

Jeff Homsheer's 1966 GTO

By
Jeff Homsher



From the time that my sister's boyfriend picked her up in a bright red 67 GTO I was hooked. The lines, the 4 speed, the wheels, and the sound all blended together perfectly to create a picture of power and beauty. I also remember how my dad frowned when he would walk along the one end of our circle driveway and view the nice "patch" left by the burnout from their last date. To me that patch was nothing less than cool and I swore I would own a similar GTO one day and leave my mark at the door of a similar young lady.

But the practicality of life has a way of pushing your bucket list to the back burner and that's where my beloved GTO transitioned. When I turned 16 I could not afford such a car and instead rode motorcycles for 2 years before I purchased a very inexpensive 1968 Triumph TR-250 (which I still have today). That car kicked off a love of working-on and restoring classic cars and for the next 35 years I went through countless cars and learned all aspects of the business. I was employed at Boeing full time (previously McDonnell Douglas) so time was limited, but whenever I had a chance I was working on or thinking about a car restoration project.

Initially my passion was old British cars (Triumphs, Healeys and the like) and then after seeing a 280SL at a garage sale, I slowly migrated into restoring German sports cars. At the time they were cheap and few people had the patience to tune 6 carburetors or rebuild a mechanical fuel injection pump. As an engineer I loved the challenge and became rather proficient at a few select cars. But something was missing and at the end of the 90s I realized my passion for American Muscle had been suppressed for many years. I knew the first true muscle car I purchased needed to be a GTO like that one that left such an enduring mark on my father, me,



and our driveway. So the hunt began.

I was very fortunate to find a car that had the features I remembered so well; a 1966 red GTO convertible 4 speed with AC. Not a show car but a good solid car that needed much TLC. On the positive side the paint was no more than a 5-footer, and the engine and transmission were original and strong (amazing/consistent compression). However, at the other end of the spectrum, the AC had been ripped out of her (all but the evaporator coil), the floors were rusted through, and the suspension was very “squishy”. I probably paid too much but that’s the beauty of classics, they’re only too much for a short time (or at least that’s what I tell my lovely wife Celia of 33 years). Most importantly, she came with the original tiger stuffed animal used for promotion. I love that little guy and unfortunately so does our dog.

The project was more work than I had anticipated. I removed the dash completely and repaired all the instruments. I welded in new floors and while I was under there I fixed the leaking exhaust and manifolds. One of the most time consuming and frustrating jobs was rebuilding the AC. Finding the parts, identifying the correct assembly configuration, and making her function properly was a chore, but once completed I forgot the pain. I didn’t touch the paint as it allows me to use the car with limited fear (something I could drive further than the end of the trailer ramp). The one remaining issue was the engine; such great compression and so little power? I rebuild that Carter AFB at least 10 times but could never get her to idle below 1600 RPM or to provide that “instantaneous rev” that we all live for. I finally opted for a tri-

power and the problem was solved (I knew a nice new 750 spread bore would have provided more power and reliability, but that tri-power is more than sufficient). More importantly, it made the underside of the hood a true work of art. So pretty! I'm confident there's more power to be had and the clutch slips an embarrassing amount, but with a few more hours in the garage she too will be suitable for leave long streaks in my mother-in-laws drive (although being a retirement community they will likely be even less forgiving than my father was.....we'll see).

Once completed she became our family pride and joy. My son, learned to drive a stick in this car (he's now a B1 pilot and I believe his time behind the wheel of the 66 helped to develop his reflexes (he raises an eye brow every time I say that but I still love to say it)). My daughter also drove the car but had a love/hate relationship. Driving a 66 Goat to the high School parking lot is pretty cool, but then she would complain about how when she stopped to get gas "all these "old men" would hit on me". Regardless, I believe the love was greater than the hate. I realize that allowing a teenage girl to drive your prized car sounds risky, but she was very responsible and again, the paint was only "fair". Another beauty of the big goat is the room. What fun to pick up your friends for a trip to dinner and listen to the wives complain about how their hair is being blown out of place. The men just smile and say "yes Dear". Men are so shrewd.

So the bucket list has been satisfied and it was worth the wait. The car is everything I/we dreamed of and more. There's still some work to be done, but that's nothing less than ex-



citement for me. She just becomes better and better, as I grow older and older.

PS: I just retired from Boeing after 38 years and while I could have gone out quietly, I instead decided to fulfill another item on the bucket list and start a restoration business. As a result "Its Alive Automotive" was born. I had no idea how hard it is to run a business, but we've come a long way and the smiles on our customer's faces makes it all worth the effort. Who knows, maybe our 66 will go on the rotisserie some day? After that, the daughter will no longer be allowed behind the wheel. Maybe for her wedding?

