

# A WILDCAT FROM BUICK



THE WILDCAT'S PLUSH INTERIOR IS A BUCKET-SEAT PALACE. NOTE CENTER CONSOLE, WITH SHIFT CONTROL, STORAGE BOX, TACHOMETER.



**a top-handling performer  
that likes to GO in luxury**

by Jim Wright, Technical Editor

**I**F YOU WERE TO TUNE IN on the babblings of a group of automotive sales and advertising types, you would hear them refer constantly to a thing called "performance image"—the idea being that it takes a solid PI to make a car sell. This is widely believed in the industry and could very well be true.

Buick's performance has always been a shade above the average, but in the past the company hasn't put too much emphasis on this image. Even so, first-quarter sales results show that Buick is solidly in sixth place (Chevy, Ford, Pontiac, Olds and Rambler), which is a two-spot gain over last year's

position. Heartened by this, and with an eye towards climbing even higher on the sales charts, Buick has decided to join the rest of the industry by marketing their own performance image personification—the Wildcat.

This newest of bucket-seat beauties is basically an Invicta two-door hardtop, to which has been added a host of styling goodies. Biggest single feature is the fabric-covered top, which can be had in either black or white. The interior is all-vinyl and contains bucket seats (naturally), divided by a center console that incorporates a storage box and litter container as



## A Wildcat from Buick

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well as the shift lever and tachometer. Special trim and a distinctive medallion complete the Wildcat theme.

Unlike some of the other manufacturers, Buick hasn't felt it necessary to offer a hotter engine option with the Wildcat. Their well-proven, reliable 401-cubic-incher, with a four-barrel carburetor and 10.25-to-1 compression ratio, is putting out 325 horses at 4400 rpm, with 445 lbs.-ft. of torque at 2800. This, they feel, is all the power and torque that anyone would want (or could use) in a car of this type. The Invicta and Electra series also offer this same engine as standard equipment. To make sure that the Wildcat's performance is better than the other two, Buick has dropped the rear axle ratio down from the standard 3.23 to 3.42-to-1.

The MT test car was equipped with the standard Turbine-Drive transmission, all the power accessories including win-

dows and air conditioning, and in test trim was carrying slightly over 4600 pounds on its 123-inch wheelbase. But even with all the weight and power-robbing accessories, it can still be called a wildcat. We recorded 0-to-30, 0-to-45 and 0-to-60 mph in 2.9, 5.2 and 8.1 seconds. The standing quarter-mile was reached in 17.1 seconds, with a top speed of 87 mph. Down the long Riverside back straight we observed an honest 115 mph on our Weston electric speedometer.

With the air conditioner belts removed, the quarter-mile speeds didn't increase, but the e.t. dropped to 16.6 seconds and 0.2 second was knocked off the 0-to-60 time. For those who are interested in a little more dig, the options list includes a positive traction differential and either a 3.91 or 4.45 rear axle.

Fuel consumption was in the 10-to-16-mpg range for all driving and road conditions. In the city the Wildcat averaged several tanks at 10.5 mpg and one at 11.2. On the highway we saw as high as 16 mpg, but this was only when we stayed strictly in the 55-to-65-mpg range. At 70 to 80 mph (staying with the traffic flow), the average was closer to 14 mpg. With the air conditioner turned on, it makes a difference of exactly one mpg at cruising speeds.

More economy could be induced, at the sacrifice of per-



WILDCAT'S ENGINE IS NOT NEW, BUT THE RELIABLE 401-CUBIC-INCH 325-HP POWERPLANT ALREADY OFFERED IN THE INVICTA AND ELECTRA.

formance, by choosing either the 3.07 or 2.87 gearset option, but the 10.25-to-1 compression ratio dictates the use of higher-priced premium-grade fuel. Mileage is also helped if the secondary throttles are used as little as possible.

There have been rumors that Buick will soon be offering a manual four-speed transmission, but the factory emphatically denies this. They haven't even offered a three-speed manual since 1960 and probably never will again.

They feel their Turbine-Drive automatic is just about the ultimate, as far as automatics are concerned. It probably does come closer to being a *true* automatic (in the pure sense of the word) than anything now on the market. Due to the variable-pitch feature of the torque converter stator blades, any gear changes are completely undiscernible, and the effect is like that of an infinitely variable-ratio transmission. Slippage feels to be at a minimum (completely unlike the first Dynaflow), and it is certainly the smoothest of all the automatics. We used L during our acceleration runs and shifted to D at 5500 rpm, and this was the only time that we definitely felt the box change ratios. The console-mounted shift lever falls readily to the hand and sports a large, grip-filling knob. There is a positive detent action in each position that imparts the pleasing feel of a top-quality mechanism.

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*Back seat availability and comfort are above average. There is sufficient head- and hip-room to allow three passengers to ride in the rear with comfort.*



THE SUSPENSION AIMS MORE TOWARD A SOFT RIDE THAN RESPONSIVE CORNERING. WE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED STIFFER SPRINGS AND SHOCKS.



*To open the trunk, you pull a switch located in the glove box (above). Once open, the huge trunk demonstrates a tremendous appetite for storage. Note the well in front section.*



## A Wildcat from Buick *continued*

*Console-mounted tachometer is not in best position for visibility but is helped by good color markings on dial.*



**BUICK'S BRAKES ARE STILL THE BEST BEING OFFERED BY A DETROIT MANUFACTURER. THE BIG 12-INCH DRUMS GIVE CONSISTENT STRAIGHT-LINE STOPS WITHOUT APPARENT FADE OR PEDAL HARDNESS. NOTE THE AIR-COOLING ON THE DRUMS.**



**IN SPITE OF THE SOFT RIDE, A FRONT ANTI-ROLL BAR MANAGES TO HOLD THE WILDCAT SURPRISINGLY LEVEL, EVEN ON WIDE CORNERS.**

The standard Buick brakes are still the best being offered in this country. Wisely, they are sticking with 15-inch wheels and are thus able to retain the big 12-inch drum units (finned aluminum on the front with cast iron at the rear). We used these very hard during our tests. Twice the Wildcat was brought down hard from 115 mph, and after the second time the brakes were showing almost complete fade. Given a five-minute cool-down, they were like new and we were able to run the regular brake tests.

The average stopping distances from 30 and 60 mph were 38 and 168 feet, respectively. All stops were straight-line, with no apparent fade or pedal hardness. The left rear wheel showed a tendency to grab, but this was due to the adjustment more than anything. The test car had power assist, which requires very light pedal pressures, and while one can get used to this, it is very easy in a moment of stress to apply too much pressure, causing all four wheels to lock up.

Suspension on the Wildcat is strictly GM, which means an ultra-soft ride but also means the car has less than desirable cornering characteristics in its stock form. This has been compensated for to some extent by the well chosen front and rear end geometry, but we would personally prefer either stiffer springs or shocks, or better yet, both.

On tight corners or on loose surfaces the front end tends to plough, but there is always enough power available to keep all but the worst drivers out of trouble. At speed through wide, sweeping turns, the understeer is not so noticeable, and the car's behavior is fairly predictable—except when the road surface is rough. Here the light shocks are at their worst and allow the wheels to tramp excessively. A hefty anti-roll bar is used at the front and this, in conjunction with the rear-end control arms and Panhard-type track bar, keeps the Wildcat surprisingly level in the corners.

The Buick is probably at its best out on the open road where all-day, high-speed cruising is the order. It has excellent directional stability and is little affected by cross-winds. Noise levels, from wind, road or engine, are very low at high cruising speeds. A driver could put in a 12-hour, 6000-mile day in this car and still be fairly fresh at his destination.

One accessory we wouldn't be without is Buick's power steering. This full-time unit reduces the full-lock turns from five to 3½ and still gives the driver plenty of road feel. Without it, parking or even threading your way through heavy traffic could become a real chore.

Exterior detail work is excellent. All panels and doors are well aligned and fit flush. The acrylic lacquer finish is hard and deep and with proper care should give good service.

Interior detailing and finish are of the same high quality as the exterior. The dash is safety-padded, and the instruments, though few (and with the exception of the tachometer) are easy to see from the driver's position. The tach is located well forward on the console and has a large, easy-to-read face, but unfortunately, the driver has to turn his head, taking his eyes completely off the road, in order to see it.

The steering wheel is comfortably placed and allows good over-the-wheel vision, with adequate room under it for the driver's legs. The well-contoured bucket seats give good support to the back and legs and have plenty of fore-and-aft adjustment. Back seat legroom is about average, and hip- and headroom are adequate for three average-size adults. One-color, pre-stretched vinyl and heavy, loop-pile carpeting are used throughout the interior.

We found the forward and sideward visibility to be good, but the top line is a bit low in the vicinity of the rear window and this restricts rearward vision, through the mirror, to a half-dozen car lengths or so.

Under-the-hood space is limited by all the power accessories, but most components can be reached without too much trouble for routine servicing. With the spare tire in place, total trunk volume is 28.28 cubic feet, and the usable space should be more than adequate for most families.

/MT

## BUICK WILDCAT

2-door, 5-passenger hardtop

**OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED:** Radio, air conditioning, power steering, power brakes, whitewall tires

**BASIC PRICE:** \$3927

**PRICE AS TESTED:** \$5120.78 (plus tax and license)

**ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST:** 2538 miles

**RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE:** 5500 rpm

### PERFORMANCE

#### ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph.....	2.9 secs.
0-45 mph.....	5.2
0-60 mph.....	8.1

Standing start ¼-mile 17.1 secs. and 87 mph

Speeds in gears @ 5500 rpm

Drive.....130 mph (est.)

115 mph observed at 4800 rpm

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading.....	30	45	50	61	71	82
Weston electric speedometer.....	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear.....73.5 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 38 ft.; from 60 mph, 168 ft.

### SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

#### Engine

Ohv V-8  
Bore: 4.1875 ins.  
Stroke: 3.64 ins.  
Displacement: 401 cu. ins.  
Compression ratio: 10.25:1  
Horsepower: 325 @ 4400 rpm  
Torque: 445 lbs.-ft. @ 2800 rpm  
Horsepower per cu. in.: 0.81  
Ignition: 12-volt coil

#### Steering

Recirculating ball and nut, with integral power piston  
Turning diameter: 45.9 ft.  
Turns: 3.5 lock-to-lock

#### Wheels and Tires

Steel disc — 5 lug  
7.60 x 15 4-ply rayon tires

#### Gearbox

Dual-range Turbine-Drive; console-mounted shift lever

#### Driveshaft

Two-piece, open tube

#### Differential

Hypoid — semi-floating  
Standard ratio: 3.42:1

#### Suspension

Front: Coil springs with upper and lower control arms, direct-acting telescopic shocks and anti-roll bar  
Rear: Rigid axle, with coil springs, leading control arms, track bar and direct-acting telescopic shocks

#### Brakes

Hydraulic, duo-servo, with finned, 12-inch drums (aluminum fronts, cast-iron rears) and power assist  
Front: 10-in. dia. x 2.25 in. wide  
Rear: 10-in. dia. x 2.00 in. wide  
Effective lining area: 156.9 sq. ins.

#### Body and Frame

X-type, boxed frame  
Wheelbase: 123 ins.  
Track: front 62 ins.; rear, 61 ins.  
Overall length: 214.1 ins.  
Curb weight: 4272 lbs.

