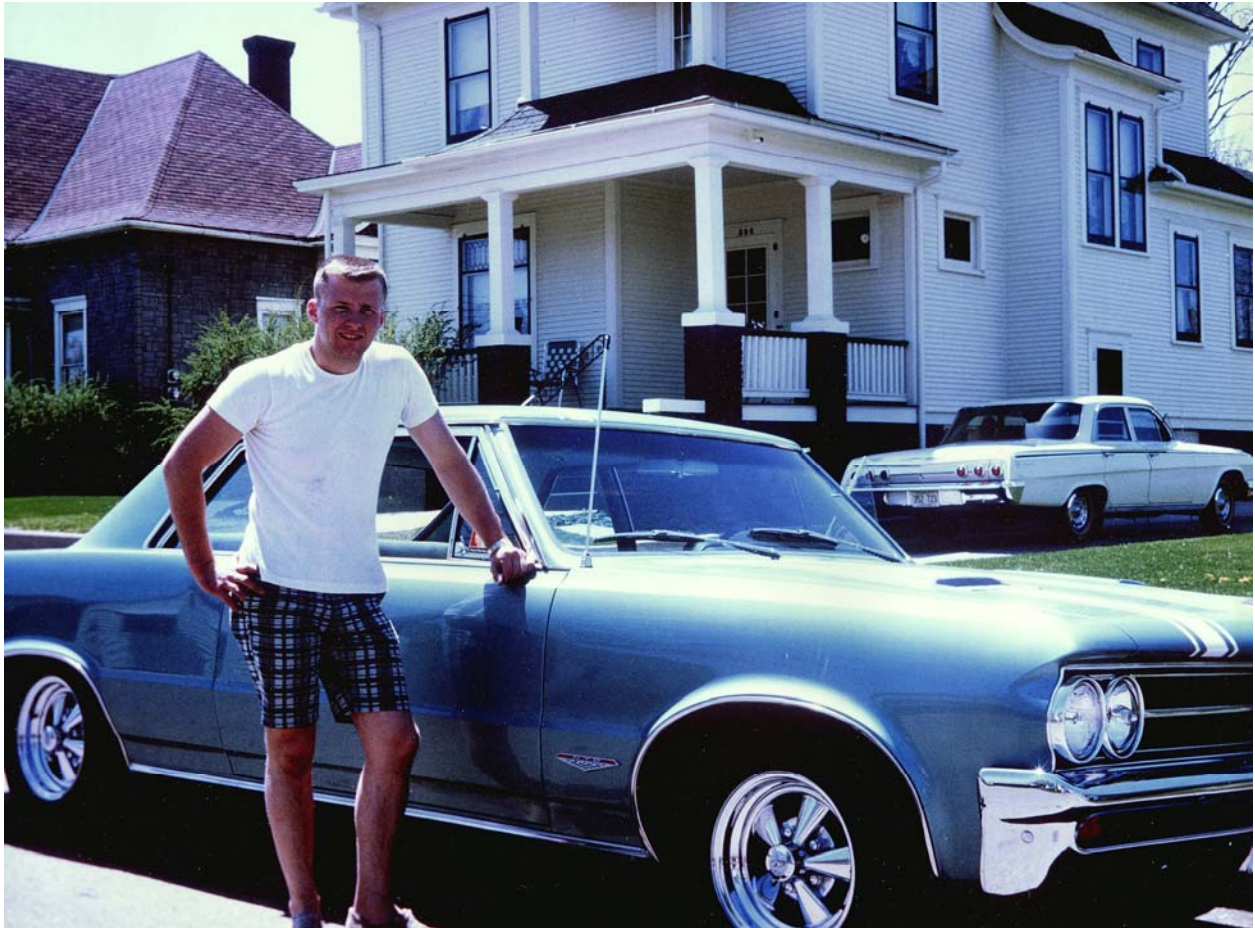


My GTOs

By Will Bowers



I have always loved cars. Even before I could drive, I would read Hot Rod; as well as, other automotive magazines and dream about buying my first car. I grew up in Granite City, IL and cars were a big deal in high school. There was a street adjacent to the front of the school that would park about a dozen cars. Space was at a premium so I had to actually pick up girl friend and arrive at school early if I wanted to get one of these “premo” spots. The advantages were that you could look out the windows in class and daydream about your car and go out at lunch time with your girl friend and listen to the radio or whatever. I also belonged to a car club the “Derbys” where I first got the opportunity to work on cars. The club actually purchased a '32 Ford coupe that we rebuilt and raffled off earning us enough money to by another project a '32 Ford Victoria 2 door sedan with a Chevy V-8.

As it turned out, my first couple of cars were Chevrolets. My first car was a 1948, 2 door, bubble back sedan with a six cylinder motor and stick shift. I saved up my money and purchased it for \$100. To my excitement, when I opened the trunk there was an extra manifold set up for 3 single barrel carbs and dual exhaust. My first project was to install the new found treasure. I fabricated the intake linkage from aluminum stock and dual exhaust using flex pipe.

Cherry Bomb mufflers were added to complete the installation. There was a near disaster when the red plastic fuel lines coming out of the chrome fuel block sprung a leak and created a heck of a fire. Fortunately, it was winter with snow on the ground that functioned as a fire extinguisher. The snow also felt good on my singed hands. I painted the rims red and added spun aluminum racing disks. It was not super fast, but it was very loud. The exhaust would actually rattle the windows in homes. Obviously, this was a big hit with the neighbors.

My second car was a 1959 Impala with a 348 cubic inch motor, 3 two barrels and 3 on the tree. I immediately converted it to a Hurst floor shift with a spring loaded mechanism, for the first to second shift, that made it almost impossible to miss a shift. Off came the big air cleaner and 3 small chrome ones were added, along with pretty classy '61 spinner hub caps, tube grill and some white roll and pleats for the seat inserts. Another project was to swap the differential for a 4:11 open rear end. It was like being in second gear all the time. I was heart-broken when the car got sold after a license suspension for 3 moving violations (speeding).

My dad and the local Pontiac dealer were hunting and fishing buddies, and they worked out a deal where he could trade every year for \$300 for the latest Grand Prix. It started with the 1962 model and continued through 1969. My favorites were the '62 and '69. I later purchased the '69 and drove it for a number of years. I particularly remember the '67 model with its somewhat radical styling. We took delivery several days before being released to the public with the understanding it would not be driven. I don't think they expected the agreement would be honored. It drew a lot of looks in those first few days.

The first Pontiac that I purchased was a pre-owned, '62 Ventura in light blue with Tri-colored interior. It had a 425A, motor with Tri Power, 4 speed, posi, and aluminum wheels. It was a great car and I have always loved that body style.

If it had not been for some bad weather, I may never have purchased my first GTO. I was not considering selling the Ventura until I got caught in a golf ball size hail storm. I took the insurance settlement and traded the Ventura to the Pontiac dealer. On the show room floor were 2, new 1964 GTO's. A black hard top with red interior, 4 barrel, 4 speed and an Aqua GTO Sport Coupe with matching Aqua interior. It had all the right stuff: Tri-Power, 4 speed, tach, 3:90 posi, handling package, splitters, read lines and 3 bar spinners. When in doubt always go for the Tri-Power. It was basically the same set up as the Ventura but much lighter and faster.

Fast forward to 1983, I was again bitten by the muscle car bug, after watching the local paper for some time; I purchased a 1965 GTO for \$800. After some paint and body work, I had Jim Moran build a low compression 455 motor and raced it some over the years turning consistent 13:20's at 105 MPH.

I really liked the '65, but the '64 was always my favorite. In 1986, I spotted a '64 convertible in Hemmings that was advertised as having the original Tri-Power motor, 4 speed, and being an almost rust free Florida Car. After several telephone conversations with the seller, who lived in Chicago, I bought an airplane ticket and headed north. It is funny how things are never quite the way they were described. The car was advertised as being drivable with a newly re-



built Tri-Power. The owner picked me up at the airport and drove me to his home in Park Ridge. During the drive, he mentioned that the car had not actually been running for at least 2 years and that the carbs were not on the car. He said not to worry, as his buddy had rebuilt them and was meeting us at his house.

When I first viewed the car, I have to say it was the ugliest thing I had ever seen!!

It had been painted burgundy and was chalked so bad that it almost looked like red primer. All the trim and bumpers had been removed; however, it was almost rust free and straight. It did have the correct 76 X motor and was a 4 speed. After going over the body with a magnet, his buddy arrived with the “rebuilt carbs”. They were greasy and rusty, but he offered to rebuild them on the spot if we could get some hot water to boil them out. I told the owner to forget about it and take me back to the airport. I hated to say that because under the ugly burgundy paint there were traces of the original Aqua paint, the same color as my original '64. He said if I was really interested in the car, there was a complete Tri-Power on a '64 Catalina he had for sale and he would install the carbs. They appeared to be in fairly good shape, they even had the original tags that were the correct numbers for the GTO, so we then installed them on the Goat. After pouring in some fresh gas, it did not fire. After some further checking, we determined the points were not opening. After adjusting the dwell, it fired, and we took it for a test drive. The battery light was on, and apparently not



charging, so we replaced the voltage regulator which solved the problem. After additional test driving, it actually was not running bad or overheating.

After some serious negotiation, we agreed on a price and the sale was concluded about 9:00 PM. Believe it or not, I drove the car home that night with the bumper and trim stuffed in the trunk and back seat. Amazingly, I arrived home without a problem about 3:30 AM!!

The motor and transmission have since been rebuilt and the correct 3:55 posi was added. The body and paint were redone for the second time in 1996, and when completed, Donna surprised me on my birthday with a beautiful set of restored Hurst wheels!! What a wife!!

As Kermit the frog has noted, It is not easy being Green; however; green has been very good to me. The car has been entered in a number of Popular Vote events at GTOAA, POCI, and others and has won a number of first place trophies. It has been featured in three magazines most recently on the cover of the May 2012 issue of Auto Enthusiast. It is also on the cover of Paul Zazarine's book "Pontiac's Greatest Decade of Performance". In addition, it was photographed and used as the basis for developing the Polar Lights plastic model. The company actually sent me a case of the models after it went in to production.

I really wasn't looking for another car; however, out of habit I was scanning the classic car ad in the Post Dispatch the Saturday before Labor Day in 1989. The car was advertized with a '67 HO, 4 speed with Tri-Power added and Rally I wheels. Needless to say I called the number all afternoon but didn't get an answer until about 4:00 PM. The seller asked if I had called before because his answer machine was not working and he had just gotten home. He did not want to show the car until Saturday; however, he agreed to let me see it since I was going out of town for the holiday weekend. This was great...I would be the first person to see the car! As soon as the garage door went up I wanted the car. After driving it, I knew it was sold. I didn't even try to get him down on price. After giving him a deposit, I returned after the holiday and paid the remaining balance. Over the weekend he had received over 30 calls on the car. Most of the people were offering more than the full asking price. Fortunately, he honored our deal and the car was mine. I later learned that Terry Schott was one of the unlucky callers.

In addition to the options listed in the ad, it had A/C, full tinted glass, power disc brakes, power steering, rally dash, wood wheel, cordova top, 3:73 12 bolt posi, front and rear seat belts and push button radio with a rear speaker. Additional options have been added over the years including; AM/FM, 8 track, defogger, map lights, rare head rests and a reclining passenger bucket seat.

The build date was November 1966. With the rare combination of options, this was obviously a special ordered car. PHS confirmed that it had the original HO motor. All that could be determined from PHS was that it had been delivered to a dealer in Pontiac Northern District. I subsequently had a base coat clear coat applied in the original Gulf Turquoise color. The motor has always performed well and was returned to a 4 barrel with a correct Q-jet carburetor.

In the fall of 1990, my luck continued. While attend a Behlmann Pontiac Display, I met the original owner, Nick Decker. He is a very meticulous individual who had kept all the corre-

spondence with the dealer, the order form, the original window sticker and other associated data. Unfortunately, the warranty book with Protecto Plate had gone with the car when it was sold. He confirmed that it had been special ordered through Hames Pontiac in Eau Claire, WI. Nick had been attending the University of Wisconsin and ordered it just prior to graduation and returning to the St. Louis area. Nick gave me the original documents he had along with several pictures of the car when it was new. We have kept in touch and I invited him to the Easter Show this year to see the see the car. He was actually waiting at the entrance to see the car when we arrived.

This car has always been Donna's favorite. I drove her to the church in it when we got married. (My luck with this car continued once again)



This is really getting long. Guess I have been doing this too long or have had too many cars. I will quickly summarize the remaining Pontiacs. We also have another '67 GTO. It is Montreux Blue, blue interior, standard 400, with His and Hers shifter and A/C. It was purchased from former Gateway GTO members Jerry and Tina Arnold. A couple of years ago I picked up a '64 Catalina, with a 455, Tri-Power, 4 speed and 8 Lug aluminum wheels. It was originally a 389, 2 barrel with three on the tree. The previous owner lost interest after a completing the body work with a nice silver repaint. I replaced the green bench seat interior with black '64 buckets, new head liner, carpet, dyed the door panels, added correct floor shift steering column, painted the dash and added other interior trim. I also added later red line radials and a 3:42 posi. Other cars that have come and gone are 1970 triple black GTO (I should have never sold this one... No Good Deed Goes Unpunished); 1966 LeMans from California, 1966 double red, 4 speed, Hard top; 1965 Lemans Convertible from California; and a 1963 Catalina.

I joined GTOAA in late 1983 and have kept my membership #1153 active ever since. In 1984 there was an ad in the Post Dispatch indicating that a local chapter was being formed and that there was to be a meeting at the Midas Muffler Shop across the street from Crestwood Plaza (where the big stores used to be). I have been an active member in Gateway GTO Association ever since, during the various ups and downs and have participated in the two national events held in St. Louis.

Donna has been very understanding so far as my car addiction is concerned. Although I have tried to convince her that it is actually a diversified 401K, I am not sure she fell for it. I have had stocks that ended up being worth nothing; however, the old cars will always have value. Opening the envelope on a retirement account statement can never compare with polishing a classic car and going out banging some gears.

We have made many great friends over the years both in Gateway and GTOAA. I have to say it may have been the cars that brought us together but it is the lasting friendships that have been the greatest reward.

