

# Big Buick

by Joe Sage

**GM** has long been skilled at brand positioning—they had to be when they had Chevrolet, Buick, Cadillac, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, Saturn and GMC (not to mention Saab, Isuzu and Geo). Now with Chevy, Buick, Cadillac and GMC, they still need each to have its own image, purpose and feature set—internally to distinguish brands in the GM stable, models within that brand, various trim levels within each model and the new model against earlier model years; and externally against the competition from other brands.

In this niche, GM has the Chevrolet Impala, Buick LaCrosse and Cadillac XTS—built on the same extended Epsilon II platform (and if there were still a Pontiac Bonneville or Olds 98, it would be, too)—but the idea of a big Buick has a certain timeless air about it. A big Buick is not just a physical reality, but a bit of a feeling. GM brand positioning still holds true after all these years: while the current Impala is anything but downscale, the Buick badge makes more of a premium statement, while still slotting in below the more purposefully ostentatious presence that is Cadillac's raison d'être. But the new Buick LaCrosse goes beyond

this. We started out thinking of this car's position in the Chevy-Buick-Cadillac continuum, but soon began comparing it with premium/luxury German autobahn cruisers.

We had taken the LaCrosse straight to the freeway on day one and loved it immediately. We hit the ramp and gave it the gas, and it has the power—right away you know you'd like to cover some high desert highway miles in this.

Buick engineers have done a Roadmasterful job with the chassis and powertrain. The LaCrosse's 3.6-liter V6 emits a powerful, elegant growl, with European royalty in its tone. The big sedan's 310 hp feels like much more, and its 38-foot turning circle feels like much less. Bringing this big sedan's weight in well below two tons keeps it nimble and quick.

The interior is spacious, with 42 inches of legroom in front and a generous 40 inches in back, with sizable doors all around, though over-the-shoulder visibility is a bit tight. The trunk holds 15 cubic feet, a proportion that's balanced against that rear seat roominess. Overall length has been kept within a relatively tidy footprint, and parking is quite easy.

For a taste of high desert highway miles, we took a cruise up I-17 to Rock Springs Café in Black Canyon City (famous for homemade pies and hot sauces), and again enjoyed the car's smooth power and premium cabin.

We played with the paddle-shift manumation on surface streets, a four-or-five-gear burst (out of eight) when the light turned green. On a two-lane country road with steady traffic, we grabbed a quick oncoming open gap and roared past a notable slowpoke, no paddles.

Control interfaces are generally clear and effective. Climate and audio are easily found and adjusted. We welcome the heads-up display, though it has a lot of info, enough to distract you at first on a par with looking down.

The electronic shift lever has an increasingly common non-traditional pattern that requires a jog up and to the left for reverse (pushing a left-side button to the right while pushing the handle itself to the left), to help avoid ending up in reverse by pushing straight up in your quest for the traditional park position. Park itself is a button atop the shift lever.

The console has a cutaway (no pesky shift mechanism), with a flat rubberized-grip surface for wireless charging (on the top two trims), as well as one lighter-style outlet in that area, plus another and two USB ports in the console bin. A deep, slim smartphone nook is just big enough for an iPhone 7, not a Plus, though the lower mat will handle bigger phones. The LaCrosse also has GM's WiFi hot spot technology included on all trim levels.

Mild front-drive characteristics were neg-

ligible. Variable-effort electric power steering with lead/pull compensation and active return assist mitigates this well. Another option: top Premium trim offers all-wheel drive for \$2200, which adds 242 pounds (still under two tons) and sheds one MPG city, two highway. For that, you must buy the top trim, but don't compare this fully equipped car with the base LaCrosse—compare it with the Germans.

European and Asian premium and luxury brands include some fine machines, but the Buick LaCrosse starts at just \$32,990. Even our top trip Premium (the highest of four levels) is just above \$40k. Max it out with AWD, and you are at \$44,190. You'd be remiss not to look twice at this before you finish your shopping process. Fit, finish and features are tops. So is style—we become attuned to what we're driving each week, but quickly realized we were not only noticing other LaCrosse, but sometimes mistaking their panache for brands that cost two or three times as much, or vice versa. And a bonus: American brand parts and service are far less painful as the years roll on. It's almost not even a fair fight.

A classic big Buick customer is not left high and dry by LaCrosse's athletic and wired new direction—they will be very satisfied with this machine. But a younger, more aggressive, more demanding and more technical customer demographic will be very pleased to discover this car. And either camp, if value is part of their equation, will be delighted. ■



## SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	3.6L direct-injection VVT V6
HP/TORQUE	310 hp / 282 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	8-spd auto electronic overdrive with torque converter clutch
DRIVETRAIN	FWD (AWD available w Premium)
BRAKES	4-whl disc: F 12.6 vented / R 11.3 solid
STEERING	elec vari pwr, active return assist
SUSPENSION	FR: MacPherson strut coil-over-spring; R: five-link (opt 20-in wheels add continuous damping)
WHEELS	18" alum (opt 20" alum)
TIRES	235/50R18 all-season (opt 245/40R20)
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	197.5 in / 114.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.0 cu.ft
CARGO CAPACITY	15.0 cu.ft
WEIGHT	3598 lb (avail AWD 3840 lb)
FUEL CAPACITY	15.8 gal (16.2 w avail AWD)
MPG	21/31/25 (city/hwy/comb)

**BASE PRICE PREMIUM FWD** ..... \$41,065  
 (Note: base model starts at ..... \$32,990)

**INCLUDES:** Driver-selectable electronic precision shift, low-drag disc brakes w Duralife rotors, lead/pull steering compensation, teen driver feature, perforated leather front seats w lumbar massage on Premium, 8-in IntelliLink touchscreen w Apple/Android/OnStar and wifi hot spot, keyless entry/start, remote start, rear camera, following distance and forward collision alert on Premium.

**DRIVER CONFIDENCE PACKAGE:** Adaptive cruise control (full speed range), auto parking assist, front automatic braking, front pedestrian detection 1690

**SUN AND SHADE PACKAGE:** Power sunroof w 2nd row skylight, power rear sunshade ..... 1550

**SIGHTS AND SOUND PACKAGE:** Bose 11-speaker Centerpoint surround sound audio, navigation 1145

**WHITE FROST TRICOAT** ..... 995  
**DESTINATION CHARGE** ..... 925

**TOTAL** ..... **\$47,370**

*The big Buick used to be thought of as an older person's car, but we've decided it may really just be that it took some people that long to realize what a collection of attributes this car delivers at such a reasonable price. We went from "Yeah, okay, thanks" to "Hey, can we keep this?" during our week.*

