

# My GTOs

By Brian Ray



My dad was really into antique cars, and I remember the 1919 Model-T, which was sold for the '27 Nash (one of my favorites), which was sold for the '34 Rolls Royce (in poor shape, but very cool), then we added a '49 Caddy for a short time, which was promptly sold to buy the '61 Rolls Royce (not an antique in 1970). But his daily driver was always a Pontiac. The first one that I remember was a '59 Catalina, but the one that I learned to spell PONTIAC in was a

Nightwatch Blue '65 Catalina 4-door. What does this have to do with GTOs? Well, several years later my friends and I were riding our bikes and talking about cars – they were always commenting on how great Chevys were but even then I was leaning towards Pontiacs. Suddenly, two ragged out cars decided to go at it from a stop sign...





a '67 or '68 Camaro and a '68 or '69 GTO (it was nearly 40 years ago and I couldn't tell at that time). Well the two were even for the first few feet, belching out smoke and engines roaring, but the GTO began to pull ahead commandingly, and my friends couldn't believe it...but I could, and from then on I was hooked.

My first car was a '72 LeMans Sport 400. That car was sporty, but slow. Not as slow as my friends Camaros, but not a GTO. After college, I was commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the

AF, and about a year later, I bought a worn out 68 GTO, not unlike the one in that race, except this one wouldn't have won. But it was a GTO, and over time and a couple of moves, it became fairly nice and relatively fast. It was during this time that Mary Ann and I met and were married in Dayton, OH, so I broke her in right, pulling an engine in our apartment parking lot in Del Rio, TX a year after we were married. We moved to Tucson, AZ and joined the Arizona Chapter of POCI in '88, which started our Pontiac friendships that endure through today. The big problem with Tucson though, was that we were only 60 miles from Mexico, and I believe that's where the '68 went one weekend when Mary Ann and I were out of town.

After settling with the insurance company (get your car appraised BEFORE it is stolen) I found almost what I wanted – an Atoll Blue 1970 GTO with a 455 & A/C (very important in AZ in the summer). I wanted a 4-speed and this was an auto, but it was numbers matching and I figured the 455 made up for not having a 4-speed. It wasn't as rough or as slow as the '68 was when I bought it, but it did need paint, then a year later it needed an engine rebuild, then a transmission, then...you get the picture. We drove that car a lot – 800+ miles from Ogden, UT to our first POCI Convention in CA in 1993 with our then 3-month old son. After getting as-



signed to Edwards AFB, CA we had a shorter trip to the 1996 GTOAA Western Regional Convention in Long Beach (when we joined GTOAA), and I drove it down quite a few ¼ miles, including for the Trophy Bracket win in 1996 at the Pontiac Drag Days at LA County Raceway in Palmdale, CA. But, I was always having to fix things and it was never done because it was never done right.



And, while my favorite year was 1970, I had a thing for '65 GTOs. My uncle had one; rebuilt it, then sold it to another uncle...who drove it daily...in Chicago...in the winter. When I bought it, I knew it was rusty, but I really didn't know how bad. It ran fine, but there wasn't a body panel that didn't have major cancer, so I just couldn't waste any real money on it. I sold it less than a year later. But I wasn't done buying rust-belt '65s.

I had seen my next purchase back in the late 1970's, and I remembered that it had 4-wheel disc brakes and a 12-bolt rear - unusual for that time. But it also had a Pontiac 350 2bbl engine (with a 4bbl by then) and a TH400 auto. I really didn't want it that much, though it did have American CP200 rims and it didn't look too bad in the pics...and the price was reasonable. Believe it or not, Mary Ann convinced me to buy it (she won't admit it now, but she did). And while it took 9 years of collecting parts and figuring out that I was not capable of doing it correctly, (nor was a shop I tried here) I finally got the '65 on the road, configured the way I wanted in a color that I love - Sapphire Blue Metallic Pearl, a very close resemblance to Nightwatch Blue. I did have to reluctantly sell the '70 GTO to be able to have it done right, but it was worth it. This '65 GTO was put together in 2003 by Dave Trokey shortly after we moved to O'Fallon, IL. We have taken it to many shows and even a few races. It knocked down 23 mpg while caravanning back from the 2004 GTOAA Nats (it has a Richmond 6-speed), it won the classic division autocross at our 2005 GTOAA Convention, it blew the cam at the 2006 GTOAA Convention (no zinc in new oil), and it beat Tom twice at the 2007 POCI Convention

in Tulsa (not faster, just better traction <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVUwcdLuMH8&feature=q-upl&context=G2689fcdAUAAAAAAAAEAA>), though it also had the beautiful paint spotted by an idiot working at the host hotel. I drove it on a large portion of the '07 Hot Rod Power Tour (HRPT) and the first leg of the HRPT in '08, and I drove it to the POCI/GTOAA Covention in Dayton in 2009, which is around 700 miles each way.

We still have fun with it down here in Arkansas where we moved after my retirement from the AF. And, as you can tell, we are still members of this great club, distant members, but we do try to make it to an event or two every year. We are charter members of and very active in the Arkansas Pontiac Association, a non-affiliated Pontiac club here in central Arkansas, and of course we are still GTOAA and POCI members (17 & 24 years respectively). We have owned a few other Pontiacs through the years, including an '84 Sunbird, an '88 Grand Am SE (Quad 4, 5-speed), a 2000 Grand Prix GTP/GTX, and lately I've been driving a '09 G8 GXP (6-M) as my daily driver. Lastly, we have brain-washed our son Eric thoroughly in his 19 years, so he presently drives a '05 Sunfire (which he raced at the last club drags) and he has a '63 Tempest that is under construction. He wants a '04-'06 GTO as a daily driver, but he'll have to do that on his own nickel after college.

