Auto X GN

– Eric Fisher
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What's black, named after a oval track racing series, yet is more of a legend in 1/4 mile drag racing? The Buick Grand National of course! Well, now you can add "autocrossing standout" to those accomplishments. Let me tell you about my '86 GN.

First, my latest accomplishments: I have the first Buick and the only GM G-body to ever compete in a national Solo 2 championship event. In 1997 I competed in the street prepared class at Topeka, Kansas. Due to mechanical problems, I did not place very well in the final standings although I feel my car would have finished in the top 50%. More recently I became the 1998 points champion for the Nebraska Region SCCA in its street tire class. Now, the last thing you think of when you see a T-R is autocrossing. That's the number one reason I race mine. The satisfaction of beating Z-28's and Mustangs on their home turf is sweet to experience.

Since I've been preparing G-bodies for auto-X since 1978, some of my modifications are more easily done with parts made specifically for this task, although my originals are still cheaper. Besides, hot rodding is just starting to catch on in the auto crossing world. The majority of my suspension modifications are from the 3rd generation F-body, as these cars share a lot of components with the G-body. Some are not legal for the class, but you're not cheating until you get caught. Someday I will move up to 17" wheels, but if you can keep your unsprung weight to a minimum, the TR is a lot easier to drive with 15" wheels. Future modifications include a computer designed suspension with more lightweight parts, bigger 17" wheels and more powerful engine mods.

Specifications ...

1986 Buick Grand National
Solo 2 Class: "E" Street Prepared
Best E.T.: 11.80/115.11 mph, '97 GS Nationals
Weight: 3550 pounds
Engine: Stock with TA 49 Turbo
Blue Top Injectors
ATR 3" Race Exhaust
BGC 3" Downpipe
Armstrong 108 Chip
ATR Ram Air
Transmission: Stock with stock converter, shift kit, manual TCC lockup.
Rear Axle: 72 Buick Skylark 8.5" w/3.42 posi
Brakes: Front Stock 10.5" discs with "Gator" pads. Rear 11" Drum with "H.D. "Taxi" Shoes, adjustable proportioning valve.
Suspension: Front Camaro 1LE springs
2 coils cut
PST graphite bushings
36mm Camaro 1LE sway bar
Guldstand adjustable links
HAL aluminum shocks
Suspension: Rear Camaro 1LE springs
1-1/2 coils cut
HPM rear control arms
HAL aluminum shocks
Stock sway bar - no air bags
Wheels: Front 15x8 widened stock with 4" backspace rear 15x10 widened stock with 6-1/4" backspace

Tires (Street Class): Front Bridgestone RE71 245/50R15
Rear Yokohama AVS 285/40R15
Body: Stock with factory aluminum bumpers
1980 Century aluminum radiator support
92 Camaro plastic/aluminum radiator
B&M oil cooler
Dynabat Battery
Interior: Stock except console removed; column shifter added.
Stock bucket seats and seat belts, Fiero seat adjusters
Replacement carpet with insulation removed
Q-Pads and all unnecessary weight removed

With as much weight as possible removed from the front end and from the total weight of the car, oversteer is predictable and this is the key to getting the T-R to hustle around the cones with street compound tires. Lowered suspension with lower seat position move the roll centers and center of gravity to make the car as neutral as possible.

Always Start With The Little Things!

1973 GS 455: Cheap E.T.!

– Warren Rund

In the late '80's and early '90's I used to support my racing habit by "super tuning" cars, mostly GM's. I had already spent 5 years tuning my cars as well as those owned by some close friends of mine. Our cars were mostly stock, but could usually beat other mildly modified cars, some with bigger engines. On almost every stock original car, I could get it to run from 4 to 7 tenths quicker for just a few bucks, while still being considered "stock."

Unfortunately, the two closest drag strips (Portland/Woodburn) weren't too racer friendly. We got tired of all the headaches so all of us gave up drag racing. We would go racing again, but there just isn't a good track to go to.

My own street/strip cars were usually '70-'72 Buick GS's. Some were 350's, some were 455's and Stage 1's. My favorite all around race car was a '73 GS 455 that was all original. I paid $1,000 for it. It had 130,000 miles on the rebuilt motor, but it ran good.

As I bought it, it ran inconsistent 16.20's - 16.40's, with some traction problems and a transmission that slipped at every shift. I kept a log book on every car and this is what I had written for this car back in 1989:

1. Bought used posi and 3.73 gears; 15.61-15.97 still inconsistent, trans slips badly, 3.73's pull better - cost $150.
2. New plugs, plug wires, points/cap/rotor, 40,000 volt coil; 15.54-15.68 trans still slipping badly - cost $68 on sale.
3. Transmission rebuilt, RV shift kit; 14.79-14.82 pretty consistent finally, trans shifts great at 4,600 rpm - cost $168 rebuilt cheaply by friend and I, we used the old converter.
4. Bumped timing from 6° to 12° advanced, recurved advance to be all in by 2,200 rpm, 34° total, plugged distributor vacuum; 14.52-14.55 definitely stronger off the line - cost $0, already had parts.
5. Removed choke from Q-jet, jetted up from 73's to 74's, air valve loosened 1/8 turn; 14.35-14.37 - cost $0, already had parts.
6. Loosened air valve an additional 1/16 turn; 14.33-14.37 (don't loosen anymore) - cost $0.
7. Removed a/c and front bumper (very heavy); 14.20-14.27 made next pass too quickly, motor was really hot (210°) - cost $0.
8. Modified trans governor for 5,000 rpm shifts; 14.09-14.14. 14.09 was with water temp. at 140°, motor really likes new shift point - cost $0, already had the penny nails used on the governor.
9. Cooled motor again, loosened both belts; 13.95. Lost water pump belt on 1-2 shift, only 1 pass was made - cost $0, someone gave me a used belt that fit so we could drive home.

Gain: 16.40 - 13.95 (best) -2.45 seconds in 1/4 mile - cost $386.

Notes ...

1. All runs were made with Hoosier street slicks, P275-60's on 15x8 GM steel wheels. Times posted were from 7-9 runs made on each day.
2. Motor was a high mileage '73 with 8.5:1 compression, smog cam and factory dual exhaust.
3. 3 years later and a new 292° cam, headers, and a 10" converter were added. Times improved to a best of 12.47. With good heads and a better intake, this car would have run 12.10's or better on the original short block (now with 145,000 miles on it).
4. I never was concerned about mph at this time, so no mph was ever written down.