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CA Report

Buick's 1997 LeSabre perfect for long trips

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

The 1997 Buick LeSabre will probably be remembered when it's gone as the ultimate classic car.

Its virtues abound, and this year it has a redesigned exterior design and is safer and more comfortable than ever.

The LeSabre is a true touring car with class ... one that's perfect for long, cross-country trips. The suspension is remarkable. Run over a chuck-hole and it feels like you ran over a pebble.

The redesigned seats have something to do with that, of course. They're really comfortable.

The exterior has that familiar Buick look, but almost everything has been changed. This isn't a minor sheetmetal change. This is change that makes sense.

The new grill, which is incorporated right into the hood, looks smart. There are new front and rear fascias with individual "Buick" letters embossed in the rear. There are new headlamps and cornering lamps that feature fixed lenses, aluminum housing and easier-



ROAD TEST
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than-usual adjustment mechanism.

Even the park, turn and side marker lamps, complete with its sleek wraparound design, are new for the LeSabre.

The LeSabre carries six with ease. Buick outfitted the car with the powerful 3800 Series V6 engine mated to an electronically controlled 4-speed transmission that nets a comfortable 205 horsepower.

Best news of all is that this

engine gets around 19 miles to the gallon in the city and 30 on the highway on regular — not premium — unleaded gas.

Safety has not been put on the back burner in the new LeSabre. Some of the changes are simple, but translate into a lot. Like the safety belt release buttons being relocated to the end of the buckle for ease of use.

Or the fact the LeSabre surpasses the government's dynamic side-impact standards. Dual air bags, anti-lock brakes, air conditioning, power windows, rear-window defogger and the PASS-Key II anti-theft system are all standard equipment on the LeSabre as well.

Like most vehicles, the LeSabre has engine coolant and platinum-tipped spark plugs that don't need changing until you hit 100,000 miles. And the transmission fluid doesn't require changing — under normal operating conditions.

OBD II — the new on-board diagnostic system — is on the new LeSabre. OBD II can reduce exhaust emissions by locating malfunctions before they cause emissions to rise. Don't ignore the "service" light — higher emissions temps can cause you to lose your catalytic converter prematurely.

An option on the LeSabre Custom, but standard on the Limited, is Personal Choice. Activated by the remote keyless entry fob, Personal Choice allows two drivers, with separate fobs, to "set" the car to their preference. You can set memory door locks, delayed locking security feedback and perimeter lighting.

Other features on the LeSabre include delayed entry and exit lighting, theater dimming interior lights, battery rundown protection, lockout protection on power door locks and warning chimes when you leave the parking brake on.

Those annoying warning chimes are also activated when you leave the turn signal or headlamps on and for leaving the keys in the ignition when leaving the car.

Buick's added a new exterior color this year: A really pretty Teal. The LeSabre is no longer offered in black, however. It wasn't a popular color.

The LeSabre isn't fancy, it isn't stunning, it isn't even sporty. But it's a practical car that screams comfort and luxury. Maybe that's why it's been

the best-selling full-size sedan for several years.

1997 Buick LeSabre
Vehicle class: Full-size sedan.
Engine: 3800 Series II SFI V6.
Mileage: 19 city / 30 highway.
Where built: Flint, Mich.
Price: About \$26,000.

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures. Write her online with car questions and stories about your favorite car at AVANTI1054@aol.com.

How To Communicate For Better Auto Service

(NAPS) — As fall arrives, many motorists will be behaving their vehicles serviced before colder weather sets in. Here are some tips from the nonprofit National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) on communicating effectively with repair shops.

Do your homework before taking your vehicle in for repairs or service:

- Read the owner's manual to learn about the vehicle's systems and components.

- Follow the recommended service schedules; keep a log of all repairs and service.

- Use all of your senses to inspect your car for:

- Unusual sounds, odors, drips, leaks, smoke, warning lights, gauge readings and worn tires, belts and hoses.

- Changes in acceleration, engine performance, gas mileage and fluid levels.

- Problems in handling, braking, steering and vibrations.

Note when the problem occurs:

- When did the problem first start? Is it constant or periodic?

When the vehicle is cold or after the engine has warmed up?

- At all speeds? Under acceleration? During braking? When shifting?

Once you are at the repair establishment:

- Be prepared to describe the symptoms, but do not suggest a specific course of repair.

- Do not be embarrassed to ask questions.

- Don't expect an on-the-spot diagnosis, but ask to be apprised of the problem, course of action and costs before work begins.

Be sure you understand policies regarding diagnostic fees, labor rates, return of old parts, guarantees, etc.

A note about ASE: The mission of the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence is to improve the quality of automotive service and repair through the voluntary testing and certification of automotive technicians. Certified technicians wear ASE shoulder insignia. Their employers often display the ASE sign.

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