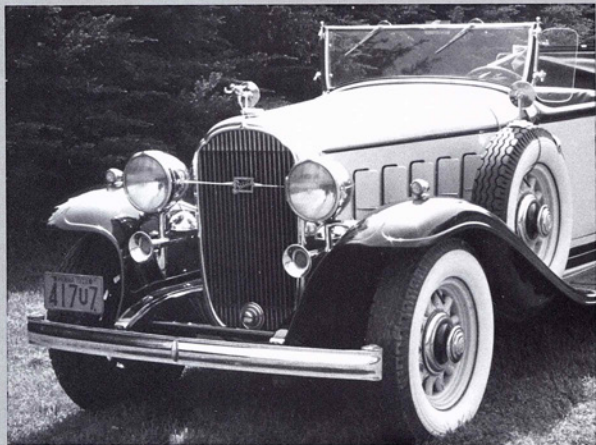


B U I C K

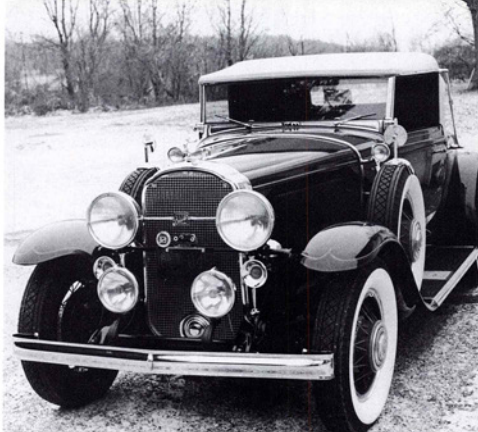


The face of Alvin Zamba's 1932 Buick Series 90 Sport Phaeton, photo by Charles Vatter

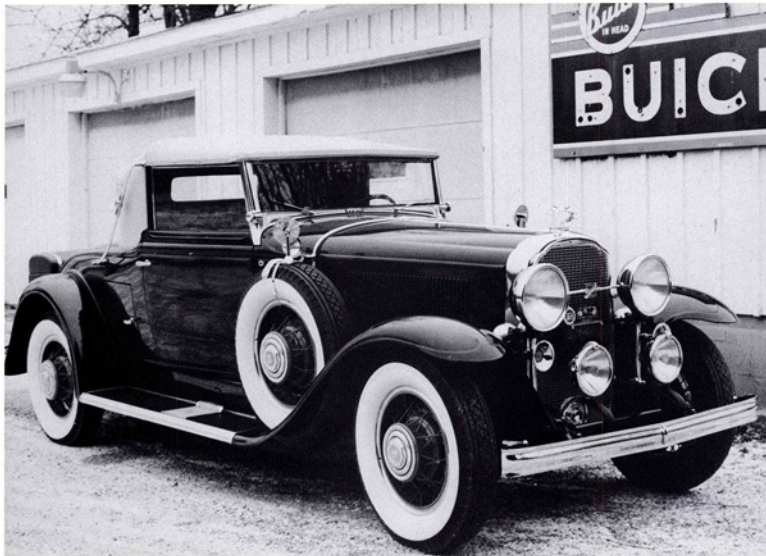
Neither the fellow who founded Buick nor the man responsible for its early success were with the company when the Classic Era began. Genesis for the marque had been 1903 when David Dunbar Buick—who had previously invented a method of affixing porcelain to cast iron, thus giving America the white bathtub—became bored with plumbing fixtures and built an automobile. An inveterate tinkerer, Buick was a consummately bad businessman. Enter William Crapo Durant, an entrepreneur and super salesman who enjoyed tinkering in big business. Under Durant, Buick fortunes soared and in 1908 Billy parlayed the Buick Motor Car Company into a brand-new corporation called General Motors. The pace in Flint was too fast for David Buick, who left the company that year. The pace Billy Durant set for General Motors was too fast, and reckless, for the banking community—and Durant was booted out of the corporation by 1912. Billy got General Motors back, spectacularly, by organizing another firm (Chevrolet) and quietly buying up GM stock, but by late 1920 was forced out of the corporation for the second, and final, time. Alfred P. Sloan, Jr. picked up the GM pieces and recognized Buick as the “vital link” in the empire Durant had built. Billy himself had always referred to the Buick as “my number one baby.” Except for the lamentable styling decision that made the 1929 models appear encephalic—the cars would ever after be known as the “pregnant Buicks”—the company seemed not to do anything wrong during the twenties. In 1931 Buick bragged in advertisements that it was the “First Large Producer to Adopt Eight Cylinder Engines Exclusively.” Among the new Buick straight eights was an exciting series numbered 90. . . .

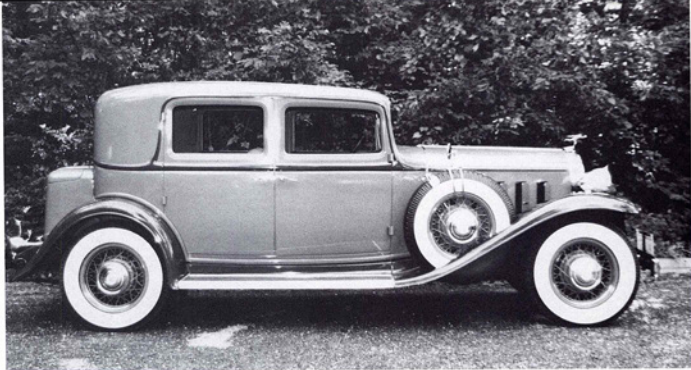
Prior to production of its 1931 line, Buick tested its front axles for over 900,000 miles, the rear axles for nearly as much, with testing miles in the hundreds of thousands as well for the three-speed synchromesh transmission, clutches, steering gears, frames and bodies. The company wanted to make certain that the rest of the car was worthy of its new engine. Like all units from David Buick's first twin in 1903, the straight eights were overhead valve, or "valve in head," as the company preferred. Powering the top-of-the-line Series 90 was the largest, displacing 344 cubic inches and developing 104 hp at 2800 rpm. An oil temperature regulator to cool the engine at high speeds and warm it in cold weather was featured, as were thermostatically-controlled radiator shutters.

Buick's caution paid off. "It's a big well-built car, you might say over-built like most Classics," says Bud Hicks of the 1931 Convertible Coupe he and Judie have owned for eight years. This particular body style was a mid-season addition to the Series 90 line; 1,066 were sold by the end of the model year.



1931 Buick Series 90 Model 96C Convertible Coupe
Owners: Bud & Judie Hicks of Marshall, Michigan

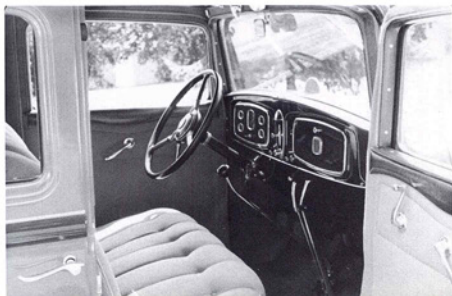


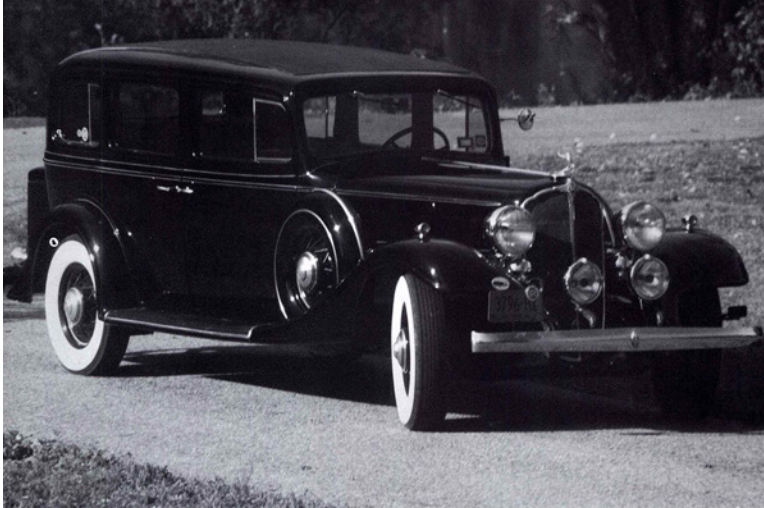


1932 Buick Series 90 Model 91 Club Sedan
Owner: Paul F. Richardson, M.D. of Baltimore, Maryland

The Series 90 increased in wheelbase from 132 to 134 inches in 1932. An adjustable shock absorber system was new (used this year only). The amusingly-named Wizard Control was a vacuum-operated clutch which enabled the driver to shift from second to third by pushing a button on the floor.

A brand-new body style offering for '32 was the close-coupled Club Sedan. "Only 2,237 were built and apparently less than 25 exist," comments Paul Richardson. "I like the smooth power of the valve-in-head straight-eight engine. My Buick, which I've owned since 1972, requires very little gearshifting and climbs hills with ease. It also cruises effortlessly at legal speeds."





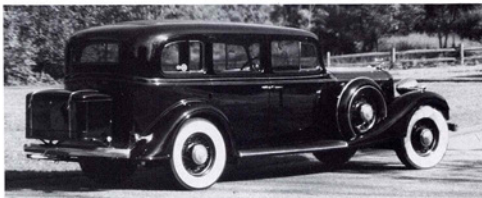
1933 Buick Series 90 Model 90 Seven-Passenger Sedan

Owner: Onofrio Imbasciani of Kings Park, New York

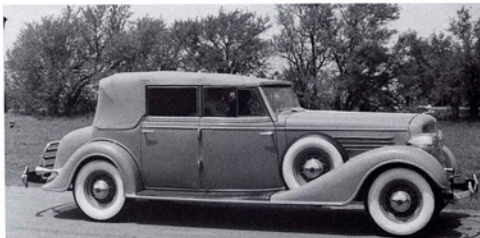
All-new styling throughout the Buick lines and, for the Series 90, enhanced prestige with all body styles placed on a long 138-inch wheelbase distinguished the marque for '33. Less fortuitous was a sales decrease overall, shared with most manufacturers, which resulted in Buick's worst year since 1915. Just 890 (versus 1,368 in '32) Seven-Passenger Sedans like Onofrio Imbasciani's were produced:

"Growing up in a very large family, we needed a large car. My Dad owned a 1933 Buick Series 90 Model 90 that disappeared in 1967. My love of that car left me determined to find another one. After a ten-year cross-country search, my dream came true in 1982. Appropriately, I think, this Buick remains an all-original car."

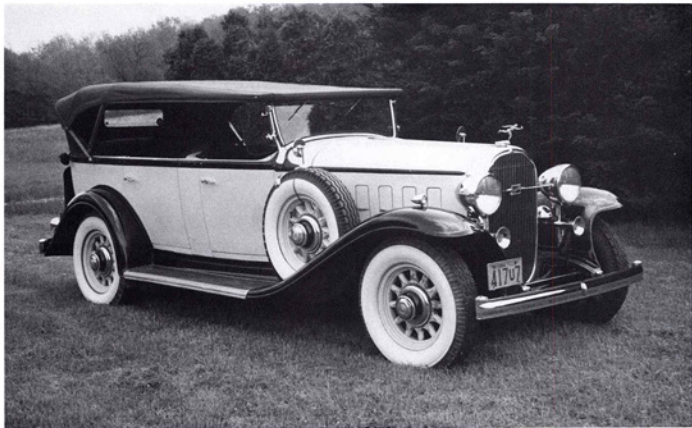
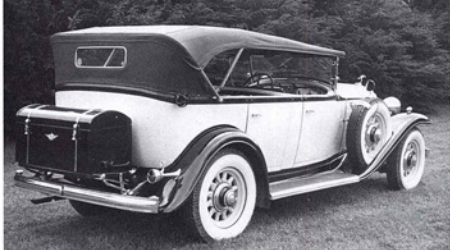
Nineteen thirty-four was a better year for Buick overall and for the Series 90. With the discontinuation of the Series 80, the top-of-the-line Buick (now on a 136-inch wheelbase) received three new body styles—Convertible Coupe, Sport Coupe and Convertible Phaeton with built-in trunk. Production of cars like Knox Kershaw's totaled 138, nineteen of those for export.



1934 Buick Series 90 Model 98C Convertible Phaeton
Owner: Knox Kershaw of Montgomery, Alabama



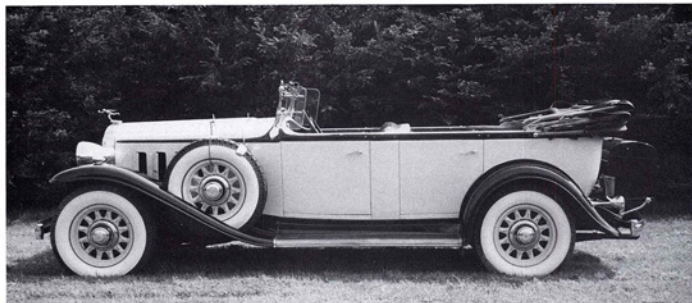
"This car can keep up with traffic anywhere," echoes Alvin Zamba regarding his '32 Sport Phaeton which he's owned since 1982. With just 146 built (15 of those for export), the Sport Phaeton was Buick's lowest-production Series 90 model. The wooden spoke wheels on Al's car were an option, and '32 was the last year they would be available on any production Buick. The dual side-mounts on both the Zamba and Richardson cars were a standard equipment perk for all Series 90 buyers.

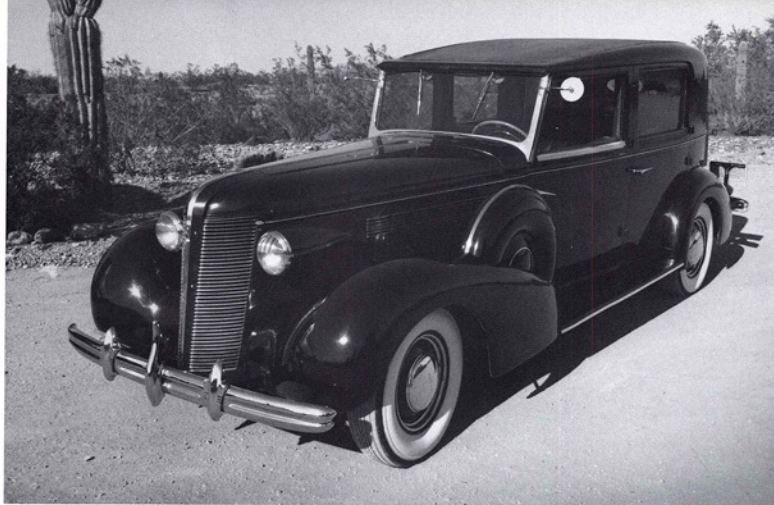


1932 Buick Series 90 Model 95 Sport Phaeton

Owner: Alvin Zamba of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Photos: Charles Vatter





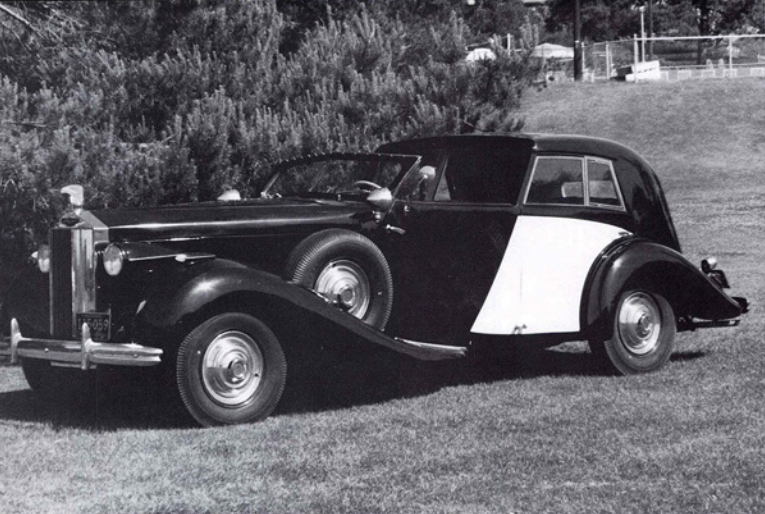
1937 Buick Series 80 Limousine, Brewster

Owner: Russ Jackson of Phoenix, Arizona



Late in 1933 Harlow Herbert "Red" Curtice had been appointed Buick president. Formerly the dynamo at AC, Curtice now became the spark plug that pulled Buick out of its Depression doldrums. Nineteen thirty-six was the landmark year for winsome new Buick styling courtesy of Harley Earl and evocative names for the various Buick series: Special for the 40, Century for the 60, Roadmaster for the 80, Limited for the 90. While turning Buick into a solid moneymaker, Curtice did not neglect the carriage trade. That a clientele able to afford any chassis upon which to have custom coachwork applied often chose the Buick is a tribute both to the marque and the acumen of its leader.

The Series 80 131-inch Roadmaster chassis was selected by the original owner of the 1937 Brewster Limousine now owned by Russ Jackson: "I have always been partial to Buicks. I drove a Super throughout World War II from Army Air Force base to base. This '37 Brewster Buick is very special, the only one built. Hypoid gears make the car easy to shift, and this was the first year for the steering wheel horn-ring."

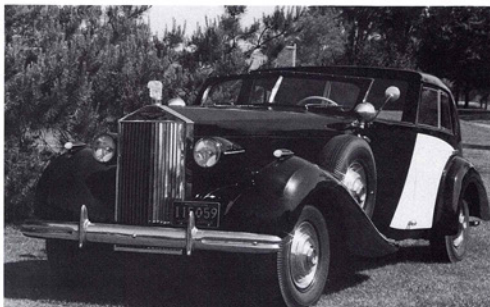


The 140-inch long wheelbase of the Series 90 Limited was the choice of Howard "Dutch" Darrin for the very theatrical Opera Brougham owned by Jim Robbins. Banker Fernandez, the liaison Dutch made following Tom Hibbard's return to the States, was largely a silent partner on styling matters. The Darrin touch is evident in the car's elongated fenders sweeping from the front of the grille to the back door, the sloping windshield that makes the body appear more compact and the hood a lot longer, as well as the oversized front opening "suicide" doors which Dutch subsequently carried even into the Packard Darrins. Buick identification is readily discernible in the car's cowl, bumpers and lights (though Marchal lenses are in the headlamps and there is an additional Marchal taillight). After completing the design, Dutch returned to the States, and it is believed the car was finished by Franay. Following display at the 1938 Paris Automobile Salon, the Opera Brougham was acquired by the Countess Max de Palaska, a.k.a. Sandra Plankinton, who used it primarily for round trips between her summer *pied-à-terre* on Long Island and her winter home in Palm Beach, Florida. Jim Robbins' belief that Buick

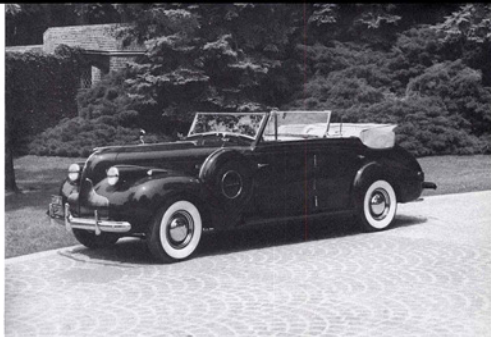
had the best running and performing automobile on the market in 1938 enticed him to acquire the Opera Brougham in 1972 from its second owner. "This Buick is the kind of car you either think is gorgeous and love, or think is ugly and hate," comments Katie Robbins. "Needless to say, Jim thought it was gorgeous.

It took a little time for the car to become a favorite of mine." This Buick is also the kind of car people crowd around, and the Robbins have provided ample opportunity for that. Everybody in the CCCA who has been on a CARavan knows the Fernandez & Darrin Buick, because it's been on twelve of them.

1938 Buick Series 90 Opera Brougham, Fernandez & Darrin
Owner: Jim Robbins of Dearborn, Michigan



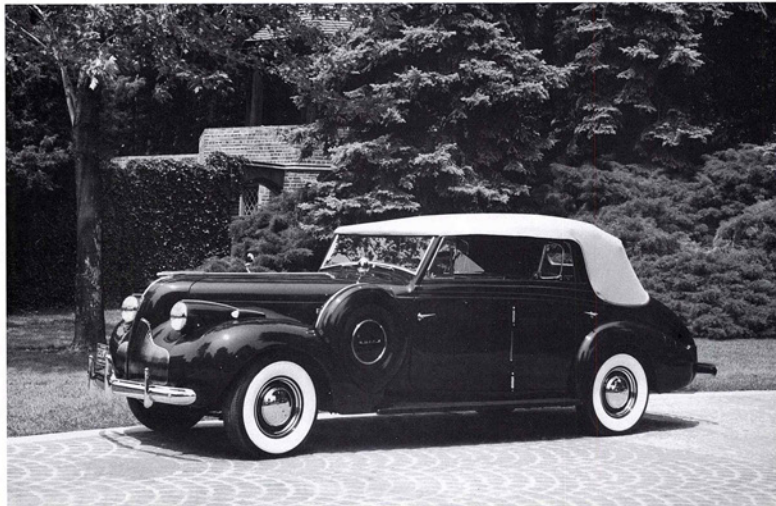
General Motors itself commissioned the Series 60 Dual Cowl Phaeton from Maltby's Motor Works & Garage, Ltd., a coachbuilding establishment in the English seaside resort of Folkestone, Kent. Since 1936, when the Redfern Saloon Tourer with hydro-electric top was first shown on a Buick chassis at the Olympia Motor Show, GM had apparently become quite interested in Maltby's work. Putting the sporty Saloon Tourer on the 126-inch Series 60 chassis was a natural since the 320-cubic-inch 140+ hp Buick Century was arguably the hottest car in America at the time. The result was dynamite. Among those ogling the Maltby Buick at the 1939 International Automobile Show in Copenhagen was Carl Jensen, who was on a reconnaissance mission to find something "both modern and distinctive" for his employer, Danish furniture manufacturer James Løve. Since the Løve garage already housed three Buicks, chauffeur Jensen knew he had found just the car for his boss. General Motors' reluctance to sell did not deter James Løve, and ultimately he prevailed. During World War II, the car was hidden for the duration of the German occupation of Denmark. Following the

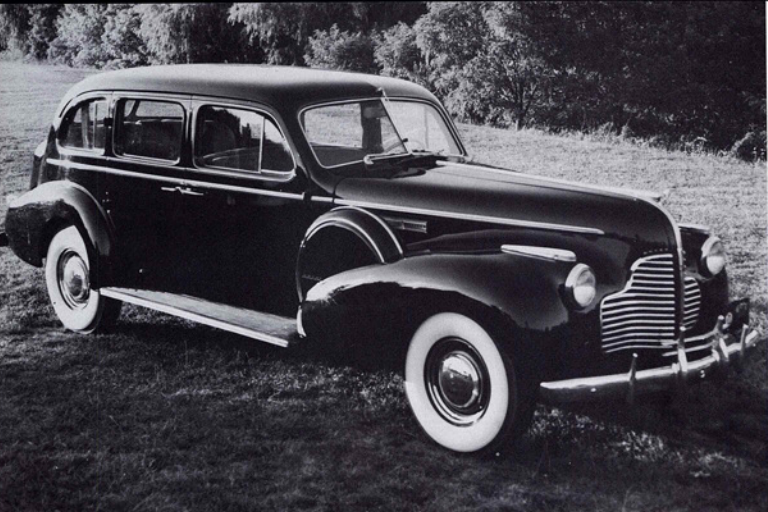


1939 Buick Series 60 Redfern Saloon Tourer, Maltby
Owner: Russell L. Creason of Franklin, Michigan

liberation, the Maltby Buick was back on the road. Because its owner was a personal friend of the Danish royal family, the car was used on ceremonial occasions by visiting heads of state. Both General Eisenhower and Winston Churchill are believed to have paraded in it. In 1966 James

Løve died and bequeathed the Buick to his chauffeur. That same year Russ Creason, on a visit to Copenhagen, saw it for the first time, and three years later had himself a wonderful Christmas present. In December 1969 Carl Jensen agreed to sell him the car.





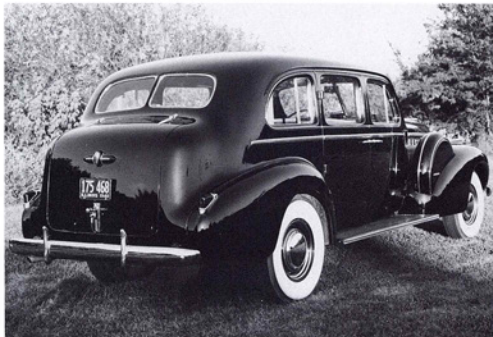
The Series 90 Limited for 1940 was a big Buick with the same engine as the Century mounted in a 140-inch chassis and cloaked with roomy bodies providing accommodations for eight. Academic matters were no doubt discussed in the back seat of the car Larry Sciortino has owned for eight years: "My Buick was originally bought by Arthur Cutts Willard, president of the University of Illinois. It remained in the state until 1980, then went to Colorado and in 1982 came back home. The Limited was truly limited in 1940. Out of 310,995 Buicks built that year, only 796 were the Series 90 Eight-Passenger Touring Sedan."

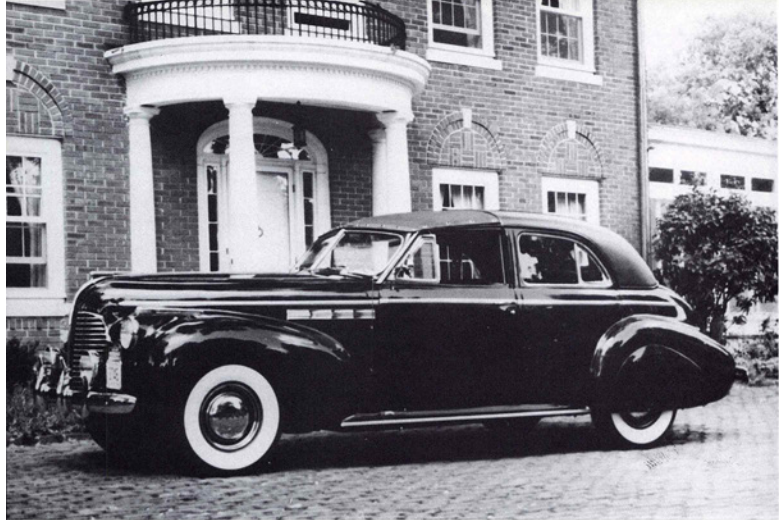
Total Series 90 Limousine production was 526 cars. Sonny Abagnale has owned his since 1961: "It was purchased at an estate sale. I paid \$35.00. There were no other bids. The sidemount spares have never been used, and the tires on the road wheels are original. I've driven this Buick 10,000 miles and at times at speeds up to 100 mph. But the car's most spectacular performance was in the movie *The Godfather*. That sensational U-turn on the George Washington Bridge? This was the car!" And the photograph shown here is a still from the film.

Noel Thompson's custom Series 90 Town Car was built for Mrs. Richard Whitney, whose husband was president of the New York Stock Exchange. Noel has owned the car since 1962: "The distinctive Brewster radiator shell, the P-100 headlights, the very unusual vee windshield and

custom aluminum body attracted me. But most important at the time was the town car configuration, providing the parents of four children the opportunity to sit up front and put the kids in the back. The subsequent full restoration, right down to the bud vases, took three years."

1940 Buick Series 90 Model 90 Eight-Passenger Touring Sedan
Owner: Larry Sciortino of Elmhurst, Illinois





1940 Buick Series 70 Townmaster, Brunn

Owner: Daniel J. Slowik of Berwyn, Illinois

Had Cadillac not cried foul, possibly more collectors would enjoy ownership of a Buick like Daniel Slowik's. His was the prototype for an ambitious custom program which died aborning. Dan tells the story: "As good as this era was for Buick, characteristically, it was not quite good enough for Buick's Harlow 'Red' Curtice. For the 1940 model year he decided to go custom. First he approached Cadillac and Fleetwood/Fisher asking for cooperation in the supplying of bodies. The answer was a resounding 'no'—which might have been expected. Buick Limiteds were already making inroads into the luxury-class territory which Cadillac regarded as its private preserve in General Motors. So Brunn & Company of Buffalo, New York was contacted. Brunn chose to work with the 126-inch-wheelbase Roadmaster chassis, which was a Series 70 this year because of Buick's division of the Limited into two individual model lines. To revise the Roadmaster Four-Door Sedan into a town car, Brunn sectioned the roof just behind the driver, with provision for roof panels over the driving compartment (to be stored in the header

behind the driver's seat) and a two-piece sliding divider window separating the driver and passenger compartments. This sectioning made necessary the relocation of the radio antenna to the rear of the left front fender. Stock 1940 Buick fender skirts were used. However, a very luxurious passenger compartment

was created featuring amenities from hidden radios to overstuffed cushions. The finished car was exhibited at the Waldorf Astoria during the New York Automobile Show at the old Palace. It enjoyed an enthusiastic reception, but the price of \$3,750 proved a deterrent to sales. Buick officially named the Brunn the

The instrument panel in Dan Slowik's 1940 Buick Series 70 Townmaster, Brunn





1940 Buick Series 90 Model 90L Limousine Owner: Sonny Abagnale of Cedar Grove, New Jersey

1940 Buick Series 90 Town Car, Brewster Owner: Noel Thompson of New Vernon, New Jersey Photo: K. Karger





1941 Buick Series 90 Model 90L Limousine

Owner: Robert Stork of Grand Blanc, Michigan

Townmaster and officially introduced it on February 18th. But my prototype was the only one built. After being used to pick up Buick VIP's at the Flint airport, the Townmaster was sold and lived on a Connecticut estate until 1975 when it was traded on a Jaguar. The Jaguar dealer put it on the collector car

market simply as an old car. I acquired the Brunn in 1980. To me, it is the ultimate 1940 Buick—a Roadmaster, a convertible, a town car, a very special piece of General Motors history." Dan is exactly right. Four custom Brunns were specially ordered on either Roadmaster or Limited chassis. None exist today. Dan's car

is the only tangible reminder of the ambitious custom program that Harlow Curtice planned and which might have worked had not Cadillac complained to GM corporate management that Buick was treading into sanctified custom territory and with coachwork that, heaven forbid, wasn't even built by General Motors. Harlow Curtice knew when to quit.

Unlike 1940 when the Limited was offered on two wheelbases, the 1941 version was a 139-inch-chassis Series 90 only. Dual sidemounts were no more; two-tone color schemes were available at no extra charge. Compound carburetion was new which, Robert Stork says, improved performance measurably: "My 1941 Buick, one of 605 built, is a big comfortable automobile to drive and always dependable, even in the hottest weather. The car has an unusual five-band radio. Owning a hometown product of the Classic Era has a special significance for me."

Following Pearl Harbor in 1941, Buick went to war. In the early fifties, when GM president Charles Wilson left to become U.S. Secretary of Defense, his successor was no surprise: Harlow Curtice.

Rear passenger compartment in Dan Slowik's 1940 Buick Townmaster, Brunn

