

BUICK CHROME ROAD WHEELS...

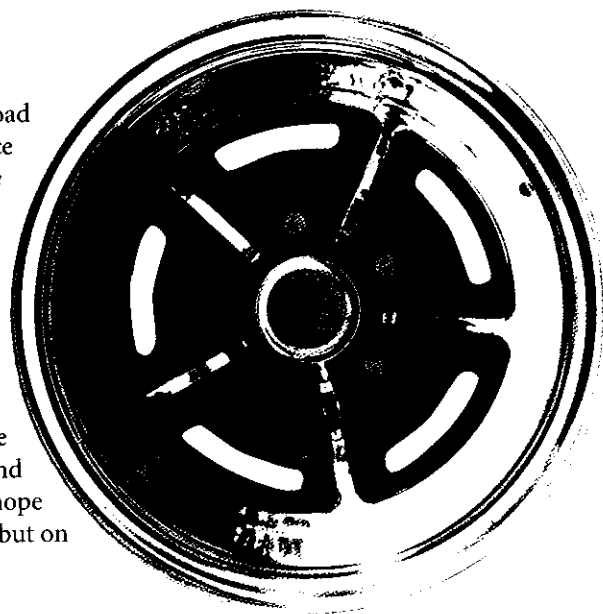
1964 THROUGH 1987 (RWD)

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PREFACE

In 1994 I started to look for a replacement set of Buick Chrome Road Wheels for my 1966 Wildcat GS. In response to my inquiry Brian Laurance BCA# 5168 sent me a copy of Mr. Leonard Scott's article "*Chrome Wheel Identification*" and John Gulbransen's "*Road Wheel Tips*" as printed in "*The Review*." In 1998 I was able to get a copy of R. Sean Keegan's expanded article and "'64-'73 lug nut" also as printed in "*The Review*." Mr. Scott's article was most helpful in clearing up the disc brake change (1967) and the difference in the height of the cone for mounting the center caps (1971). Mr. Keegan's article was also most helpful in deciphering the date codes.

In this article I have consolidated the above information, made additions and minor corrections, presented quick reference tables, and expanded into the other configurations of Buick Chrome Road Wheels. I hope that this does not turn out to be a case of "I am just as confused as before but on a different level."



INTRODUCTION

In the late '40s and early '50s, dressing up your car's wheels was not complicated. Ford Model A's ended up with 16-inch and then 15-inch wheels, disc type or wire type, and cars like Buicks were updated from 16-inch to 15-inch wheels, often with full stainless steel wheel covers. The rims were usually painted red, which offered a pleasing contrast to the black/whitewall tires and the shiny wheel covers. For my 1941 Buick Super convertible I chose to run 16-inch wheels with the outer rim painted red, the rest of the rim painted Nightshade Blue (body color) and stainless steel "beauty rings" and "baby moons." If you were the fortunate owner of a late '40s or early '50s Cadillac, you had better have your chrome wheel covers well secured or they would end up on some hopped-up Chevy, Ford, or Mercury. In 1953 several automobile manufacturers (influenced in part by the influx of foreign sports cars) ordered up the manufacture of chrome-plated wire wheels for use on their special models such as "Skylark," "Caribbean," and "New Yorker."

Many race cars of that time also used wire wheels but strange looking disc wheels made from lightweight aluminum/magnesium alloys were starting to replace them. These wheels were often referred to as "Mags" and offered winning result. (The lighter the weight of a rotating mass the faster it can be accelerated. Remember shaving down or using lightweight flywheels on drag racers) So the "Mag"

look went from "Indy" to the "dragstrip" to the "custom car show" and then to the "kid" that just wanted something a little different.

By the mid-1960s the custom wheel business was booming. Some wheels were very good but some were downright dangerous. This trend was noted by the car manufactures, and they had their wheel suppliers design and make a large variety of optional wheels for sale on their new cars.

John Ethridge, Technical Editor, *Motor Trend*, in the April 1965 issue wrote the following: Motor Wheel Corporation's answer to the needs of the Buick owners is the cleverly designed two-piece steel wheel. The two stampings are joined by a continuous circumferential weld... The wheel is chrome plated and the webs (bolt pockets) are painted. Stamping requires a very high quality deep-drawing steel. Ordinary steel just won't do the job. The wheel weighs only 21 pounds, unusually light for a steel wheel.

For the 1964 through 1987 model years Buick offered optional Chrome Road Wheels for full-sized and intermediate cars. For some years they also offered them for compacts. The full sized cars used a 5 bolt on 5-inch bolt circle pattern and the intermediates used a 5 bolt on 4-3/4 inch bolt circle pattern. (For some years the LeSabre and Electra used both patterns.)



The five spoke Buick Chrome Road Wheels made their debut on this four-place 1963 "Wildcat 445" show car. Mr Dave Holls, Buick Chief stylist is quoted in *Collectible Automobile*, June 1998: "We had the first stamped steel sport wheels on those 1964 Buick Wildcats. they were manufactured by Motor Wheel, ...They were designed in conjunction with the manufacturer right in the (design) studio...They were chrome plated but other than that, they didn't cost any more than any other steel wheel."

PART ONE

This part will cover the 15-inch Buick Chrome Road Wheels, 5 bolt on 5-inch bolt circle as used on the full-sized cars. These wheels are constructed as shown in the *Motor Trend* picture of two pieces, a rear rim piece and a front rim/hub piece. These are often called "the one piece wheel," which they are, after they are welded together.

Designs: The 1st through the 5th designs are 15" X 6"; the 6th design is 15" X 7".

The 1st design was offered only on the 1964 Wildcat (series 6000); this design was unique to 1964. It can be used on the other full-sized Buicks, LeSabre, Electra and Riviera for 1964 and earlier years that have 3-1/2 inch wheel hub diameters. This design has a 2-inch center cap hole. Rim code Unistyle, application code not shown.

The 2nd design was offered only on the 1965 Wildcat and Riviera (series 9000); this design was unique to 1965. It can be used on the other full-sized Buicks for 1965. It can also be used for earlier years if the register ring and spot welds are removed. This design is the same as the 1st but a register ring was spot welded into the hub because of the wheel hub diameter change in 1965 from 3-1/2 inches to 2-3/4 inches. This wheel has a 2-inch center cap mounting hole. This wheel can also be used on the full-sized cars without disc brakes 1966–1970. Rim code Unistyle, web code and application code not shown.

The 3rd design was offered only on the 1966–1967 Wildcat and Riviera without disc brakes. It can be used on the same cars as the 1965 wheel. This design is the same as the 2nd but has a 2-1/8 inch center cap hole. Rim code 802, application not shown

The 4th design was offered only on the 1967–1970 Wildcat and Riviera and the 1970 LeSabre (series 5000). It can be used on the same cars as the 1965 wheel and the 1967–1970 full-sized cars with disc brakes. This design was a redo of the rim and rim/hub configuration to allow space for the disc brakes. It retained the use of the 2-3/4 inch register ring and the 2-1/8 inch center cap hole. Rim code 853. In 1970 an application code started to appear after the date code on the rim flange (WD).

The 5th design was offered on the 1971–1973 Centurion (B), 1971–1978 Riviera (E&B), 1971–1985 LeSabre (B), 1973–1984 Electra (C&D). These wheels can be used on the full-sized cars rear wheel drive 1971–1987 except the 4-3/4 inch B.C. LeSabres and Electras. With properly engineered and machined adapters they may be used on others. This design is a general redesign changing the wheel hub diameter to 3 inches (no register ring) reverting back to the 2-inch center cap hole, changing the tire bead type from "L" to "JJ" and changing the back-space from 3-3/8 inches to 3-7/8 inches. Rim code 895, rim/hub code 865, application codes WK, VT

The 6th design was offered on the rear wheel drive (B), LeSabre and (C)&(D) Electra 1980–1987. These are 15 inch x 7 inch, 5 bolt on 5 inch B.C. They are of the same basic construction as the 5th design but 1 inch wider and with a 4-1/4 inch backspace. Rim code 011. These may be used on the 1971–1987 full-sized rear wheel drive cars if tire to fender clearances are adequate. Application code VC. (For you fat-tire freaks this may be an answer to using 235 and wider tires.)

Identification

Often a quick means of identification may be needed without scrubbing the dirt or rust off of the wheel. Use the following progressive checks: Check for 5 inch bolt circle. An X stamped next to the center cap hole is a 3rd design (1966–67, 15X 6 inch). Measure across the outer edges of the rim; if 8 inches, the wheel is a 6th design (1982–1987, 15X7 inch). Place the wheel, outer face down, on a flat surface; if the wheel rests on the center cap mounting surface and not on the rim, it is a 5th design (1971–1987, 15X6 inch). If the wheel rests on the rim and does not have a register ring, it is a 1st design (1964, 15X6 inch). If the wheel has a register ring and a 2-inch center cap hole it is 2nd design (1965, 15X6 inch). if the wheel has a register ring, a 2-1/8 inch center cap hole, and no X, it is a 4th design (1967–1970, 15X6 inch). (Check to see if a register ring has been removed.)

For a more thorough identification, each wheel is identified with a factory stamping giving the wheel size, bead type, rim code, date code, and other marks. This stamping is found on the rear outside of the rim (covered by the tire when a tire is mounted) for the years 1964–1975 and on the inside of the rim for 1970–87. For those who are not satisfied with just having the right design but insist on the correct date of manufacture for their car, this information is shown on each wheel. For 1964–1967 the date codes are on the rim with the other data and on the wheel web mounting surface. It is an alpha-numeric code, i.e., C6 where the numeric is the calendar year and the alpha the month—C6 would be March, 1966. In 1970 the date code started to appear on the outside rear rim flange, i.e., M4/3 5 26 would be 1973, May 26th. M4 identifies the manufacturing plant. By 1977 the date code on the rim flange showed the month, day, and year, i.e., 8 26 77. There is another code that appears on the rim flange that is a Buick application code, i.e. (VZ), 1976 "E" body (Riviera). Some 1970s have 60 or 70 instead of an application code, this for 6 inch or 7 inch width.

Center Caps, Lug Nuts, and Web Colors

There are three basic type center caps used with these wheels: The 1964 C.C. is a flat disc with a silver wildcat head on a black background and mounts in a 2-inch center cap hole. The 1966–1970 C.C. is a ribbed truncated cone with a silver wildcat head or a silver R or a red, white and blue “Tri-shield” on a black background, and mounts in a 2-1/8 inch center cap hole. The 1965 and 1971–1987 C.C. is a thick, chrome-rimmed disc that mounts in a 2-inch c.c. hole. The 1965 has a silver R on a black background or a black wildcat head on a silver background circled by a red ring inscribed with BUICK WILDCAT; the 1971–1987 has a black R or a red, white, and blue “Tri-shield” on a silver background.

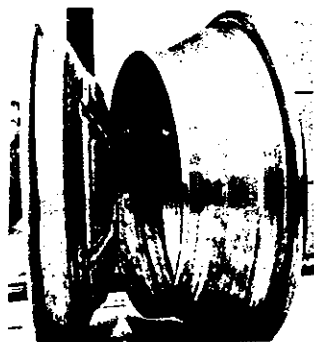
The lug nuts are all 1/2 inch, 20 threads per inch with 13/16 hex heads. From 1964 to 1970 they were solid chrome-plated with domed heads. From 1969 onward they were stainless steel clad and the heads were semi-domed (flattened on the domed).

The 1st design (1964) webs (bolt pockets) were painted satin light metallic silver. The 2nd and 3rd design (1965–1967) webs were painted satin metallic charcoal. From the 4th design (1967) onward they were painted satin black (I have seen semigloss on some 1973 wheels). Red on 1976 Riviera R/S ???

Care and reconditioning

Keep your wheels clean with hot soapy water and rinse and keep the animals away from them.. Store them during the winter if you live in areas where they use chemicals and/or sand on the pavement. To help keep them from rusting use a chrome wheel wax on them. You may want to

put a clear coat on them but remember it is very hard to remove if it deteriorates. Use chrome polish sparingly and only use brasswool pad with soap if necessary to remove rusted spots. (There is only so much chrome on these “honeys” and when it is gone it is about \$200 per wheel to get it replaced.)



2 piece construction
Photo from Motor Trend 4/65

Center Caps



1965 Wildcat



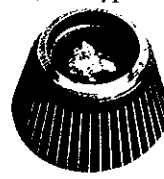
1964 Wildcat



1971-78 Riviera



1970 LeSabre



1966-70 Wildcat



1971- 87 B and C cars

The 1966-67 rim code wheels have an X stamped next to center cap mounting hole

The 1966-67 Rim code wheels used on drum brake cars only. The 1967-70 code 853 wheels used drum or disc brake cars.

The 1964-70 wheels the center cone is lower than the rim edge, 1971-87 is higher. No need to measure just site across the rim.

The Rim codes Unistyle and 802 have 5/8 inch valve stem holes, rim codes 853 and 895 have 7/16 holes.

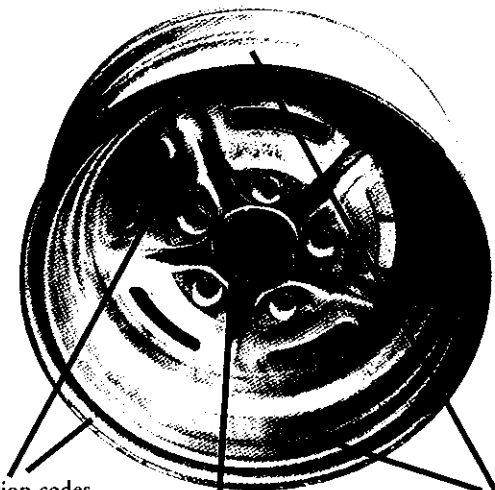
G.M. part numbers will appear in the Appendix, they are not shown on the wheels themselves.

The webs can readily be repainted but they must be clean. Sanding them is near impossible but steelwool can be used. If chipped, bubbled or rusted they should be stripped and primed. You can carefully mask the non-painted areas or cut the bottom out of a 5-gallon paint bucket and use the bottomless bucket to mask off the chromed rim area. Then spray the color on the webs (several light coats, no runs please) and wipe the paint off the spokes. Let it dry and then clean up with lacquer thinner on a rag.

To quiet rattling center caps use silicon caulking. This also reduces the chance of the center cap coming off and getting lost. If you do this, then remove the center caps yourself before the wheels go to the tire shop for repair or tire replacement.

Marketplace

If you are thinking about getting “Buick Chrome Road Wheels” for your vehicle I would not put it off. Used early designs (prior to 1971) are almost impossible to find and the later ones, especially the 15X7 inch, are no longer a “walk into any wrecking yard and there they are” item. Those that are in the yards are mostly “core” quality or junk. I found four 1970 wheels recently in a wrecking yard. One (junk) was not worth buying; of the three that I bought, two were salvageable and the third (“core”) I gave to the guy who bought the two to use on his spare tire. Occasionally you may run into a “gem,” usually a loner. I found a near perfect ’65 one day and another day met a fellow with a couple new old stock ’71 wheels. These went to friends for their Rivieras.



Date and application codes

Typical... M 8 22 WK

2

(1972 August 22nd B, C, E cars)

Register ring: 1965-1970 or Id Stamp

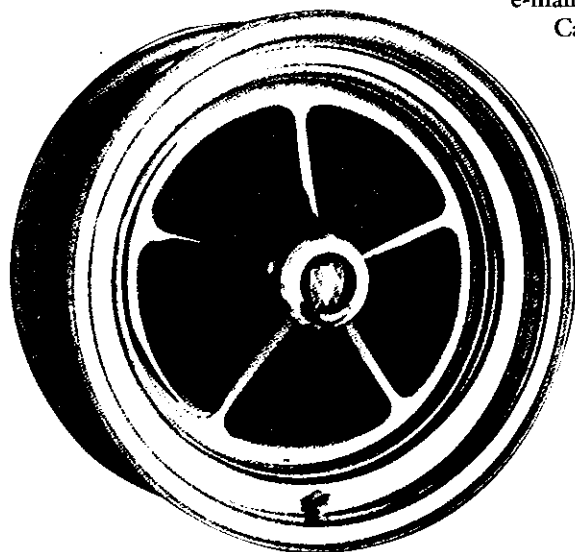
Typical...L 15X6 M4 25

895 5 USA

(Bead type L Rim code 895 1975)

BUICK CHROME ROAD WHEELS... 1964 THROUGH 1987 (RWD) PART TWO

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This part will cover the Buick Chrome Road Wheels, 5 bolts on 4-3/4 inch bolt circle as used on the intermediate cars and some full sized cars. These wheels were manufactured with 14 x 6 inch rims and 15x7 inch rims. Buick also had Motor Wheel Corporation design some 15x8 inch wheels for the 1975-76 "Indy-500" pace cars. These wheels are constructed from two pieces: a continuous rim and a hub. The hub is inserted into the rim and then welded into place. This type of construction makes it easy for the manufacturer to change rim widths and backspaces. These wheels all have 2-3/4 inch wheel hub diameter, 2-1/8 inch center cap mounting holes, and satin black webs (except the 1st design)

DESIGNS

14x6 inch with 5 bolts on 4-3/4 inch bolt circles,

The 1st design was offered on the 1965 and 1966 series 30-4000 cars, Special, Skylark and Skylark GS, and had metallic silver (some owners report metallic charcoal) webs (bolt pockets). 4-1/2 inch backspace. Hub and spoke chrome is mirror finish; later designs the hub and spoke chrome is satin finish.

The 2nd design was the same as the 1st design but had satin black webs. This design was offered on 1966-1967 series 30-4000 cars including GS. Rim code 813, no hub code shown, backspace 4-1/2 inches, bead type JK. Not for use on the 1967 disc brake cars. Hub and spoke chrome is satin finish.

The 3rd design was offered on the 1968-70 series 30-4000 cars, including GS. Not for use on the 1968 disc brake cars. Rim code 810, hub code not shown or 6 with a 0 around it, backspace 4-3/8 inches, bead type JK. This same basic design was also offered in 1968 with the stainless steel trim ring rather than the chromed rim area.

The 4th design was offered on the 1971-72 "A" cars and can be used as replacement wheels on the 1965-1970 cars. Backspace 4-3/8 inches, rim code 810, hub code not shown or 042, bead type JK, application code WJ

The 5th design was offered on the 1973-77 "A" cars and the 1973-79 "X" cars. The "X" cars were the Apollo, Special, Skylark series; the "A" cars were the Century, Regal series. Backspace 4 inches, rim code 914, hub code 042, bead type JJ, application code WO.

The 6th design was offered on the 1978-81 "A" cars and the 1982-87 "G" cars...Note the "G" designation replaced the "A" designation in 1982, i.e., Regal, Century. Backspace 3-1/2 inches, rim code 991, hub code 223, bead type JJ, application codes VN, VF, WX.

15x7 inch with 5 bolts on 4-3/4 inch bolt circle,

The 7th design was offered on the 1970 series 4600 (GS 455, GSX). Rim code 890, hub code not shown or a 6 with a 0 around it, backspace 4-3/8 inches, bead type JJ, application code WG.

The 8th design was offered on the 1971-77 "A" cars, except wagons, 1977-87 R.W.D.; "B" cars (LeSabre) and "C," "D" car (Electra) with the 4-3/4 inch bolt circle hubs. Rim code 903 or 975, hub code 042 or 420, backspace 4-3/8 inches, application code WP, VJ.

Note: these wheels may be used on some other years and models with compatible wheel hubs and backspacing. An option for you wide tire freaks.

IDENTIFICATION AND INTERCHANGE

Measure the maximum rim diameter for 15 inch (16-1/4 inches) or 14 inch wheel (15-1/4 inches), measure the distance across the flanges; the 6 inch width measures almost 7 inches and the 7 inch measures almost 8 inches. Measure the backspace...straight edge across the back of the wheel and measure down to the mounting surfaces on the webs. Check for rim and hub codes and date codes.

If interchanging wheels from other years note the different backspacing and check for tire to body interference and also interference with disc brake parts. Bead types i.e., JK, and JJ, are per the Rim and Tire Association, Inc. standards.

CENTER CAPS, LUG NUTS

The lug nuts are as described in **PART ONE** except they are 7/16 x 20 threads per inch and with 3/4 inch heads.

Center caps (1965-1970) have ribbed chrome bezels. Center caps (1971-1987) have smooth chrome bezels.

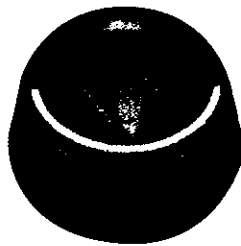
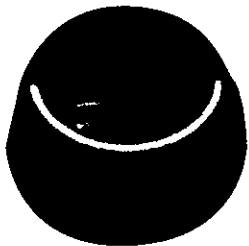
1965 Skylarks center caps have a silver skylark bird on a red background

1966-67, 69 Skylarks have a smaller silver skylark bird with a silver ring around it on a red background.

1965-70 other models have a Tri-shield on a black background (some owners report these on Skylarks).

1971-77 have the Tri-shield with a white or silver background.

1976-87 have the Tri-shield with a black background; check your local Buick parts dealer for availability.



MARKETPLACE

The good news about the 5 bolt on 4-3/4 inch bolt circle Buick Chrome Road Wheels is that remanufactured wheels are available for about \$100 each. Not only are they available in the standard factory sizes but are also available in wider rim width up to 10 inches and custom backspaces.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND REFERENCES

* As shown in the preface. *The Riview*: Vol. 4, No. 6; Vol. 7, No. 5 and 6. *The Review* is the news magazine of the RIVIERA OWNERS ASSOCIATION 303 987 3712. Specialty Wheels Ltd (Rechromed and remanufactured wheels) 503 668 4793. Mitch Romanowski (Center caps) 847 705 5761. Wheel Vintiques 559 251 1620. *Custom Wheels: Are they Really Safe?* John Ethridge *Motor Trend* April 1965. Buick Parts Sheets 5.803 1973-92. Buick Riviera, Chrome Road Wheels, 1963 through 1978, James D. Brothers, *The Riview* Vol. 16, No 1. Buick Chrome Road Wheels 1964-1987 James D. Brothers, *The Buick Shop Rag*, May 2001 and Dec. 2001. Dave Knutsen G.S. Club. Jeff Cornish, Buick Club of America, BCA and ROA members and Buick Dealers.

Continued on page 22

APPENDIX

Table 1 15 inch with 5 bolts on 5 inch bolt circle.

Design	Year	Rim Code	Appl. Code	Wheel Hub Dia.	Register Ring	Center Cap Dia.	Back Space	Disc Brakes	Bead Type	Web Color	Part No. N.S.
15 X 6 inch width											
1st	1964	N.S.	N.S.	3-1/2"	No	2"	3-3/8"	No	L	Light Met. Silver, satin	1364865
2 nd	1965	N.S.	N.S.	2-3/4"	Yes	2"	3-3/8"	No	L	Dark Met. Grey, satin	123377
3 rd	1966-67	802	N.S.	2-3/4"	Yes	2-1/8"	3-3/8"	No	L	Dark Met. Grey, satin	1231960
4 th	1967-70	853	N.S. WD	2-3/4"	Yes	2-1/8"	3-3/8"	Yes	L	Black, satin	1383421
5 th	1971-85	895	WK VZ	3"	No	2"	3-7/8"	Yes	JJ	Black, satin	1236171 25503819

15 X 7 inch width

6 th	1980-87	011	VC	3"	No	2'	4-1/4"	Yes	JJ	Black, satin	1256066
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Table 2 14 inch with 5 bolts on 4-3/4 inch bolt circle.

14 X 6 inch width

1 st	1965-66	N.S.	N.S.	2-3/4"	No	2-1/8"	4-1/2"	No	JK	light Met. Silver, satin	1373793
2 nd	1966-67	813	N.S.	2-3/4"	No	2-1/8"	4-1/2"	No	JK	light Met. Silver, satin	1380798
3 rd	1968-70	810	N.S.	2-3/4"	No	2-1/8"	4-3/8"	No '68 Yes '69-70	JK	Black, satin	1384134
4 th	1971-72	810	WJ	2-3/4	No	2-1/8'	4-3/8"	Yes	JK	Black, satin	1236969
5 th	1973-77	914	WO	2-3/4"	No	2-1/8"	4"	Yes	JJ	Black, satin	1240831
6 th	1978-87	991	WX	2-3/4"	No	2-1/8"	3-1/2"	yes	JJ	Black, satin	25504291

15 X 7 inch width

7 th	1970	890	WG	2-3/4"	No	2-1/8"	4-3/8"	Yes	JJ	Black, satin	1235061
8 th	1971- 87	903 975	WP VJ	2-3/4"	No	2-1/8"	4-3/8"	Yes	JJ	Black, satin	1236968 25504168

N.S. means not shown on the wheel. All Buick Chrome Road Wheels were designed to provide a register with the wheel hub using the web shoulder or a register ring.

Notes for 5 bolt on 5 inch bolt circle wheels: Some owners report semi-gloss black on 1973 wheels. 1966-67 rim code 802 is non disc brakes. 1967-70 rim code 853 is disc brakes. The 1966-67 rim code 802 has an X stamped on the center cap-mounting cone next to the hole. 1964-1967 (rim code 802) have 5/8 inch valve stem holes; others have 7/16 inch holes. 1964-1970 center cap-mounting cone is lower than the rim edge; the 1971-1987 is higher. No need to measure, just sight across the rim.

Notes for 5 bolts on 4-3/4 inch bolt circle: Buick offered a variety of other special wheels for the intermediate cars...Super Sport wheels, Rally wheels, Rally and silver-painted wheels, Turbine wheels, some with stainless steel trim rings, etc. Buick also offered wheel covers that looked like the Chrome Road Wheels (as did Sears Roebuck).

Web paints: Eastwood; Silver/Argent, Charcoal/ Dark Argent, Satin Black

The author has spent considerable time researching the subject of this article. However, the author assumes no responsibility as a result of using this information.