

Car of the Month

1941 Buick Super Phaeton

By Bill Holmes

1941 was the last year for the 4-door convertible phaetons made by any of the car makers. Since then, that body style has seen only brief runs by Kaiser in the mid-50s and Lincoln Continentals in the late 50s and early 60s. General Motors saw the handwriting on the wall and reduced the number of available Buick phaeton models in 1941 to just the Super and Roadmaster models. Cadillac only made one phaeton model, and Oldsmobile made a phaeton model for only this one year. Buick made 467 domestic Supers and 312 Roadmasters. About 50 other phaetons were shipped overseas. The phaetons topped the price list at \$1550 for the Super and \$1750 for the Roadmaster. The four door models sold for \$300-\$400 more than the 2-door convertibles or the closed models. The phaeton came with all the options which helped justify the high price: leather interior, radio with vacuum fender antenna, under seat heater, defroster and white sidewall tires. Supers were powered by the 248 cubic inch straight eight Fireball Buick engine with dual carburetors which functioned as a four-barrel carb and gave the big Buick added horsepower and torque. Supers made 125 horsepower and Buick claimed it would do 101.5 mph.

Finding my 1941 Buick Super Phaeton was like finding a diamond in the rough. I had sold my 1922 Overland touring car in the late 90's. After a few years of not having an antique or classic car, in 2007, I was ready to acquire a late 30s or early 40s open car. After some searching in all the usual places, I came across this beautiful Buick on eBay. I noticed it was for sale by private owner, who reserved the right to withdraw it from the auction. Some additional internet searching revealed it was located in Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, just a two hour drive from my house in Burke, Virginia. I quickly made an appointment to see it and by the end of the next Saturday it was mine.

It had resided in the JC Stevens collection in upstate New York since 1972 where, with 120 other old cars, it had been stored in as-found condition. Research revealed that I was only the fourth owner since new. The first owner bought it in the Boston area and kept it until 1962. It changed hands twice between then and 1972, but stayed in the Boston area. I have had the pleasure of talking to all four previous owners, their wives or their children. The Buick is all original except for a repaint in the 1950s, but still in black with the original red leather. I had to get a new top made by Hill Jenkins in North Carolina as the old one had completely disintegrated and nothing was left but the metal frame. It has been re-chromed and I soon will be installing the top. My car has a special 3.9:1 rear differential and high-lift springs. My Buick is an early production car, Number 109 of the 508 Super Phaetons made, and was produced October 10, 1940.

Since I got the Buick, I have been mostly working on its mechanicals. I have rebuilt the carburetors, generator, and starter. I installed a new clutch and pressure plate, rebuilt the brakes, transmission and rear end, the radiator and fuel and water pumps. I also removed the head and sent it out for a valve job. Compression is good and oil consumption low, so I have not touched the bearings or pistons yet. I really enjoy this car as almost everything on it can be rebuilt, which

I enjoy doing. I had a 1953 Special hardtop as a kid, so working on this brings back some fond memories. They are almost identical. The dual carbs make the 1941 a lot peppier than prior years, too. As a survivor car, I continue to wrestle with how much I should do. Well, only time will tell.

