

'41 Buick Restored to Original After 36 Years in Storage

Villager's 1941 Buick Super Convertible Phaeton is named Rebecca, after the Alfred Hitchcock movie.

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By Maddie Cutler



Mike Stemen fell in love with Buicks when he was 8 years old. One day, the best man from his father's wedding pulled up in front of Stemen's grandfather's house in a 1948 Roadmaster convertible and Stemen loved the design and beauty of the car.

"We had a Plymouth, and it was as dull a car as you can ever imagine," he said. "But my dad was an engineer and was all about practically, and he said the Buick was impractical for us."

Years later, while driving an ATV, he found a 1947 Roadmaster and hauled it out of the woods. After contacting the land owners where the car was sitting, he started the processes of restoring it.

He never finished that car, instead selling it to a professional restorer and buying a completed car he still has. But that experience led him to Rebecca, his 1941 Super Convertible Phaeton.

“This car was bought in 1941 by a man named Mr. Wiley, and I still have a repair sheet from when he brought it to Newberry Garage & Motor Sales in Chicago,” he said. “He drove the car for 17 years but he only put 55,000 miles on it before he traded it in.”

The car was bought by three other owners, being driven as a beater car and given a poor-quality paint job before sitting in storage for 36 consecutive years.

Stemen, of the Village of Dunedin, saw the car for sale in an issue of Hemmings in 2004. The car was in Wisconsin and his friend John Williams lived in Illinois.

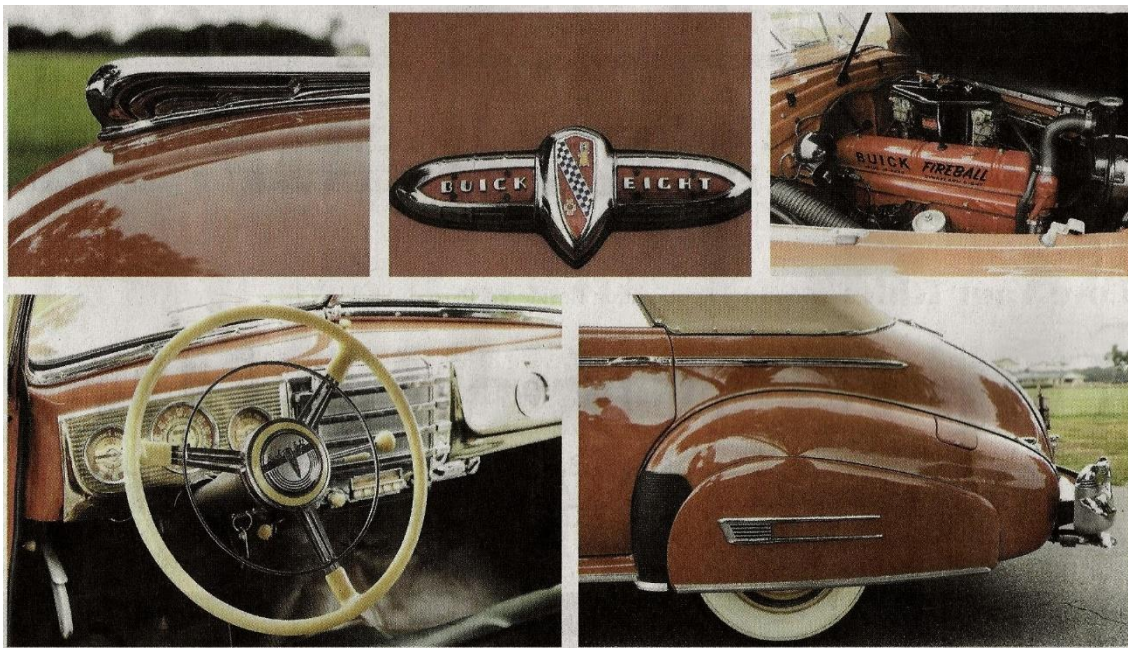
Stemen, who lived in New York at the time, asked Williams to get the car for him and trailer it back to Illinois.

“I chased all the parts and paid all the bills, but he was majordomo for me and oversaw each step,” Stemen said. “He lives in a town with a lot of craftsmen, so it stayed there during its restoration.”

After the car was finally finished, including its paint color being restored to its original Sienna Rust hue, Stemen and his wife, Nancy Taber, debuted it at the 2006 Buick Club of America nationals in Rochester, Illinois, where it won gold.

“I was born in 1941 and I always thought that this was one of the prettiest cars I’ve ever seen,” Stemen said. “I love the look, and the fact that the car sweeps back, and the skirts over the wheels make the whole look of the car.”

Stemen continued entering the car in competitions, and it eventually earned a first-place national prize in 2012, and the title of both Antique Automobile Club of America junior and senior car, a prestigious title in the antique car world.



Of Stemen’s six cars, four of them are convertibles. Each convertible has a woman’s name, generally something matching a woman from that era.

The 1941 is named Rebecca, after the Alfred Hitchcock movie of the same name that came out the year prior.

When Stemen and Taber bring the cars to shows, they match their wardrobe to each other as well as to the same decade of fashion from the year the car is made.

When they showcase Rebecca, Taber dons a dress and bolero-style cardigan in the exact color of the car.

Stemen and Taber moved from New York to The Villages around 2021. Stemen said this is a much better place for old cars.

“You have to put them away for six months up in the north,” he said. “Here we get to drive them around much more than we could before.”

Stemen is a member of the Villages Classic Automobile Club, and he loves picking which car to take to the club events and car shows he participates in.