

ACQUIRING MY '69 GTO CONVERTIBLE – PART 1 OF 2 (MAYBE 3)

By Marty Howard



“\$6,500” is what the seller wanted for his “’69 red GTO convertible” as the ad read in some newspaper in Baltimore, Maryland. On March 28, 1989, I was at my usual job in Manhattan on the phone with one of my co-workers in Washington, DC. He had already been given the word that I was looking for a black or red 1969 GTO convertible. Actually, working for the Federal Government had an added bonus of having co-workers all over the U.S. and I certainly wanted everyone to know about a particular car I wanted to buy. So, I spread it...the ‘word’ that is. I don’t remember what the rest of the ad said, but it did have a phone number and a brief description of the car. So, I called the number and arranged to meet Richard at the Amtrak Train Station in Baltimore at 1 p.m. that same day. I was so excited that I almost forgot to tell my boss that I was leaving for the rest of the day. When he asked where I was going, I told him and he just shook his head. Only car fanatics can understand my behavior. I stopped at my bank, put \$6,500 cash in my pocket and caught the next train out of Penn Station. Anticipation was making me crazy, as Carly Simon said in her song way back when. Arriving in a town I

had never been to had an added feeling of adventure. Off the train and approaching the exit, I could already see the car was waiting for me at the curb. WOW! Do you remember that feeling when you found yours? I shook hands with Richard and we were on our way to his home to talk and, possibly, sign the papers for the new owner. He explained to me that he was getting a divorce and they decided that the car needed to be put up for sale. I shed a tear....not really since his loss was my gain. At his home, I met his wife and we all sat down to talk. Richard gave me all the paperwork that he had and explained to me that yes, this car was a 4-speed but had been converted to a 3-speed automatic so that his wife could drive the car. I figured, "no big deal" as I later learned that it was, indeed a big deal...and expensive. At least it was ordered as a 4-speed or he was assuring me that it was. At \$6,500 I thought it was a good price for me and even talked him down to \$6,200 explaining that I had to travel so far to get to the car. (Travelling to see a GTO in person was not foreign to me since I had made many trips prior to other parts of the country only to be disappointed in what I found when I got there.) So, the GTO changed hands and I drove the car home that evening with no problem. I breathed a sigh of relief as I was now the owner of my dream car. Toll both takers gave me thumbs up as I paid various tolls between Baltimore and Staten Island. Absolutely, no problems all the way on my 5+ hour journey home. I was thrilled.

Over the next few years, I got caught up with trying to get my GTO to a "numbers marching" car. Getting information, speaking to other GTO owners, and joining the "Great New York GTO Club" that was located in Long Island. Expenses were getting a bit out of



hand, but I was determined. A few of the first things that I wanted to change was to get rid of the automatic transmission and replace it with a correct 4-speed. And, then finding out that the engine was out of a '68 GTO and finding a correct, date-coded block and heads. Yes, I was deep into 'numbers'. The Vice President of the Long Island GTO Club was able to get me those parts. However, I had to leave my car in his backyard for about 3 months until completion of those 2 items. Now, his backyard was in the rear of this large apartment house complex so it was shared with about 10 or 20 other families. I dreaded having my car in such a precarious position with all those other cars around it. The VP was able to park my car at the end of all the garages in the backyard so my GTO did not have to be moved. I helped him a few times each week with what needed to be done relying on him to give me as much time working on my car as he could afford, driving an hour each way to his apartment house. Finding a parking spot for my 'driver' car was a bitch since there were so many surrounding apartment houses. During the time when we were taking out the '68 engine, the hoist slipped and the engine wound up sitting on one of the most durable front rubber bumpers ever made. Did I just say that? You already know the answer. Not wanting to cause any more pain, I just said, "It needed to be painted anyway". I thought that would be easy. Yikes! Who knew? Not me. The rest of the parts were obtained and I drove my GTO home into it's own garage. Finally!! One of the other items that needed attention was straightening the frame. Just gonna let this one seep in and not give further details. Another experience! How many more to come???

