

My '68 GTO Refresh By Mark Melrose



Since it's 2018, now we are in the "Year of the 8s", 1968 GTOs that is. Since my '68 was the *GTO of the Month* in the March 2011 *Hood Scoop*, I will try not to repeat much from that article except to say that the first GTO I owned was a 1968 hardtop I bought in 1972. Due to dramatically rising musclecar insurance premiums and the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973, I sold the car and replaced it with a more fuel efficient and insurance-friendly Ford Maverick (OK, no snickers please).

Fast-forward 30 years and I bought my current '68 in 2003. The car had been repainted around 1998 and had been treated to an engine rebuild about 5,000 miles before I acquired it. Aside from running great and having a reasonably fresh paint job, the car had issues. I spent the years between 2003 and 2013 addressing most of those issues (see the March 2011 *Hood Scoop* article). But paint chips and scratches were plentiful and I started seeing bubbles in the paint in telltale areas like the lower doors, quarter panels and front fenders. Based on high praise and recommendations from fellow Gateway members, in late 2012 I took the car to the Maserang brothers at Walnut Park Auto Body and asked for their quote for bodywork and a repaint. Their pricing was reasonable and in my ballpark so I got on their waiting list. In February of 2014 I got a call from Scott Maserang saying they were ready to begin work on the car,

If you watch any of the car restoration shows on the History and Velocity channels you know that among the first steps are to disassemble the vehicle and ready it for media blasting. When the paint is blasted off the sheetmetal all the "warts" show up BIGTIME. While the original quote included new reproduction quarter panels, lots of additional "warts" were discovered:



the doors needed rebuilding at the bottoms and the corners as well as new sheetmetal “skins”, the front fenders contained hundreds of rust pin-holes that had been puttied over and painted, there was a 3” diameter hole in the roof near the driver’s A-pillar – also puttied and painted. It





was also discovered that one side of the core support had completely rusted away and there were puttied dents in the hood, front valance and rear decklid. So, new reproduction sheetmetal was sourced to replace the door skins and fenders in addition to the quarter panels. While I sourced most of the parts, this was not an easy restoration since OEM sheetmetal was either not available or priced in the stratosphere and as we went along many other issues became apparent and begged to be addressed – the old “might as well syndrome” (while it’s apart we might as well do this and that).

What started out to be some bodywork and a repaint had morphed into basically a complete frame-on restoration except no drivetrain or suspension work was necessary. How complete? In addition to the bodywork, all the stainless moldings had dents removed and were polished, all the wiring was replaced along with the rear taillights and housings, all the standard incandescent lightbulbs were replaced with LEDs (including all interior lighting), the standard steering column was replaced with a rebuilt tilt column, the heater box was replaced, the dash was refinished with new paint, knobs, repro instrument lenses and bezels. IP work included a new dashpad and replacement of the dash woodgrain with an engine-turned applique and the dash tach replaced with a Rally Clock.

So, how did it turn out? Since the car was repainted the same color (1989 Ford *Currant Red*) before and after photos don’t really tell the story. Suffice it to say I am absolutely thrilled with the results – the car has essentially a brand new body and completely refurbished interior

with many improvements and no more electrical problems. So, while the bottom line was about 2-1/2 times the original estimate, the car is 10+ times better than it was. Best indicator of the improvements is the fact that after showing the car four times at the Pontiac Illinois Regional and picking up a 2nd and 3rd place award this past year I came home with a First in Class trophy. In my view there is no higher praise than that from fellow enthusiasts. Will I get back what I have spent? I think so but don't really care because the work was done by an expert Pontiac shop at reasonable cost with results noticeably superior to the original factory build. I also have the satisfaction of preventing another original era GTO from going to the crusher any time soon. Besides, I don't mind all the thumbs-ups and shout-outs I get while driving this beautiful car.

