

Buicks and Building Family Memories

By Kay & Mike Loewenthal

What do antique Buicks, teenagers, and memories have in common? They all need something to spark them into action! Our 1908 Buick's history, plus recent adventures on the 2015 Vintage Tour in Lancaster, coupled with receiving the 2015 AACA Edgar Rohr Memorial Award is an example of just such a spark. Driving old cars on tours perpetuates many memories, but attempting to drive a large antique touring car that requires double-clutch shifting, with a steering wheel on the wrong side isn't for the faint of heart, and definitely challenging for a new teenage driver. That's where the Buick Model 10 has an advantage, even though it's a right hand drive car that must be cranked, and has its hand-operated throttle and spark advance located above the steering wheel. Yet, it is easy to shift because it has a planetary transmission (push on a pedal for low or shifting a lever for high gear). This made it an acceptable choice for our new teenage driver to start racking up old car touring memories. What teenager doesn't want to look dope (aka cool/awesome) driving in a sporty white convertible?

Buick Model 10s were made between 1908 and 1910. They were powered by a 4-cylinder, 3.75"x3.75" bore and stroke engine, which displaced 165 cubic inches and generated 22.5HP. That engine was mounted on an 88-inch wheelbase chassis mounted on 30x3 tires. The car was priced at \$900, including the brass lights. Its nickname was the "White Streak" because it was painted an off-white color. The car just "takes off" with its overhead valve engine and a 1700 lbs. curb weight, which makes it exhilarating to drive.



In 1949, the prior owner's father found this Buick in an Indiana barn. Unfortunately, he died before being able to restore it. In memory of his father's dream, his son commissioned Sheldon Loewenthal (Mike's dad) to restore the Buick's engine and transmission. The car would now run, but was still hard to start. Later when the car was for sale, there was no question in Mike's mind that its two major components were restored with the right level of expertise. After adopting "Bonnie the Buick" into the Loewenthal family, the starting problem was cured by fixing the distributor and adjusting the timing.

After a few years of driving Bonnie only around town, it became clear that other untouched mechanicals required restoration. This became a family project building on what Grandpa Sheldon started. After all, Bonnie couldn't start making memories if she wasn't ready for five days of hard labor. In particular, major attention was needed by the rear axle, which suffered from missing teeth on the pinion and differential gears. A new pinion was fabricated and differential gears were found at Hershey.

Earlier, in an Indiana barn, while Bonnie was awaiting a loving home, the chickens must have absconded with some of the brass hood latches. So, the Loewenthals spruced up her outward appearance by reproducing those parts. Our son Jared was responsible for the electrical wiring (motivation to obtain practical experience while studying electrical engineering at RIT) and Ariel (our daughter and soon to be famous on the Lancaster tour) helped with the mechanicals and cleaning parts. After Bonnie was finished, Ariel's dream of driving the Buick to her last day of high school as a senior came true.



Bonnie the Buick made her debut on the 2015 Vintage Tour in Lancaster. Ariel was the youngest driver in the oldest car. She was responsible for the oiling, cranking, and driving every day. Jared, second youngest driver, managed to tour every day in a 1912 Crawford. Ariel, Jared, and our niece Hannah (a stoic navigator) were all recognized at the final banquet. Everyone on the tour provided warm encouragement, which helped to spark the joy of old cars into all of their memories.



When Bonnie was chosen for an AACA National Award, the family attended the 2016 Philadelphia Winter Meeting to accept the honor. What a surprise it was that the honor turned out to be the Edgar Rohr Memorial Award. The award sparked many fond memories Mike had as a teenager attending yearly tours with his family and Mr. and Mrs. Rohr, who drove their 1912 Buick. Edgar was one of the most distinctive adults on those tours. He told interesting and quirky stories about being Mayor of Manassas. He usually wore a "Joe Thinfat" name tag and was relentlessly teased for

leaving the lights on his Buick. When the teenagers called out, “hey mister, you left your lights on,” Edgar always chuckled when he answered, “I don’t want my battery to overcharge.” And did you know he was so proud of having his 1917 Detroit Electric Auto on the US Postage stamp that he passed out stamps at Hershey?

Our 1908 Buick has had three generations of loving care and we’re planning on taking her on more tours. What better way to honor the memory of Edgar Rohr, an old Buick car enthusiast.



Comment: Bill Holmes met Mike Loewenthal at the Philadelphia Annual Meeting and was impressed by Mike’s long-ago connection to Edgar Rohr, and the wonderful coincidence of having that connection renewed through the Edgar Rohr Memorial Award. Edgar Rohr was, of course, a founding member and icon of the Bull Run Region. That is why this Car of the Month story honors a car owned outside the Bull Run Region. – Steve White