



# GRAN SPORT EURO

## 2012 BUICK REGAL GS

MSRP: \$40,700 · PRICE AS TESTED: \$48,445

**T**here's no replacement for displacement." This used to be the party line of the old school guys when it came to high performance cars. The idea was that when it comes to fast cars, nothing beats a big motor for getting it done. (Full disclosure: I have been accused of being old school. I don't deny it, mainly because these are the only occasions when my name and education are mentioned in the same sentence).

I do love the modern muscle cars, and many aren't lacking for cubic inches or horsepower. But, even this old school car guy can appreciate how good a lot of the new stuff is, and this week's test drive is a case in point.

Buick made its mark in the GM stable with a combination classiness and sportiness. In the '50's, Buick made Banker's Hot Rods like the Century, and in the '60s, Gran Sports mixed muscle and creature comforts like nobody else. From the early Seventies through most of the Eighties, there was precious little performance out there, when it came to American cars. With their turbocharged V-6s, late Eighties Buicks like the Regal Grand National were among the first, faint flickers of light at the end of the tunnel. Technology was finally catching up: power and pollution controls were no longer mutually exclusive.

Fast forward to 2012 and the latest Buick Regal GS. This midsize, premium performance sedan is powered by a 2.0 liter four-cylinder engine. That's 122 cubic inches: a far cry from the V-6s of the '80s (232 c.i.d) and even further from the 455 cube big blocks of the muscle car era. The 2012 Regal GS motor may be small, but it's smart, and it's fairly fast. The high output, DOHC, direct injection, turbocharged Ecotec four displaces 2.0 liters and produces 270 horsepower and 295 lb. ft. of torque. It can be linked to a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission. Sad to say, my tester had the latter and not the former, but even so, the combo is capable of a 0-60 mph best of 6.7 seconds — respectably quick. EPA estimated fuel economy is solid on the highway (27), though a little dis-



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appointing in the city (19).

So, Regal GS is Euro Quick, but just as interesting is how athletic the car is. With ride height lowered and spring/stabilizer rates raised, the GS's fully independent suspension makes the car notably nimble. GS drivers can fine tune their ride and handling through the standard, Interactive Drive Control System.

Switching from Standard to Sport to GS settings adapts suspension damping, steering effort and shift points to suit the mood of the driver, from sporting to cruising. In all, the front wheel drive GS has a tautness consistent with what you'd feel with any good European sport sedan. Steering response is sharp, braking is strong and the Buick carves corners with gusto.

Inside, the Regal GS shows a dressy, if slightly

subdued look. Switchgear is for the most part in easy reach of the driver. The number of control buttons on the center stack will require a little time for the driver to digest before they become second nature. The GS seats most any size up front, and four six footers can fit overall — though tight at the knees in back — with some compromise in front seat recline.

The driver's rear view is hindered somewhat by the combination of a sharply slanting backlight and chunky c-pillars. Interior storage spots are uniformly small. Regal has a decent sized trunk (14.25 cu. ft.), though the hinges impinge on the cargo space. Rear seats split and fold to a mostly flat floor, if you need more room for your gear.

Notable in the standard equipment roster for



the GS are a 336-watt, nine-speaker, 5.1 Matrix surround sound system, leather trim for the flat bottom steering wheel and the seats, ultrasonic parking assist for front and rear and Buick's IntelliLink, which allows smart phone access via voice command or steering wheel controls, and streaming audio through your phone via Pandora Internet radio or Stitcher Smart Radio. Options include a sunroof and an audio system upgrade with 7-inch touch screen GPS navigation, SD card slot and iPod support, although strangely, this upgrade is only available when the sunroof is also ordered.

Young-uns may not recall that there was a time when cars had chrome trim on them — sometimes, lots of it. (Non-believers: see this week's '58 Buick in my RVM column, but put your sunglasses on first). Styling has seasons and the pendulum has long ago swung back the other way, to the point where it's unusual to see much shiny stuff on any car.

Surprising then is the new Regal GS, with a wide chrome grille, deck lid blade, and bright-work surrounds for front air ducts, dual exhaust ports and all window trim.

Especially when you add the optional, 20-inch chrome rims, this is a flashy car, one that draws a lot of looks. It's a decidedly American stamp on a car that otherwise has a definite European slant, and it works well on this Buick.

Regal GS has a very European feel and is designed to attract very American buyers — younger Americans, specifically, who may have always associated Buicks with older Americans.

Like the last of the late, Saturn lineup, it's a reminder that GM builds some very interesting, Euro-influenced products; cars that have considerable appeal for drivers here in the states.