

# Attention seeking MISSILE

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When he was a young man, Tony Gentilcore owned a Mini Cooper S. Thanks to his son, he now prefers something with an engine seven times larger



It's not unusual for a boy to inherit his father's taste in cars – the everlasting Ford versus Holden feud is proof of that. But it can happen in reverse, too.

Take Tony Gentilcore. He preferred sporty English numbers until he took a ride in his son's Buick.

"I used to like English sports cars, like Triumph TR6s, and I had a Mini Cooper S when I was quite young," he says. "Then I bought another Mini for my kids to learn to drive in. So it hasn't always been big cars.

"At the age of 21, my son wanted to buy a big Yank tank, so he bought a '69 Riviera."

Tony sometimes rode along in the Buick or joined his son at car shows. The enthusiastic response to that car seeded his own passion for these American behemoths.

"Everyone would come along and say, 'Oh, wow, this is great – is it your car?' And I'd say, 'No, it's my son's – talk to him.' Eventually I thought, I've got to get my own!"

Tony now owns several Buicks and has a website dedicated to them at [www.mako.com.au/buick](http://www.mako.com.au/buick). The first

one he bought was a '66 Riviera in July 2001. That one he sourced from Queensland. Three years later, he decided he wanted a '66 Wildcat and a worldwide search turned one up in Arizona, USA.

In 2005, Tony and his wife Barbara decided to celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary in 2006 with a trip to the States. His wife is also mad for Buicks (see 'What





# 1971 BUICK RIVIERA BOATTAIL

the wife wants...'), so they decided to squeeze in some Buick meets during their holiday. Then the plan began to grow – wouldn't it be terrific to roll up at the Riviera Owners Association meet in Flagstaff, Arizona, driving a '71 Buick Riviera Boattail?

## ON THE 'TAIL TRAIL

"We thought the Yanks would get a bit of a thrill seeing Aussies turn up with their own car," Tony says. "So three months before we left to go on the trip, we found the '71 Boattail in Phoenix, Arizona."

After their holiday it was time to ship the car home. Luckily Tony knew what to expect from his previous import. He tracked down someone in America who would put the car in his container so it could be shipped to Sydney. Then it was just a matter of

## WHAT THE WIFE WANTS...

Not only did Tony's son get him interested in Buicks, it was Tony's wife Barbara's idea to get the Boattail. "I got a [die-cast] model of one for my birthday a few years ago and we always liked it," Tony says. When they decided they were going to buy a car to attend the Buick meet in Arizona, Barbara suggested it should be one like the model. "She is right into it," Tony adds.



dropping off the Buick in California and it was on its way.

"The other thing was to get a licence from Canberra for a private import," Tony explains. "If it's over 25 years old, it's almost guaranteed that they will give you a licence."

"Within 10 days, they'll have the paperwork turned around. You don't want to import a car without doing that, because if it arrives before the paperwork's approved, they can actually make it turn around and go back. Usually it takes longer for the car to arrive than it does for them to turn the paperwork around."

## AN UGLY DUCKLING

The Boattail arrived safe and sound and Tony and his wife actually drove it around for a couple of years before starting the restoration.

Although it was quite healthy mechanically, the engine bay was "filthy". A shonky paintjob didn't help matters, either. "There was no rust in it, but the paint job on it was shocking. Someone had painted it in the '90s, a friend of the owner, and they didn't mask-up anything. They didn't take badges off, they just tried to go around them. The bumper bars were left on, the chrome strips were left on – I think they call it a closed-

door paintjob in the US. Very cheap.

"It was a gold colour. It was only shiny and looked nice if the sun was on it. Once it was out of the sun it was dull. So it had to go back to bare metal," he says.

He began to shop around for quotes in Sydney – Tony lives in the northern suburbs – and wound up choosing Wally's Panel and Paint in Warilla, just south of Wollongong. Not exactly convenient, but it was "about \$4000 cheaper than anything I could get around here".

"Originally it was Copper Mist, which was like a Holden Kingswood brown-gold colour – and which I don't like," Tony says. "The most popular colour for a car in the 1970s

■ **TOP** Tony and his wife Barbara in Phoenix with the pre-resto Boattail.

■ **ABOVE LEFT** Tony burns the midnight oil to get the engine in tip-top shape.

■ **ABOVE CENTRE** The Buick waits for its doors and bonnet to return from the panel beater.

■ **ABOVE RIGHT** Dashboard luxury 1970s style.

■ **ABOVE** The Boattail is complete – and good enough to win awards.

in the US was brown with brown interior. Those sorts of tones were the most popular. God knows why."

Now he had to choose a respray hue and got a '71 Buick colour chart off eBay. He found himself tossing up between Cortez Gold, which was not dissimilar to the colour of the dodgy paintwork, and Lime Mist.

"I got the panel beater to paint up a couple of sheets of metal in 2-Pak that we could go and have a look at – one in the gold and one in Lime Mist. Four of us went down and we all said Lime Mist."

## GETTING HIS HANDS DIRTY

While that was being done, Tony – who is in marketing now but is a



“The interior was awful. Being a Phoenix car, everything was sunburnt to buggery”

## SPECS

### 1971 BUICK RIVIERA BOATTAIL

**Engine:**  
7.5-litre (455ci) V8

**Bore and stroke:**  
109.5mm x 99mm

**Power:** 246kW  
(330bhp) @ 4600rpm

**Torque:** 617Nm  
(455lb/ft) @ 2800rpm

**Suspension: Front:**  
Independent wishbone,  
coil springs **Rear:** Live  
axle, coil springs

**Length:** 5525mm  
(217.5")

**Width:** 2019mm  
(79.5")

**Height:** 1365mm  
(53.7")

**Weight:** 2009kg  
(4429lb)

**0-60mph:** 9.1 seconds

**Top speed:**  
201km/h (125mph)

toolmaker by trade – spent five weeks going over the engine.

“I pulled the engine out, ripped off all the front guards, front clip, inner guards and everything. Everything that was black that came off the engine or the inner guards I sand-blasted and powder-coated in General Motors’ Satin Black. And while the engine was out, I replaced the timing cover, the timing chain and all the seals and gaskets that I could get to. Water pump and stuff like that. Just to sort of freshen it up. But then I stripped all the gold paint off, and about a kilo of grease, and repainted it and had it all nice and ready to go back in once all the bits came back from the powder-coaters.”

That left the inside – no small job.

“The interior was awful,” Tony says. “Being a Phoenix car, everything was sunburnt to buggery. It was all brown and as soon as you put your elbow on the top of the seat it just cracked. So I found a place in the US that had new-old stock vinyl. I replaced the vinyl with what came from the factory, which has a bit of a pearl finish to it – White Madrid. I got 10 yards of that, which was

enough to do all of the interior. I got that done locally.”

## MATTERS OF TASTE

While Tony kept things like paint and upholstery authentic, he was not above altering things to suit his taste.

“It’s pretty original, except on the door panels I’ve got brushed aluminium inserts and originally they were dark-brown woodgrain. I thought just to give it a bit of a lift I would get rid of the woodgrain. It looks like wood panelling, which is very ’70s, you know?”

“The horn button on the steering wheel also had inserts of woodgrain,

so I flattened all that out and just did it in silver 2-Pak. The exhaust manifolds – instead of being cast-iron they are sprayed with an aluminium powder, so they are real white. Apart from that everything else is fairly original.”

It’s a handsome car, no doubt about it, and Tony and his wife have enjoyed some success at shows such as the Eastern Creek Classic and the Buick Nationals, although Tony says he’s “not really that into trophies”.

## ATTRACTED OR REPULSED?

A car like this attracts attention. Tony says he once got a gobful from an Oxford Street environmentalist who felt owning a car with a 7.5-litre engine was unconscionable. The Buick also turned heads following our photo shoot in Newtown. Tony stopped at a café for breakfast and watched as people paused to look at his car and take photos with their mobile phones. One man even started to ask around for the owner.

“He came to me and asked if it was my car. I should have said no, because he was a bit crazy and he wouldn’t go away,” Tony says.

But the day after our interview Tony emails me with the nicer side to Boattail ownership: *I forgot to mention one of the reasons I love full-size Buicks is because when you go to a car meet there’s hardly any there, unlike Mustangs and other popular classics.* **ACC**



### TOP RIGHT

Brushed aluminium door inserts replace original woodgrain.

### CENTRE RIGHT

The upholstery is authentic new-old White Madrid vinyl.

### BELOW RIGHT

Check out the tail on that! No wonder it attracts attention.

**BELOW** Yep, that’s 455 cubic inches of Greenie-angering V8 grunt.

