

FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1972 Buick GS 455 Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1972 Buick GS 455

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

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

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet



Manufacturer 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

1972 changed the authentication game: the fifth VIN digit is the engine code - U for the base 455, V for the Stage 1. For the first time, the VIN alone proves which engine the car was born with. A 'Stage 1' with a U-code VIN is a clone, full stop.



power ratings arrived industry-wide: 250 net hp for the base 455, 270 for the Stage 1. The engines did not suddenly lose 65-75 horsepower - the ruler changed. Compare 1972 net figures to 1971 gross figures only with that understanding, or you will misjudge the car.

Production is unusually well documented for 1972: 1,099 base hardtops, 728 Stage 1 hardtops, 126 base convertibles, and just 81 Stage 1 convertibles (Hemmings, via marque records). The Stage 1 convertible is one of the rarest factory GS configurations of the era.

8.5:1 compression continues for low-lead fuel. The 1972 is the most street-friendly of the GS 455s - pump gas, milder cam timing, and the same A-body bones.

Year-to-year changes

- Net horsepower ratings industry-wide (250/270 net hp)
- VIN engine codes introduced: U = base 455, V = Stage 1
- No GSX package; GS 455 convertible in its final classic-format year
- Production unusually well documented: 1,099 / 728 / 126 / 81 split

4 — VIN Decoding

1972 Buick VINs are 13 digits WITH an engine code. Examples: 4G37U2H100001 (base 455), 4G37V2H100001 (Stage 1).

Position 1: 4 = Buick. Position 2: G = GS series - the series letter that separates GS cars from Skylarks this year (verify against factory docs).

Positions 3-4: 37 = 2-door hardtop sport coupe (67 = convertible). Position 5: ENGINE CODE - U = base 455, V = Stage 1. This digit is the authentication linchpin for 1972.

Position 6: 2 = 1972 model year. Position 7: assembly plant (H = Flint). Positions 8-13: production sequence number.

5 — Cowl / Fender-Tag Decoding

Cowl tag: ST 72, model, trim, paint, and build-date codes. The VIN engine code (U/V) and the cowl tag must tell the same story as the engine stamping.

1972 paint codes are year-specific - verify against the 1972 factory chart. Build date should precede delivery; date-coded components cluster before it.

6 — Engines

Factory engine lineup

Engine

Compression

Horsepower

Torque

455 4-barrel (base GS 455)

8.5:1

250 hp (net)

375 lb-ft (net)

455 Stage 1

8.5:1

270 hp (net)

390 lb-ft (net)

455 4-barrel (base GS 455) 455 cu in — bore 4.312 in × stroke 3.90 in, 8.5:1 compression, 250 hp (net), 375 lb-ft (net), Rochester 4bbl. Engine code: U (VIN). VIN engine code U. Net ratings per TA Performance factory-derived table.

455 Stage 1 455 cu in — bore 4.312 in × stroke 3.90 in, 8.5:1 compression, 270 hp (net), 390 lb-ft (net),