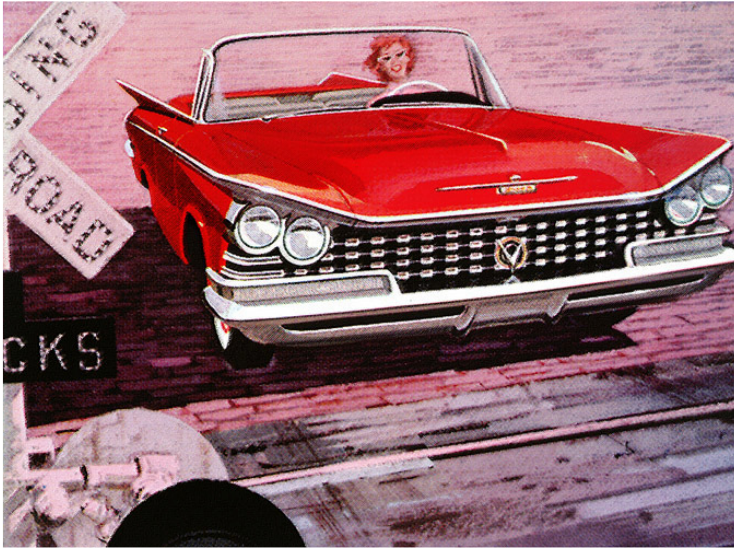


Neal McKenna

PO Box 6505, Cresta Postal Station, 2118
Johannesburg, South Africa

Telephone 011-782-2869
Cell: 072-554-3561
e-mail: neal.mckenna@gmail.com



Man and Convertible – a Love Story

- by Neal McKenna © 1993

1959 Buick LeSabre convertible

It's a time worn story, an open and shut case of true, unabashed love: boy meets car. In this instance, the boy is Jack Pooachoff of Playmore Junction and the car is a red, very red, 1959 Buick LeSabre convertible. Rescued from an Okanagan auto graveyard, the Buick was eased from its berth of twenty-one years and moved to the Kootenays for restoration. Time and neglect had taken their toll and the LeSabre had to be completely gutted; the first step, removing interior debris with a shovel.

Requiring a full four months, five days a week, the convertible slowly and, no doubt, expensively took shape. Body panels and chrome bright work were cannibalized from two other '59's, a two door bubble top and a four door vista cruiser flat top. The end result, through the efforts of Corral Glass & Upholstery, Castlegar, and Bill Horst Bodyworks, Trail, has returned the LeSabre to her original grandeur.

When asked why he spent so much time, effort and cash on such a pursuit, Jack Pooachoff grinned and said: "This Buick is a piece of history. A car like this will never roll off an assembly line, anywhere, ever again. It's big, opulent, and wild. People turn their heads and smile when it's on the road. Kids want to know what kind of car it is, they've never seen anything like it. It's a dream machine, it's fun, and it's mine...."

'59 Buicks are also rare. The economy of 1957-59 was quite similar to the economic climate we suffer with today. Times were tough, there was a recession going on and

automobile sales were down to say the least. Imports were still strange little cars named Volkswagen, Opel, Vauxhall and barely made a blip on the sales sheets. Japanese cars weren't even a consideration.

To add to already existing economic woes, the '58 model Buick resembled a chrome brick with pod-like fins protruding past the rear bumper and outweighed Cadillac's flagship, the 60 Special. In short, it was ugly, a gas-guzzler – even in terms of the era – and it simply didn't sell. Fortunately, 1958 was the end of that particular three-year styling era.

In 1957, as was customary at the time, General Motors had gone back to the drawing board to design the 1959-61 models. The spectacular results were, no doubt, in answer to Chrysler Corporation's radically new and majestically finned "Forward Look." From Chevrolet to Cadillac, body shells were shared throughout the GM line but with unrestrained styling and GM's many versions of the omnipresent tail fin, few consumers were aware of the corporate money-saving device. GM prices went down across the board.

If the '58 Buick had been stodgy, undignified, and gross, the '59 went 180 degrees in the opposite direction. It was clean, smooth, and aggressive-looking in a peak year of Buick styling. Angular and seemingly finned fore and aft, the '59 Buick embodied the spirit of a young industrialist on his way to the top.

Aside from the all-new styling, some important developments appeared under the hood as well. A 401 cubic inch V8 generating 325 horses, (4.2X3.6 bore and stroke) was standard on the senior Buicks while the smaller models made do with 364 V8's. For a now unknown additional cost, a monster 445 Wildcat could be dropped into any Buick model. – One lives under the hood of Jack Pooachoff's convertible. Other treats offered that year were power assisted disc brakes, a \$150.00 option; air conditioning, \$430.00; an in-dash record player, (45's only) \$97.00; and rear wheel air suspension \$420.00. The latter two options never caught on.

In 1959, everything about Buick was new and exciting including the model names. Gone were the Special, Century, Super, and Road Master, replaced with LeSabre, Invicta, Electra, and Electra 225. The most senior Buick derived it's name from it's actual bumper to bumper length: 225 inches, that's a whopping 18 feet, 9 inches! Jack Pooachoff is absolutely right, we will never see the like of these delta-winged birds of prey ever again.