

This regal Buick is a muscle car of '80s

By Al Hoss
Inquirer Automotive Writer

It was the other night. The 1986 Corvette coupe was waiting at a light on Washington Avenue when I pulled up alongside in the Buick Grand National. The young man behind the wheel yelled something. The bleached blond next to him smiled.

Maybe they didn't realize the significance of the turbo bubble on the Grand National's hood. Or maybe they did, and just wanted to see if what they had heard about this strange and wonderful car was true.

The Corvette got off the line first. Big V-8s generally do. But by the time the Grand National was across the intersection, its V-6 had the R.P.M.s it needed to put its turbo-charger to work. The big blacked-out Buick surged ahead aggressively and began its amphetamine rush to judgment.

The bleached blond wasn't smiling at the next light, and the defeated driver wasn't interested in another dance. He turned left and headed north toward Center City. ...

You're right. Corvette killing does smack of residual adolescence. But one must enter into the spirit of the car at hand. And the Grand National is certainly an automobile for those afflicted with the raging hormones of youth.

It is also a car for those with less-active diesel engines. It has a rather high nostalgia quotient. Those who knew and loved the big, powerful cars of the '60s will know and love the Grand National. Built with a hefty square body, a chrome frame and a live rear axle, it may well be The Last Muscle Car.

And this will be its last year. When the rear-drive Buick Regal, on which it is based, becomes a four-wheel-drive car in 1988, the limited-production GM will go the way of the Pontiac GTO.

For those who have noticed this special-edition automobile on the road (fewer than 5,000 will be made this model year), the Grand National is a comfortable, well-equipped, roomy Buick Regal with a blacked-out body, special upholstery, an as-



The Buick Regal Grand National, with a turbocharger on its 245-horsepower V-6 engine, is one of the last of a breed of muscle cars.

An evaluation: Grand National

Base vehicle: Includes four-speed automatic transmission, power steering and brakes, high-performance engine, sport suspension, performance tires, 15-inch chrome wheels, air conditioning, sport mirrors, special upholstery and insignia.

Test model: Includes major options: electric door locks, power windows, tinted glass, rear-window defogger, limited-slip differential, cruise control, tinted steering wheel, AM/FM radio and cassette, power interior, clock, six-way power driver's seat.

Base price	\$15,136
Test model	\$17,359
EPA city rating	17 m.p.g.
Test mileage	18 m.p.g.

tonishly competent sport suspension and a 245-horsepower engine imported from Mr. Spock's home planet.

The mad scientists at Buick obtained all that power by tweaking a 3.8-liter General Motors V-6 that nor-

mally develops 150 horse. Wonders never cease when you top a vanilla V-6 with such confections as a turbo-charger, intercooler and roller tappets.

The result of all this horsing around is a car that is generally regarded as a half faster than a standard Corvette from zero to 60 m.p.h. and in a standing quarter-mile. The car has been reported to do 0-60 in less than 6 seconds in cold weather (which benefits a turbo-charged engine much more profoundly than it helps a normally aspirated one). It also has been timed in the quarter-mile at the English-Town, N.J., drag strip at less than 14 seconds.

The Grand National tops out at a mere 124 m.p.h. only because that's when its computer shuts off its fuel. Buick installed the limiter to keep the car from going beyond the 125 m.p.h. rating of its Goodyear Eagle tires.

Interestingly, the FBI recently bought a group of these cars and

fitted them with 150 m.p.h. performance tires and a special computer chip that doesn't shut off the gas. The result is a 149 m.p.h. Buick.

As the acceleration and top-end figures might suggest, the Grand National packs a lot of engine performance for \$15,136. Thanks to its firm Type 3 sport suspension, the GN also displays a lot more cornering competence than you would expect from a hefty rear-driver that will seat five comfortably.

That firm suspension, coupled with the car's tight, quiet body, imparts to the driver a pleasing sense of solidity and security.

So what you get, finally, with a GN is a big, bad, black machine that can double as comfortable, fully equipped family transportation — and give surprisingly good gas mileage.

The GN has EPA mileage ratings of 17 city and 25 highway, which are really exceptional for a car with such a high-performance engine. I

got 18 m.p.g. during a typically punishing mixture of city and highway driving. I don't doubt for a moment that you could nudge 30 m.p.g. driving this car conservatively on the highway. But who could drive a GN conservatively?

If you want to employ a little Yankee ingenuity, you can actually "build" your own GN from the Regal option list and save \$594.

You start with a black base Regal, which costs \$11,562 and includes such amenities as a V-6, three-speed automatic transmission, power steering and power brakes. Then, instead of purchasing the \$3,574 GN package, you order its components separately.

These include the turbo engine, four-speed automatic, air conditioning, 15-inch chrome wheels, performance tires, the sport suspension, and the blacked-out exterior trim.

What you wind up with is a car that has everything the Grand National has, except for the special upholstery, hood bubble and insignia, for \$14,542 instead of \$15,136.

Peugeot's fortunes are in reverse

By Tom Ichniowski
Sunday

Its French parent company has made a remarkable financial turnaround, but Peugeot Motors of America remains as poor as the U.S. auto market. Its sales here have declined for two years running, and things have not gotten any better so far in 1987.

The parent corporation, Peugeot S.A., was Europe's fourth-largest automaker last year, with sales of 1.3 million cars. More important, last year's not-reported profits are estimated to be four times those of 1985, or about \$30 million — that for a company that lost more than \$1 billion between 1980 and 1984.

The corporation credits much of the improvement to cost-cutting, including combining the manufacturing functions of the Citroen and Peugeot Talbot units. Another factor was its new 205 model, a subcompact that is selling well abroad.

But Peugeot does not offer the 205 here — and has no plans to do so. It believes it cannot compete in price against the Japanese at the small-car end of the U.S. market.

It offers Americans just one of its car lines: the 505, ranging in price from \$14,160 to \$23,750. But its 275 U.S. dealers managed to sell only 14,336 of them last year, 8 percent fewer than the year before.

Peugeot predicts U.S. sales of between 15,000 and 17,000 units this year; its goal is to reach 50,000 by 1990. To succeed, the company and outside experts believe that it must change its reputation for poor quality. Peugeot is expected to establish a clearer image in the market and offer more models.

The company appears to be working on all three problems. Since Pascal Renault was appointed president of the U.S. unit in July, it has set up a free-road-assistance plan and begun offering a used-car warranty.

As for its image, recent ad campaigns emphasize the expertise of the French in high-performance engineering, as evidenced by the Concorde and the TGV bullet train. "They really need a complete re-educating," said industry consultant Tom O'Grady of Integrated Automotive Resources Inc. of Wayne, Pa.

For the 1989 model year, Peugeot plans to import a new model, the 405. Scheduled for European introduction in September, it is smaller and less expensive than the 505.