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1973 Buick GS Restoration Guide

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1973 Buick GS

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

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About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1973 Buick GS — one model, one year, nothing else. Every specification in this guide was checked against marque references, factory literature excerpts, and enthusiast documentation before it was written.

Our operating ethic is simple: we don't lie and we don't steal, we offer value. That means three things for this guide. First, no invented specifications — every number has a source. Second, where reputable sources disagree, the disagreement is disclosed in the text and in the Sources, Conflicts & Omissions section rather than papered over. Third, where a detail could not be verified, it is omitted and the omission is recorded — an honest gap beats a confident fabrication.

How to use this guide: start with the VIN and fender-tag (or door data plate) decoding sections to establish exactly what your car was when it left the factory. Use the engine, transmission, axle, paint, and casting sections to verify that what is on the car today matches what should be there. Use the rust and restoration-sequence sections to plan the work. And keep this guide in the shop — it is a working document, not a coffee-table book.

A final note: these cars are sixty years old. Parts have been swapped, tags have been lost, and memories have faded. Trust

the metal — casting numbers, date codes, and stampings — over stories. When in doubt, photograph everything and verify

against the factory service manual for your year.

1. Manufacturer History: Buick

Buick was founded in 1903 by David Dunbar Buick — and it was Buick's early success that gave William C. Durant the foundation to create General Motors in 1908. Buick became GM's 'doctor's car': upscale, refined, powerful, and conservatively styled. The brand's engineering signature was torque — big, effortless, low-rpm torque from nailhead and later big-block V8s.

Buick was late to the muscle party but arrived with authority. The 1965 Gran Sport put the 401-cubic-inch 'nailhead' V8 in the intermediate Skylark, and the 1966 GS added the 340-horsepower 401. The 1970 GSX — Buick's answer to the Judge and the 'Cuda — paired the 455-cubic-inch big-block (360 hp, 510 lb-ft of torque) with wild stripes and spoilers. The Stage 1 option made the GS the quickest car in many magazine tests of the era.

Buick's engineering culture shaped every GS: the 350 small-block, the 400/430/455 big-block family (the 455's 510 lb-ft remains one of the great torque figures of the muscle era), the Turbo Hydra-Matic automatics, and the GM A-body platform shared with the Chevelle, GTO, and 442 — which means deep parts interchange across the GM corporate bin.

The 1973 Colonnade restyle brought the GS into the new era with the 350 and 455 (now net-rated), and the GS name continued through the decade's performance twilight. Buick GS and GSX cars are among the most respected — and still undervalued — muscle cars, and correct restoration is supported by the Buick Gran Sport Club of America and deep GM documentation.

1973 Buick GS

2. Model History: Buick GS

The Buick Gran Sport began in the mid-1960s as Buick's muscle-car entry, growing through the GS400 and GS455 years into one of the most respected performance nameplates of the era — with the Stage 1 455 standing as one of the great engines of the muscle-car age. By the early 1970s, tightening emissions standards and insurance surcharges were squeezing big-block performance from every direction.



GM introduced the all-new Colonnade A-body intermediates — heavier cars with the distinctive pillared hardtop styling, built around anticipated rollover standards. Buick's version was the Century, and the Gran Sport became a performance package on the Century coupe rather than a standalone series. There was no convertible: the Colonnade GS was a hardtop coupe only.

The 1973 GS carried the muscle-car formula into the net-horsepower era: a 350 small-block in 175-hp 2-barrel or 190-hp 4-barrel form, a 455 big-block, and the Stage 1 455 — 270 net horsepower and 390 lb-ft, with Positraction included. A Muncie four-speed was available on the Stage 1, and just 92 were built that way. At 6,637 total GS cars, the 1973 is one of the rarest GS years.

3. What Makes the 1973 Unique

The 1973 GS is the Colonnade car — the first year of the all-new GM A-body with its pillared hardtop styling, and the first GS built on the Century rather than the Skylark. The Colonnade coupes were roughly 325 pounds heavier than the 1972 cars they replaced, with the big opera windows and heavy pillars that defined mid-1970s GM intermediates. There was no 1973 GS convertible — the hardtop coupe was the only GS body.

The engine lineup was four deep, all net-rated: the GS 350 2-barrel (175 hp), the GS 350 4-barrel (190 hp), the 455 4-barrel, and the Stage 1 455 (270 hp, 390 lb-ft). The base 455's rating is disputed — Old Cars Weekly and Hagerty's valuation page report 225 net horsepower, while Curbside Classic and a period-test discussion call the GS455 a 250-hp car (see Conflicts). The Stage 1's torque is likewise reported as both 390 and 375 lb-ft. This guide reports both figures openly.

The Stage 1 remained a genuine performance package in the net era: 270 net horsepower at 4,400 rpm and 390 lb-ft at 3,000 rpm from the 455 with 8.5:1 compression, Positraction included, and the Muncie M20 four-speed with a Hurst shifter available — 92 Stage 1 four-speeds were built. The Turbo-Hydramatic 400 was standard on the Stage 1, and a column-shifted 3-speed manual was the standard transmission across the line.

There was no 1973 GSX. The GSX package was a 1970-72 Skylark package, and the GSX name returned on the 1974 Apollo — not on the 1973 Century. Sellers who describe 1973 GS cars as 'GSX' are using the name incorrectly; a factory-correct 1973 GS wears Gran Sport identification, not GSX badges. Production totaled 6,637 GS cars: 4,930 with 350 engines, 979 with the standard 455, and 728 Stage 1s (including the 92 four-speeds). The VIN identifies the real thing: 4G37 with a fifth-digit engine code — H for the 350 2-barrel, J or K for the 350 4-barrel, U for the 455, and V for the Stage 1. A claimed Stage 1 1973 Buick GS

without the V code needs paperwork and correct hardware to be believed.

Restoration notes specific to 1973: the Colonnade body has unique trim, glass, and weatherstripping that does not interchange with 1968-72 A-bodies. Verify the fifth-digit VIN engine code — it is the single most important character on the car. The Stage 1's Positraction axle, the Muncie/Hurst four-speed hardware on the 92 four-speed cars, and the GS decals and suspension pieces are the value drivers. Note that 1973 GM cars are known for rapid rust-out in salt states, so inspect the body and frame with extra care.

Year-to-year changes at a glance.

- All-new Colonnade A-body — the GS moved from the Skylark to the Century; hardtop coupe only, no convertible.
- Four net-rated engines: 175-hp 350 2V, 190-hp 350 4V, 455 4V, and the 270-hp Stage 1 455.
- Stage 1 included Positraction; Muncie M20/Hurst 4-speed available (92 built).
- VIN engine code is the identifier: H/J/K/U, with V for the Stage 1.
- Production: 6,637 GS cars (4,930 350; 979 455; 728 Stage 1). No 1973 GSX existed.