

GTO of the Month

By Kerry Friedman



The first new car that my parents ever bought was a 1956 Pontiac Star Chief. My Dad took the bus from University City to work in downtown St. Louis, and saw this car in the Thom's Pontiac showroom on Delmar Blvd. It was a pink and grey car. It later was in the Parade magazine in the Sunday Post, and that ad made it to the wall in our kitchen. I don't remember if our house was pink and grey first, or if we bought the car first.

This large solid steel tank of a car was the first car I ever drove. I "borrowed" it on occasion when my parents were not looking. I was only 14 at the time. The next car they bought was a Beige '64 Lemans with the OHC Sprint 6. It had a powerglide transmission, and as many of you know, they were indestructible. The only way to burn rubber with this car was to rev it up in neutral, and then drop it in gear.

What a clunk, but it still kept going. We then traded in the '56 for a '65 Turquoise Lemans with the Sprint 6. I had a few fender benders with the Leman's and totaled the '64.

My introduction to the GTO was after we got the 2nd Lemans, and with a coupon, I sent away for GTO posters. I remember

having quite a few of them in my room and dreaming that one day, soon, I might own one.



My first car was a '57 Fairlane that I owned for about a month, and I had to get rid of it to go to college. I then bought a '69 Malibu Convertible with a 350, 2BB1, bench seat, and automatic. It was bright red with a black interior and white top. I really liked the car, and I added dual exhaust. I graduated college, got married and started a family. The Malibu was rusting out, so I traded a neighbor for a used Regal. The next car I bought was a 1978 Grand Prix. This was the first or 2nd year of the smaller version.

My ex-wife got custody of this car in the divorce, and I was left driving a Honda Civic. I traded the Civic in for a Prelude in 1981, and I was in style. I then met Debbie, we got married and had Ryan and Andy. At that time Debbie did not drive, and I tried to teach her to drive the 4 speed Prelude, but it wasn't going to be. So we traded it in for a Cutlass Station Wagon, a real family car that she could drive.

With Pontiac still running in my blood, I bought Debbie a new Grand Am, which I almost totaled, then a '97 Malibu SS, and now a 2004 Grand Prix GTP.

Over the years I developed heart problems, and had numerous heart attacks, balloon jobs, and even by-pass surgery. In 2002, 6 years after my surgery, I was going through more treatments, and one day Debbie asked, if I could get a car, what would I get? I don't know if this was a "bucket list" question, or what, but it didn't take long to realize that it would be a GTO.

I started looking on the internet, on eBay, Hemmings, and every other site I could find. There were a lot of them for sale, for a lot more than I wanted to spend.

In my daily job, I travel quite a lot, and even looked for a GTO in different cities. On a trip to Chicago, I made it over to the Volo Museum, in Volo, Illinois. They had a lot of very nice looking GTO's and even some Judge's. After I returned home, I was looking on the Volo website, and found a 1969 2 door hardtop that was for sale there, that I had not seen while I was there. It was more in my price range and looked as though it was in very good

condition. Under the bright showroom lights, and according to the list of repairs done to the car, It appeared that all that was need was some hood alignment and reworking the Endura bumper. So we took it for a test drive, put a down payment on it, and brought it home on a trailer the next Friday.

Well things started falling apart the minute we were unloading it from the trailer. The first thing was the headlights went out.

Needless to say, "If I only knew then, what I know now." I went to a GTO Parts Place, up near Jerseyville, IL, and bought a different bumper, and took my car to a shop in Alton. After spending numerous hours trying to make the new bumper fit, they decided it was worse than the old one, and ended up reworking the original. The finish time took longer than expected, of course. I picked the car up on a Friday, and was supposed to drive a newlywed couple from the wedding to the reception. I worked almost all night long putting the car back together, replacing bolts and nuts and painting each piece as I went. I finished about 1:00 PM Saturday, and the wedding was at 4:00. I cleaned up and took off for a church in the Concord Village area.

When I got to Gravois and Hwy 270, I decided to see what this car could do, since I had not driven this car at all, and I had it for 6 months already. Well, I floored it, it went into passing gear, and white smoke started coming out of everywhere. Oh ____! I nursed the car to the wedding, and while they were taking the photos, I loaded the car on a tow truck.



Getting back to what I thought I had bought; the engine had been rebuilt, floors pans in solid condition, transmission rebuilt, all new front end bushings, new upholstery, and the list goes on and on.

Since buying the car in 2002, I have replaced the upholstery, recovered the dash, rebuilt the engine and transmission, rebuilt the brakes, painted the Rally II wheels, added a hood tachometer, repaired the radio, installed new front end components, and put in a new carburetor.

We bought this car to drive and have fun with. I drove it to Louisville, and Columbus for GTOAA conventions, as well as every club function and show we could make it to when the weather permitted and the car was not in disassembly. Since my Goat was an automatic transmission, I was only getting 10 miles per gallon. I met Harry Timmerman and saw that he had installed an overdrive transmission in his Lemans and was getting very good mileage. Sounded like a great idea, so I bought a "rebuilt 700R4" transmission on eBay, and picked it up in Virginia on one of my business trips. A year later when I had built up the courage to change the transmission,

I took the pan off of the new unit, just to make sure it was rebuilt, and low and behold it was not a 700R4. It was an electronic transmission, and needed a \$1200 controller to make it work. Bad idea!

After talking to club members, I decided to change the 400TH automatic to a new 5 speed manual transmission. This would turn my ride into a real "muscle car."

There were two major repairs still needed for my car; replacing the floor pans, and installing a new radiator support, so that my front end could be bolted to the frame with rubber bushings, instead of it being welded solid. I took my car to Cee-Jay Auto Body, run by Cecil Morton and his brother Jack. Since Cecil was in the club, and always had very nice GTO's and older Pontiacs, I felt that this was better than some of my other, break once and fix three times, bonehead decisions.

I took the car over to his shop, and had my new transmission kit sent there, so they could rework the floor to fit around the new tranny while they replaced the pans. As they progressed, several items came up. What a surprise!

