

Shifting Gears

Regal Roding by Buick

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By Roger Witherspoon

The weather forecast called for 60 mile per hour wind gusts, and eight inches of rain. Unfortunately, that really didn't explain the condition on the ground, on single lane roadways meandering through Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountain region. It seemed as if the sky had simply opened, dumping its liquid contents on the region in a continuous, eye-blurring splash. The picturesque brooks serenely coursing around the expanse of the Poconos Raceway had turned into ugly, 20-foot wide expanses of white water rapids that left their little banks and took over the track.

And the roadways out of the region were no better. Wetlands by the roadway became lakes, spilling little rivers and racing streams across roads and turning any dip in the roadway into an instant pond. The road itself was covered with a sheet of fast moving water. These were the kinds of conditions that made one wish for a Hummer, Land Rover or some other heavy duty off road vehicle.



But this was a day for luxury roading and I was cruising along in a new Buick Regal.

Mary Mary was embedded in the entertainment system's 10-gigabyte hard drive, belting "Get Up" from the sedan's nine Harmon-Kardon speakers – a tune which seemed appropriate as the Regal pounded through puddles and parted streams, sending mini-mountains of spray in all directions. At times, it seems as if the sharply sloping hood of the Buick was diving into a pool, as it plunged into a deep, road crossing stream and the spray rolled up the front and over the windshield.

At this point, there was a nod of thanks to the GM engineers who developed a computer-coordinated stability and traction control system so the Regal always moved in a straight line, whether or not individual wheels were on the road or in the sea. It is not the most powerful of sedans: the Regal has a 2.4 liter, I-4 engine cranking out just 182 horsepower. And while the EPA says the small engine can get up to 29 miles per gallon in highway driving, in the real world it drank regular gas at a modest rate of 22 MPG.

But this is a relatively light sedan, designed to counter the popular, aggressive, Acura TSX and Volvo S-60, so the small engine is not problematic. For those who want a little more Zoom from their cars, the Regal does offer twin turbos for the engine, which boosts its horsepower to 220. Still, this was never intended to be a racing car, or leave tracks in the road from tire-squealing take-offs. It is a mid-sized sedan intended for comfortable cruising and, in that regard, the power plant is quite sufficient.

The rain didn't let up. But after 60 miles of back roads, running water and the occasional lost frog I hit Interstate 80 and it was time to switch from the driving gospel of Mary Mary to a mellower sound of Miles. It continued to rain, but after slogging through the mountain roads, the six lane interstate was a welcome treat.



Outwardly, the Buick Regal CXL is a teardrop-shaped, wide bodied, smooth-rolling vehicle whose most distinctive feature is the trademark, big, grinning grill. It's attractive, though not a head-turner. A lot more care went into designing the interior, which is characterized by a décor that is two-toned leather accented by wood paneling, with front seats that are wide, power adjustable, and heated.

There is an entertainment system, which is controlled by voice command, fingertip wheels on the leather steering wheel, or from the dashboard console. The system has a single disc CD player, XM satellite radio, a USB port and iPod and MP3 connections. The hard drive allows you to copy an entire CD or individual songs from the disc and arrange your music box any way you choose. The satellite radio also is coordinated with the navigation system, providing real time traffic and weather warnings and, where possible,

allowing you to change your route to detour around the problem. In this case, the storm blanketed the East coast, and there was nothing to do but plow through it and trust the 19-inch wheels to hold the road.

The rear seats don't recline, but there is enough room between the front and back for the average 6-footer to travel long distances comfortably. At night, soft lighting emanates around the dash and in the cup holders and door pockets, making it unnecessary to fumble around for items.

BM, which has made quite a comeback from its recent bankruptcy, is counting on the understated Buick Regal to make a mark against its flashier rivals. Considering all that is offered in this \$31,000 package, it may give the big boys a run for their money.



2011 Buick Regal CXL Sedan

MSRP:

\$31,030

EPA Mileage:

18 MPG City

29 MPG Highway

As Tested Mileage:

22.4 MPG Mixed

Performance / Safety:

2.4-Liter I-4, DOHC, cast aluminum engine producing 182 horsepower and 172 pound/feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission; stability and traction controls; daytime running lamps; 4-wheel disc brakes; fog lamps; Halogen headlamps; 19-inch painted alloy wheels; front & side impact front and driver airbags; head curtain front & rear airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/XM satellite radio; OnStar communication; Bluetooth; 9-speaker Harmon-Kardon sound system; navigation system; CD and MP3 player; iPod and USB port with 10-GB hard drive; power sunroof; tilt & telescoping leather steering wheel with fingertip audio, phone, and cruise controls; 120-volt power outlet; heated front leather seats; power adjusted driver seat.

