tail and powered the front wheels, thus a four-wheel drive dragster. The right engines were mounted facing forward, but the left engines were mounted rearward causing the left and right engines to rotate in opposite directions. (Canceling out the torque reaction force vectors for all of you engineers and other technical guys reading this.) Tommy said that, upon acceleration, the front end would jump straight up, rather than rock to the right like a conventional car would do. NHRA, for whatever reason, was quite unimpressed with his machine and outlawed it before he was ever able to enter it into competition. He did campaign the car as a special event and wowed audiences wherever he went.

For further information, you might be interested to look at this YouTube video of Tommy explaining the car: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I\\_TDSTNPGzU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_TDSTNPGzU).

Nailheads have always been noted for their impressive low end performance. The engine in the Wildcat had a decal on the air cleaner stating 445. This was not the displacement, but rather the max available torque. Achieving greater than one lb.-ft. of torque per CID, is a very impressive accomplishment for a gasoline engine. This actually works out to a ratio of 1.1 lb.-ft./ CID. Pretty good! Why this low end power was accomplished is not clear to me. All of the technical features, such as bore to stroke ratio and rod length vs. stroke would not indicate good low end torque. The combustion chamber however is somewhat "hemispherical" in design. Buick referred to it as "pentroof" to distance itself from the Chrysler "Hemi". The Hemi has canted valves, which the Nailhead doesn't, but the chamber designs are pretty close to identical. The resulting combustion efficiency of the "pentroof" design is probably the reason for the low end performance.

Nailheads have always been popular with hot rodders who build modified cars. The engine is pretty narrow making for a pretty nice fit in some of the early Ford street rods. There were some really attractive aftermarket items to dress up the engine and provide a pleasing appearance. The engines are pretty light compared with other "big block" engines, but cannot compare with small block engines, thus they have never been the hot rod engine of choice. Nailheads have experienced resurgence of late. Car shows and car magazines regularly feature Nailhead powered cars. After seeing acres and acres and pages and pages of cars powered by Small Block Chevrolets, it is nice to see some variety for a change.

For those interested in more depth, there is a wealth of articles about Nailheads available on the Internet. Street Rodder Magazine ran a yearlong feature in 1997 written by Doc Frohmader. It can be accessed via [www.webrod.com](http://www.webrod.com) and go to the section entitled: "All Tech Articles". Be patient when scrolling through since there are lots of articles, but they are listed at "Buick Nailhead Hauler – Part (1 thru 15)"

Rod and Custom Magazine also had a series of two articles showing how to machine and assemble one of these engines. For specifications, serial numbers, production numbers, etc, these can be found on [www.buicks.net](http://www.buicks.net).

Contributed by Ted Becker





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The *GATEWAY GAZETTE* is a monthly newsletter, free to paid members of the St. Louis Gateway Chapter of the Buick Club of America. Articles, technical information, For Sale and Want Ads, photos, restoration sagas and coming events are welcomed, but must be submitted by the next-to-last Thursday of the month to assure inclusion in the next issue.

Our membership year runs from May 1 to April 30. Membership is renewable on May 1. Members joining between January 1 and April 30 are paid up through the next April. Dues are \$15 per year for the local chapter. Contact Pete Nathan, Treasurer. See address below. Current dues for the national club are \$40 per year, payable to: Buick Club of America, P.O. Box 360775, Columbus, OH 43236-0775.

The Gateway Chapter meets monthly on the FIRST THURSDAY of the month. Meetings begin at 7:30 PM and guests are welcome to attend. During the warmer months, May through October, we meet at Fenton Bar & Grill, 701 Rudder Road, Fenton, MO. During the winter months, November through April, we move indoors to various restaurants around St. Louis.

For more information, our local mailing addresses are as follows:

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