

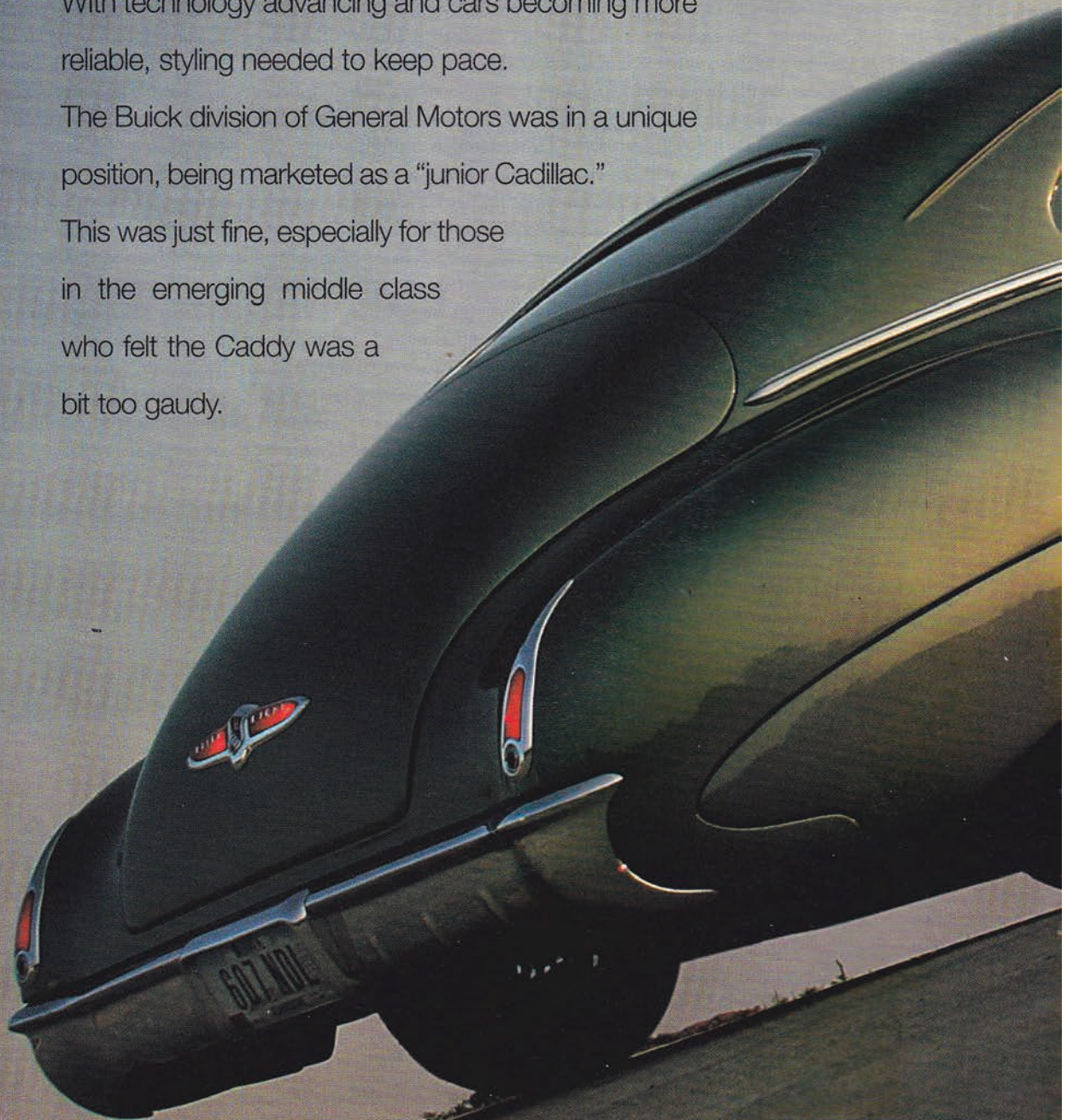
EXTRA *Special*

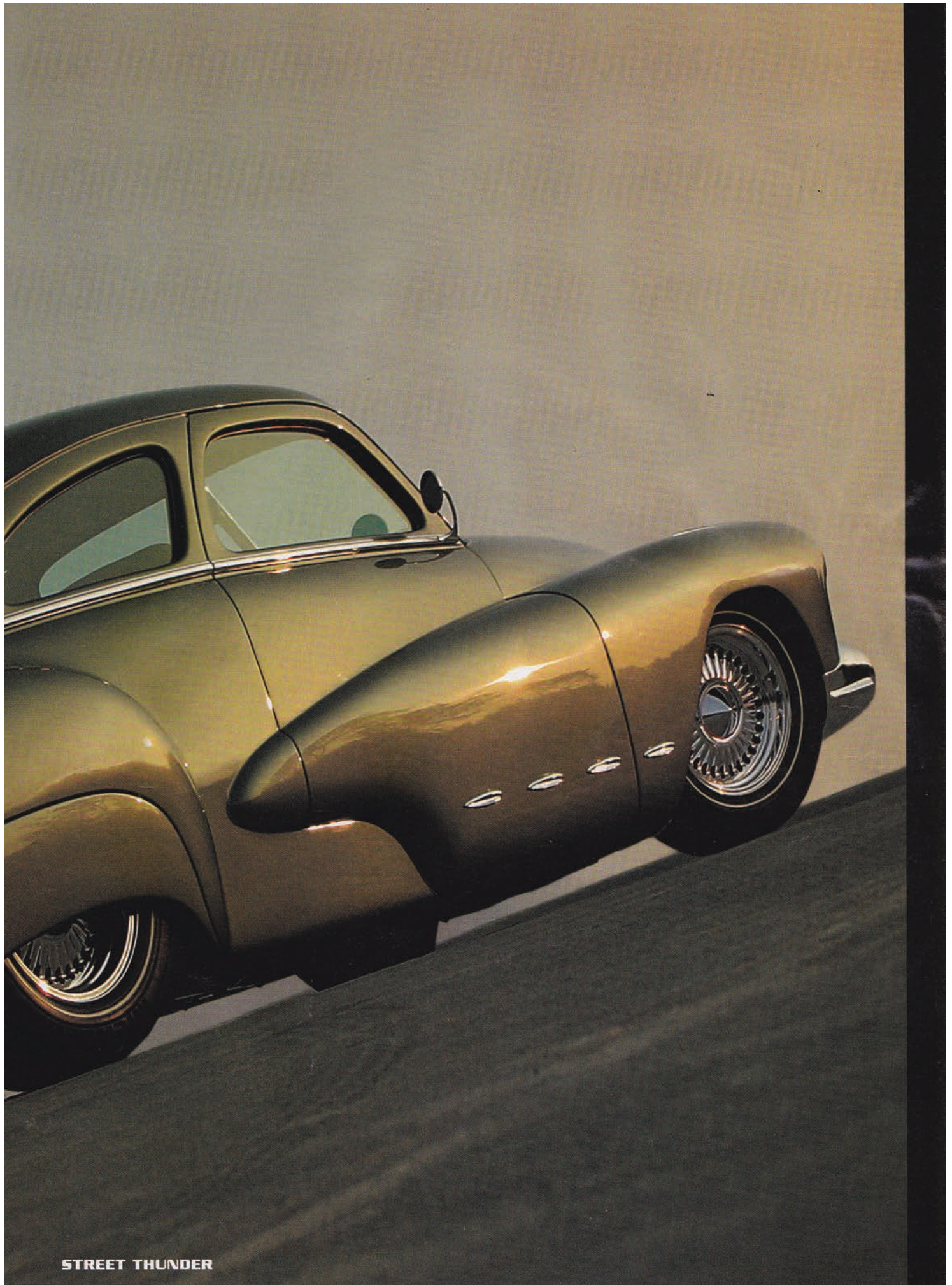
BOB AND ERMA WOLF'S "SALSA VERDE" 1948 BUICK

In the booming post WWII years, American auto manufacturers embraced the aerodynamic styles made popular by the developing aerospace industry. With technology advancing and cars becoming more reliable, styling needed to keep pace.

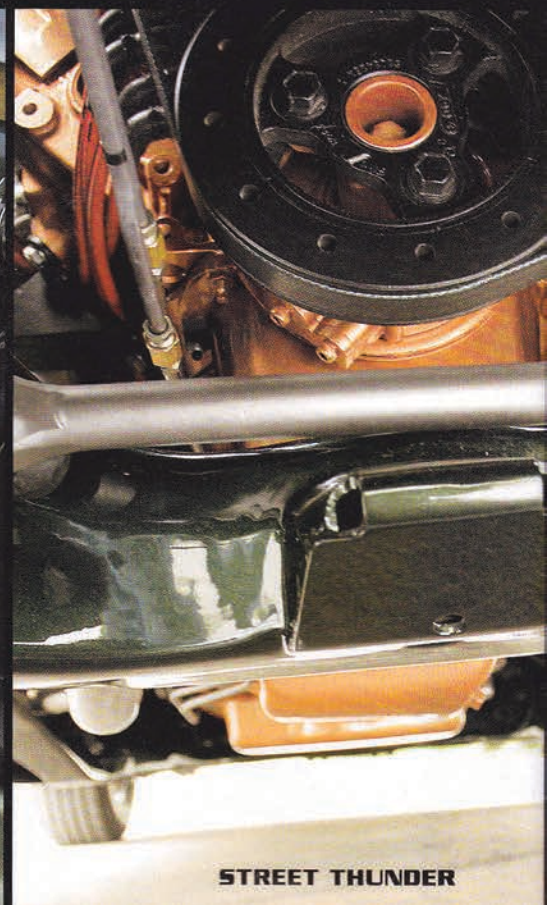
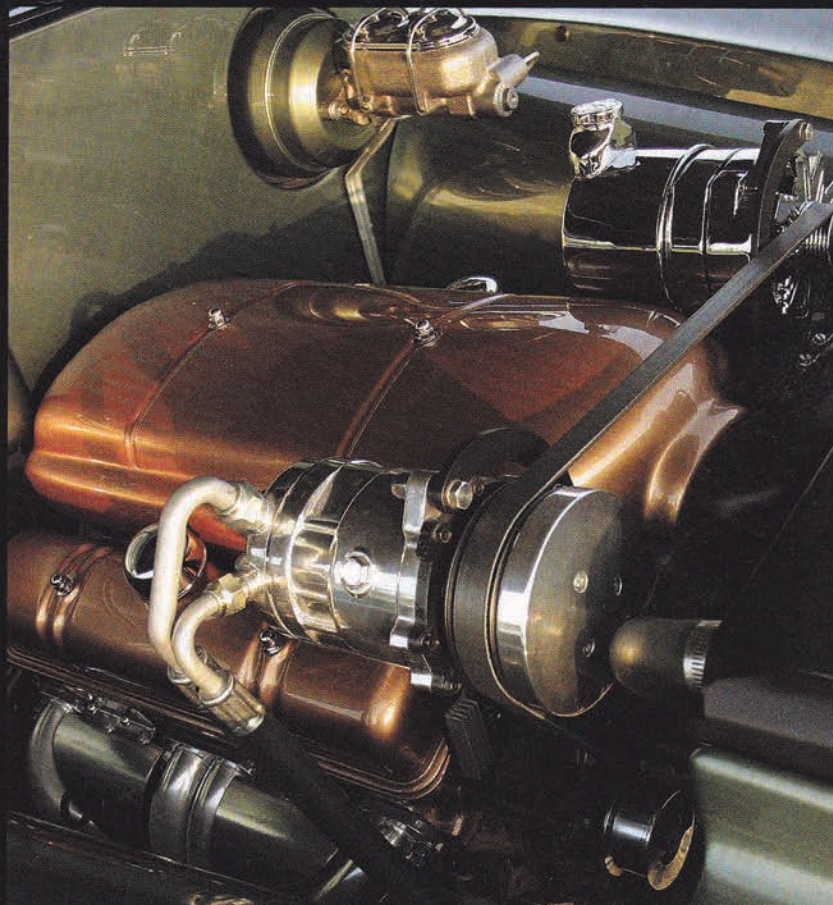
The Buick division of General Motors was in a unique position, being marketed as a "junior Cadillac."

This was just fine, especially for those in the emerging middle class who felt the Caddy was a bit too gaudy.





STREET THUNDER



The late '40s/early '50s Buicks are revered for their tasteful Harley Earl-penned style, with long sweeping curves moving gracefully from front to rear. What if these same inspirations were taken another step further? How would a Buick look with a slightly more aggressive slant? Bob Wolf of Iowa City, IA, wanted to know, and he relied upon designer Eric Aurand to push the era-specific style further. Using design cues from aircraft of the period, Eric went to work on a series of renderings. The need for tasteful restraint kept the final product looking like a true Buick.

Bob then trusted Merlin Berg to translate these ideas into reality on the '48 Special body, while Mick "The Professor" Paine was tasked with the chassis to support it. The body mods, however subtle, are extensive. The body has been sectioned 3-inches, while the roofline has been lowered 2.25-inches. The front windshield has been laid back an inch and a half, while the rear window has been mounted at a revised angle to flow with the new roofline. The front fenders and both doors have obviously been reshaped with the addition of a new sculpted section, which required re-engineering of the rocker panels, door openings, and door frames. The wheel openings (both front and rear) were reshaped to flow with the new design, while both front and rear bumpers were custom-crafted from '57 Buick pieces.

More traditional modifications include shaved trim, handles, and emblems, but this project went further. The window moldings, gas filler door, running boards, hood latches, and more were trimmed from the original body. Some of these parts were modified and reused (note the taillight lenses). Other mods may

go unnoticed by the non-Buick aficionados among us (the removal of the center-mount roof antenna, for instance).

Interestingly, in the pursuit of a "factory" feel, some trim parts were added to give a finished appearance. The door-mounted '57 Buick Ventiports and decklid trim piece (creatively engineered into a third brake light) are only a couple good examples.

The hood was sectioned 3-inches with a wedge cut to maintain shape, while the nose was laid back and provisions were made for a modern latch (rather than the traditional Buick "coffin" hood, which opened from side-to-side). To support the hood, modern gas-charged struts were engineered to disappear into the custom-smoothed firewall.

The modern ('95) LT1 wears '57 Buick valve covers and a custom-fabricated engine cover. All of the piping and wiring were placed out of sight for a clean appearance. The details were painted with House of Kolor Gold for a cool contrast with the green. Interestingly, these custom colors still don't look far from factory choices in the era.

The chassis received similar attention, gaining the LT1 small-block V-8 and 4L60-E overdrive automatic transmission to replace the original inline "Fireball Eight" and Dynaflo automatic. A late-model Buick front suspension clip was also added, bringing power steering, power disc brakes, and predictable handling performance with it. In the rear, a similar upgrade involving a GM 10-bolt disc brake rear axle (with 3.36:1 gears and Positraction), supported by a triangulated four-bar rear suspension, replaced the original torque tube setup. A complete Air Ride Technologies suspension system was integrated, allowing





for instant height adjustment and comfortable ride characteristics. Mick Paine did a phenomenal job of re-engineering the chassis for both function and form. The wheels are tasteful Billet Specialties 16-inch units with custom-machined caps. A quartet of Michelin 225/70R-16 narrow whitewall tires connects the car with the pavement.

With the Herculean tasks of body and chassis modifications completed, the interior was next on the list. Bob's wife, Erma, is responsible for all the color, fabric, and carpet choices inside the car (as well as the exterior color selection), and Jim McFall stretched the imported leather upholstery. The dashboard began life inside a '55 Pontiac, but after much custom fabrication, it now lives comfortably in the Buick. John Berry at Phoenix Restorations handled the modernization of the dash and the application of color to it. Dave Lewis crafted tasteful Babinga wood to trim both the door panels and the dash. The seats were pirated from a late-model Lincoln, and everything electrical works through a Ron Francis wiring harness. The massive 18-inch diameter steering wheel had the look the Wolf's were after, but it was simply too large. The wheel was cut down to a more-reasonable 16.5-inch diameter, and a new horn ring was cast to fit it by D&D Auto of Mobilia, PA.

The final effect is quite stunning. It still is recognizable as a Buick from the late '40s without question, but this is where the reality ends. Those of us who know these cars can see the many changes, but most simply see a fantastic example of period-correct style. The conservative color choices and top-quality workmanship hide what is truly a radically-altered car.

It's been said that a well-built custom makes you look for the changes that have been made, and the trained eye keeps finding subtle changes every time the car is looked over. We can assure you there's more to see than we have room to describe on these pages. Bob and Erma Wolf's '48 Buick is certainly a 6-year project they can be proud of, and we'd bet heavily Harley Earl himself would gladly give it his personal seal of approval. "Extra Special," indeed!

