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Hooked on Buick

Late Winter Fly Fishing in the Rendezvous

BY LENORA DANDELKE; PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN J. HULVAT

One wouldn't typically associate a rendezvous with trout fishing. The two are about as different as pink negligees and wading boots. The Buick Rendezvous, however, is not about secret meetings with mysterious, worldly men in pricey trenchcoats on dark and stormy nights; a Versatrak, all-wheel-drive SUV, it's about delivering you to your every assignment—howev-

The responsive V6 engine hummed nicely at more-miles-than-I-will-mention above the speed limit.

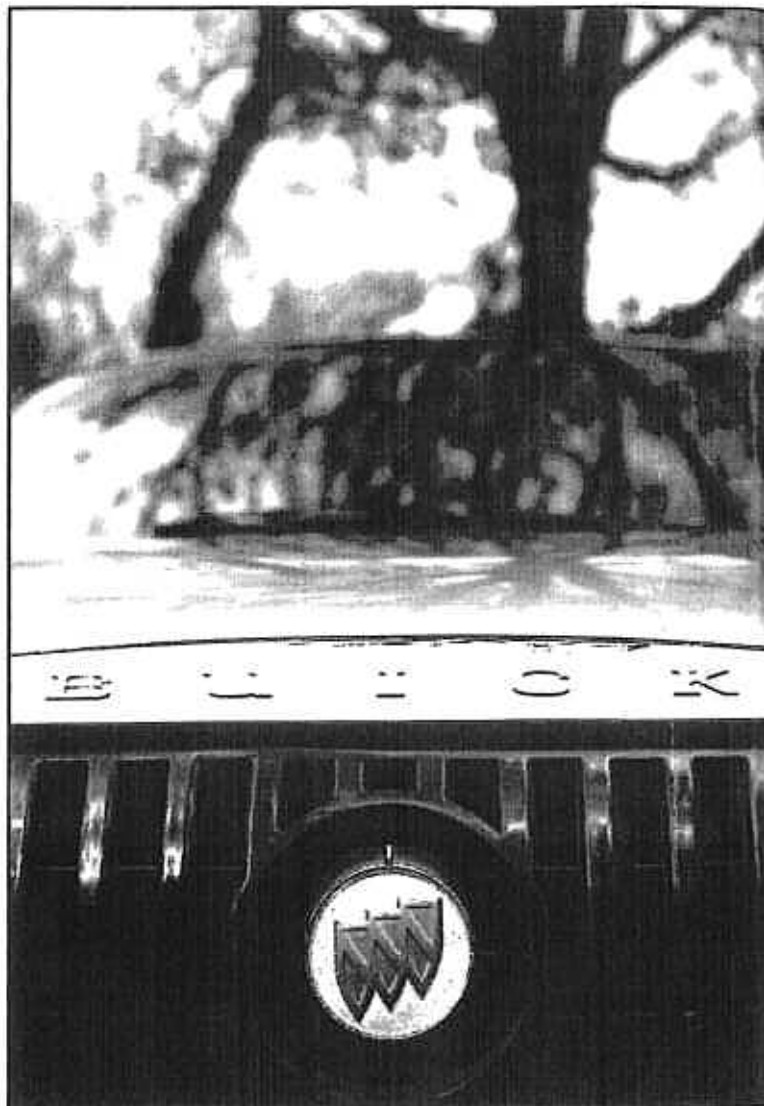
This page: The Buick Rendezvous CXL 2002. Opposite page: Niki, the watchdog at the Little Lehigh Fly Shop on Fish Hatchery Road in Allentown.

er bumpy and slippery the terrain. On the way, however, it will keep you cozy and comfy, and you'll look good when you arrive: The styling is handsome, with stronger lines than most Buicks.

In other words, it's an ideal vehicle for a fly fishing expedition—and maybe even a clandestine one with a tony gentleman. This is, after all, a luxury SUV, competing with the Mercedes-Benz ML 430 and Lexus RX 300 for a share of the rugged elegance market. The fully loaded, top-of-the-line CXL model I tested, at \$35,457, is priced considerably less than its competitors. (And a basic CX version starts at nearly \$10,000 less.)

The first truck-based vehicle made by Buick in almost eighty years, the Rendezvous still offers the comfort and deluxe features you'd expect from a premium vehicle. Among my favorite gizmos were the rear parking aid sensor, a huge help for those challenged by parallel parking or depth perception in general; and the "head-up" information display, which projects speed, turn signals, and low fuel status on the windshield.

The OnStar system offers an arsenal of safety and security services. It can summon twenty-four-hour emergency service, diagnose engine problems, and unlock the doors if you forget your keys inside. This service is faster



than calling AAA, and offers a big advantage over calling your husband—it's delivered sans lecture.

The coolest gadget on the CXL, part of the optional towing package, is the onboard air compressor, hidden in a rear compartment. A twenty-foot air hose enables you to inflate basketballs, beach toys, or even your own tires.

Versatility is integral to this model's design. Seating can be customized with an optional, fold-down, third-row bench. The back seat can be configured with a split-bench seat or a pair of captain's chairs. Footrests provide extra passenger comfort. The two-tone leather seats are scrumptiously soft, and come in more than a dozen color combinations. The rear-seat audio system, with dual earphone jacks, allows kids in the back seat to listen to Britney Spears while

grownups play Bach up front. Cargo capacity is also impressive, measuring 108 cubic feet, without second or third-row seats.

The low door makes it relatively easy to climb into the Rendezvous, compared to other SUVs. On the day I had the privilege of test-driving it, I slipped behind the leather-wrapped wheel and stowed my laptop computer and my purse in the commodious console. Tapping the on-wheel sound controls with my thumb, I switched from the stackable six-CD system to the radio. With "Born to Be Wild" blasting through the superb, eight-speaker sound system, I slid back the power sunroof and roared off in search of adventure.

Handling the Rendezvous on the highway was a delight. The responsive V6 engine hummed nicely at more-miles-than-I will-mention above the speed limit, and it felt willing to push for more. I thought a heavily corrugated country road would be a better challenge to the suspension system, so I turned off in search of woodsy back lanes. The ride remained unbelievably smooth, regardless of how well-textured the road surface.

A sign for Fish Hatchery Road decided my destination. Although it had been years since I last skewered a worm on a hook, trout fishing seemed an appropriate goal. Figuring I could use a little help, not to mention equipment, I pulled into the parking lot of the Little Lehigh Fly Shop.

The tiny building, a former nineteenth-century springhouse, contains a vast collection of fly fishing accoutrement. The business is

located on the banks of a limestone creek that boasts the largest population of wild trout in Pennsylvania.

The owner, Rod Rohrbach, offers both private and group lessons in fly fishing, and was amenable to helping a rank amateur select her gear. As Rod—a former commercial banker who opened the shop in 1993—elucidated the intricacies of fly fishing, it occurred to me that certain people seem to fulfill a destiny in their given names. It made me wish for a moment that my mother-in-law had named my husband "Rich."

Wild trout, Rohrbach explains, are bigger, stronger, healthier, and smarter than stock-bred varieties. "It's the difference between a tiger and a house cat," he says. The native fish was sounding delicious. Recipes for pecan-encrusted trout, accompanied by crisp hush puppies and wilted mustard greens, began to play through my mind.

My lovely meal fantasy evaporated, however, when Rohrbach informed me that all the fish caught in this stretch of aquatic preserve had to be returned to the water.

"Even if it's not a trout?" I inquired. I'm an adaptable cook, and blackened catfish could have become an equally delightful dinner.

"Everything has to go back," he replied.

I'm sure it sounded a bit whiny when I asked why anyone would bother to catch fish they couldn't keep. Or eat. "For the sport," was Rohrbach's reply. Tricking the wily native trout into thinking an "Al's Rat," the recommended regional fly, is a genuine



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midge is apparently reward enough to the fly fishers from around the world who visit the Little Lehigh every year.

And in this game, Rohrbach assured me, beginner's luck did not apply. He was right. I caught nothing. But standing on the riverbank, learning to cast the line quietly and gently, was a gratifying, almost Zen-like experience. "Women fly fishers are the fastest growing sector of the fishing population," Rohrbach said. "This is a safe place for women to go, and there are several women's fly fishing groups. I met my wife right here, when she was fishing."

Wanting to grasp the fly fishing mentality while it was fresh in my mind, I made it my next mission to rent *A River Runs Through It*. It would be the perfect movie to watch this evening—after my husband took me out for dinner, that is. With the Rendezvous' fuel economy of 18 miles per gallon in town and 24 on the highway—relatively good for an SUV—I didn't care how far we had to drive. We were going to find a restaurant with trout on the menu. **LVM**

Lenora Dannelke is a freelance writer who feels she is unbelievably lucky to test-drive cool cars for hire.

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