

Member Spotlight

Gary Heim

By Monica Ledwon

This month's Gazette features Gary Heim owner of a gorgeous 1936 Buick 4 dr sedan that he practically reconstructed from the ground up. Gary took the car to the recent Back to the Bricks Cruise in Flint, Michigan where it had special reserved parking front and center because it was a Buick.



You know—you gotta start somewhere!

Gary was born in Mexico, Missouri, grew up on a farm that has been owned by his family since the late 1800's and was schooled in the Vandalia area. After high school graduation, he joined the Navy. When finished with his military stint, he returned back to his roots on the land to grow crops of soy beans and corn and maintain a small herd of cattle. Monsanto, Martha White and Quaker have been Gary's customers.

Gary's interest in cars was formed early on as his father opted to open a Buick dealership in Vandalia for a few years in the mid to late fifties. From twelve years old, Gary was around the gearhead scene working on cars. When he was sixteen, his dad hired him as a transporter to bring a new model back to town. Gary was put on a train from Montgomery City to a garage on 18th street in St. Louis to retrieve the vehicle and drive it back to the dealership.

As time went on Gary retired from farming in 1999 to relax. Then, in 2010, he started to collect project cars and possessed the skills to rebuild and restore them beginning with a 1949 Chevy two-ton truck. He went on to complete work on a 1952 MG, 1941 Chevy half

ton pickup, 1931 Chevy cabriolet with rumble seat and then the magnificent '36 Buick sedan.

Seeing an ad in Hemmings in 2016 that had no picture but listed a price of \$5000 with thousands more worth of parts to be included in the sale, Gary was intrigued. It was a three-hour drive to Davenport, Iowa to first look at this Buick. Finding it had mouse smells, and was stopped mid-restoration by the owner with the body left setting literally in pieces for eleven years, Gary passed. But upon returning home, he was struck with “buyer’s remorse” shortly thereafter. He headed back with trailer in tow and drove another three hours to seal the deal. Gary says he paid \$5000 for the car but trailered home \$10,000 worth of parts, which were nicely organized, packed and labeled. As he has a complete repair shop in one of the barns for making repairs on farm equipment, Gary set to work with steadfast patience. A new engine was first on the list, so an ad for purchase was placed on Craig’s List and in the Buick Bugle for a 233c.i. straight 8 engine. The ad was answered by none other than club member Al Tornabeni who wanted to change out his 36’s straight 8 engine for a Nailhead. Gary then bought and sent Al’s engine to Kansas City to be overhauled to original condition with crankshaft, rods and babbitt main bearings fit to perfection. He expertly put the car back together in eight months, refurbishing the undercarriage, frame and body and installing a Hampton Coach interior kit. His wife, Janet, prodded him along and referred to this project as a “Big Boy’s Lego Kit”!



Gary retired from the labor intense chores of the family farm some twenty years ago and leases the land now for crop production. His hobbies include volunteering at church activities and attending Masonic Lodge gatherings. He and Janet have two children, Lynette and Luke, who both work in professional fields. Five grandchildren also expand the Heim clan.

In 2017, Gary ventured out to show his beautiful black Buick at the club's annual Shriner's Show. There, Pete and Ted put the pressure on him to join our Gateway Chapter. Though Gary lives 90 miles northwest down I70 from STL in Middleton, Missouri, he plans on getting together with us and helping out with 2020 Regional. We are so lucky to have him!

