FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1971 Buick GS 455 Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1971 Buick GS 455

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

Single-year coverage. Factory-correct specifications. No guesswork.

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ufacturer History

Buick was founded in 1903 by David Dunbar Buick and became a founding pillar of General Motors in 1908, the company William C. Durant built around the Buick Motor Company. From the start Buick occupied the upper-middle of the GM ladder: above Oldsmobile and Pontiac, below Cadillac, the 'doctor's car' for buyers who wanted prestige without the Cadillac price.

Two engineering signatures defined Buick for decades. The first was the overhead-valve engine: Buick built OHV engines from the company's earliest days and never looked back. The second was the Nailhead V8 (1953-1966), so called for its small, vertical valves that made the rocker-arm studs look like nail heads. Nailheads ran hot, breathed poorly at high rpm, and made enormous low-end torque - exactly the formula Buick's customers liked.

Buick was late to the factory muscle party. Pontiac had the GTO in 1964 and Oldsmobile the 4-4-2; Buick's answer, the Skylark Gran Sport, arrived at midyear 1965 with a 401-cubic-inch Nailhead wearing a '400' badge. It sold in strong numbers, and the GS became a standalone series in 1967 with a new 400-cubic-inch V8. The 1968 redesign brought the GS 400, the Stage 1 option arrived in January 1968, and in 1970 the GS 455 replaced the 400 with Buick's biggest big-block - the torque monster that made Buick the quiet giant of the muscle era.

The Riviera Gran Sport followed a parallel path. The Riviera itself was Buick's personal luxury coupe from 1963; the Gran Sport package, introduced for 1965, added the dual-quad 425 Nailhead and handling upgrades. The 430 replaced the Nailhead in 1967, and the Riviera GS remained the gentleman's performance Buick through 1969, tracked by collectors today as one of the most documentable Buicks ever built.

Buick's muscle era ended the way everyone's did: compression dropped to 8.5:1 for 1971, net horsepower ratings arrived for 1972, and the GS faded from a headline act to an option package. But the cars never lost their following. The Buick GS Club of America and the Sloan Museum's Buick Gallery in Flint, Michigan, keep the paper trail alive - and that paper trail is what makes a real Buick worth restoring.

2 — Model History

The Gran Sport became a standalone Buick series in 1967, and the GS 400 carried the performance banner through 1969. For 1970 Buick replaced the 400 with its largest big-block: the 455, a 4.312-by-3.90-inch V8 rated at 350 horsepower and a class-leading 510 lb-ft of torque. The GS 455 was the quiet giant of the 1970 muscle year - less advertised than the Chevelle SS 454 or GTO, but heavier on torque than nearly all of them.

The Stage 1 option continued on the 455 with larger valves, a hotter cam, and a recalibrated carburetor, rated at 360 horsepower with the same 510 lb-ft of torque. Midway through the 1970 model year Buick added the GSX package - spoilers, stripes, hood tach, Rally Ride suspension, and chrome Rally wheels - available on the base 455 or the Stage 1. The GSX is covered in its own guides; this guide covers the GS 455 itself.

For 1971 General Motors cut compression to 8.5:1 across the board for low-lead fuel, and the GS 455's ratings fell to 315 gross horsepower (345 for the Stage 1, though some references report 330). For 1972 the industry moved to net horsepower ratings and Buick added engine codes to the VIN: U for the base 455, V for the Stage 1. The 1972 GS 455 is one of the most documentable Buicks ever built, because the VIN itself tells you which engine the car was born with.

3 — What Is Unique About This Model Year

1971 is the compression-cut year: 8.5:1 on every 455, down from 10.0:1/10.5:1. Horsepower fell to 315 gross on the base 455. The Stage 1 is commonly rated at 345 gross horsepower, but reputable references also publish 330 - both figures appear in the ledger below, because the conflict is real and unresolved in the

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onsulted.
It is the last year of gross ratings and the last year before the VIN carried an engine code, which makes 1971 cars slightly harder to authenticate than 1972s - the paperwork (Sloan, Protect-O-Plate, build sheet) carries more weight.
The GSX continued for 1971 on the GS 455, no longer restricted to two colors, with about 124 built per commonly cited figures. A 1971 GSX is rarer than a 1970 and far less replicated - but the same package-not-series VIN logic applies.
Styling: new front-end treatment for 1971; the GS hood scoops and stripes carry over. Mechanically the car is a softer, lower-compression evolution of the 1970 - better for pump gas, worse for the stoplight wars.
Year-to-year changes
■ Compression cut to 8.5:1 across the board for low-lead fuel
■ Last year of gross horsepower ratings; last year before VIN engine codes
■ GSX package continues, no longer restricted to two colors (~124 built)
■ Front-end restyle; corporate 8.5-inch 10-bolt rear axle
4 — VIN Decoding
1971 Buick VINs are 13 digits with no engine code. Example: 446371H100001.
Position 1: 4 = Buick. Positions 2-3: 46 = GS 455 series. Positions 4-5: 37 = 2-door hardtop sport coupe, 67 = 2-door convertible.
Position 6: 1 = 1971 model year. Position 7: assembly plant (H = Flint). Positions 8-13: production sequence number.
As in 1970, the GSX is a package on the GS 455 VIN - there is no separate GSX series code, and a Skylark-series VIN on a claimed GSX means clone.
5 — Cowl / Fender-Tag Decoding
Cowl tag: ST 71, model 44637/44667, trim, paint, and build-date codes as in 1970. 1971 paint codes differ from 1970 - verify against the factory chart, not against 1970 references.
The build date matters more for 1971 cars because running production changes (emissions equipment, carburetor calibrations) landed mid-year. Date-coded parts should cluster just before the build date.
6 — Engines
Factory engine lineup

Engine	Compression	Horsepower	Torque
455 4-barrel (base GS 455)	8.5:1	315 hp (gross)	~450 lb-ft (gross, commonly published)
455 Stage 1	8.5:1	345 hp (gross)	~460 lb-ft (gross, commonly published)

455 4-barrel (base GS 455) 455 cu in — bore 4.312 in × stroke 3.90 in, 8.5:1 compression, 315 hp (gross), ~450 lb-ft (gross, commonly published), Rochester 4bbl. Engine code: -. Compression cut from 10.0:1 for

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