

By Eric Dahlquist ■ "What?" says this guy from Pontiac. "Are you trying to put me on? Buick doesn't have any good drag strip cars — everybody knows that." Here, the rest of the non-racing GM divisions — yea, the rest of the industry — went blithely along, believing that the super-car pie was being sliced up in '68 about the way it had been in '67. But no. Buick, who has really been in the competition game for more years in their sixty-four-year history than most people suspect (in 1909 they won a fantastic 90 percent of everything they entered), slid the magic parts numbers into the book and weird things started happening.

Last month, in our Buick GS 400 road test, we gave you all the dope on the optional listings but no cars incorporating the pieces were around to drive. Now they are. Reynolds Buick in Covina let us try several machines and we are here to tell you that they are the sleepers of the year and then

some. Outside of some initial cold-start noise (remember those piston clearances are .008-inch), the engines are very quiet and docile, exhibiting none of the usual objectionable full-race qualities that seem inherent in cars of this class. These hot Buicks are really what might be called convertible racers — flick a toggle switch, inflate the air bags and you are ready for the world. The cars we drove had a Bendix electric fuel pump mounted in the trunk above the gas tank, and a transmission modified with flat, thicker clutch plates and larger oil passages to get the juice to them. For regular driving, everything stays cool, the fuel pump doesn't make any racket and the transmission shifts normally. When competition appears, trip the toggle and the fuel pressure is right there and so are the shifts.

The cars run like you can't believe. The slowest, 3600 pounds-plus car we tried went an amazing 13.50 — 105 with tuned headers, stock tires and a 3.90

gear ratio. Another job had all the internal goodies plus the Stage II camshaft, a set of Mickey Thompson's fantastic equal-length headers that look like the Saturn V booster, and a pair of Mickey's super low-profile tires. This thing went so fast it was scary. First time at the drags it turned 12.90-109.09, still in the 3600-pound weight bracket. Yet, though the car could totally annihilate a 435 Corvette, the unknowing passenger could hardly detect more than a very slight idle irregularity at low engine speed. This handily demonstrates that Buicks are built soundly and deadened properly, and even the additional noise of steel tubing headers doesn't filter through. It is a rare example of that dual-purpose machine they've been talking about for years.

Lenny "Pop" Kennedy's SS/EA Gran Sport isn't quite in ultimate competition form yet, but have no doubt, it will not be very far from the class record. For one thing, by the time the Winter-nationals roll around, the new cold-air induction package, à la NASCAR through the plenum chamber, may be operative. Using a moderately light car, 11-inch tires and 4.56's or 4.88's, performance in the very low 12's and 118 mph range is within reach — and remember, these cars will not vary more than a few hundredths of a second from run to run because of that superb automatic.

Only a handful of people in Detroit actually believe this is all happening. What the others don't realize is that Buick is a very old, established name in the automotive industry, kind of like Mercedes-Benz, and like M-B, every so often they get back into competition just to show the newcomers how it's done. ■ ■

BUICK DOES THE BIT

Selecting the high-performance options for the GS 400 gives just what it says — high performance

photography: Eric Rickman

Mickey Thompson seems to shake the racing world up about once every year, this time with new, ultra-extractor headers seen first on the Buicks.



And they go with these, a novel, Max-Trac H-70 super-wide-oval-type tire that gives slick-like bite but has better rain qualities. Headers' smooth appearance comes from making up equal lengths in collector. Units are supposed to give 20 hp more than other types.