

GTO of the Month

By Tom Oxler



My interest in GTOs began in a barber shop in Belton, MO when I was 15 years old. I was reading a Sports Illustrated (they would not let me have the adult magazines) and noticed an ad for Pontiacs. It showed the 1966 Catalina 2 + 2, the LeMans Sprint with the OHC six and the GTO. There was a postcard attached to the ad and if returned, Pontiac would send you a large poster. Well I removed the postcard without anyone seeing me and sent it in. In about a month, I had my poster and looked at it every day hoping someday, I would have a GTO.

Terrie and I dated throughout high school and were married in 1971 while I was still in college at Central Missouri State. I commuted to school in the early morning and then went to work at my Dad's hardware store in the evening while Terrie worked as a secretary at Richards-Gebaur Air Force Base and later as a legal secretary for a law firm.

After several years of trying to have children, we adopted Julie and then 3 years later Dan through Catholic Charities. When Julie arrived, Terrie "retired" to be a stay at home mom and did some accounting for my Dad's hardware store from home. After graduating college in 1973, I started working for King Radio in the research and development group designing navigation and communication radios for airplanes. In 1977, I began working for Southwestern Bell Telephone as an engineer in Kansas City. In 1984, I was promoted and transferred to St. Louis and we bought a home in St. Charles. I worked for Southwestern Bell, SBC and now AT&T for 28+ years and retired in 2005. Terrie started working for medical transcription companies when we moved to St. Louis and continues doing this to this day. She keeps asking

when she can retire and I tell her she has to get her 28 years in before we can discuss it.

Once our daughter Julie was married in 2000, I began to look seriously for a GTO. I had a good friend of mine from SBC who owned several GTOs and knew much more about them than I did. I would ask him questions or bring in ads from the internet and we would discuss driver versus show car. He eventually convinced me that I wanted a driver so I could “fry the tires” anytime I wanted. In July 2001, I found a 1966 red GTO post coupe on the internet in Pewaukee, Wisconsin. My buddy and I drove up one Friday morning, drove the GTO around Pewaukee for an hour and drove it home. It was like bringing home our children Julie and Dan for the first time. I wanted everyone to see what I had just acquired. All the neighbors came over to look and asked a lot of questions I could not answer.



Soon, I joined GTOAA and the Gateway GTO Club. I picked up a card from someone's GTO at a car show and I called Marty Howard who invited us to a meeting which I attended at McDonald's Bar in Hazelwood. Here I met Jim Kiburz, Steve Hedrick, Will Bowers and Chris Simmons who was the current President. After the meeting, several members came out to the parking lot to look my car over. I was really impressed that the club took such an interest in me and my GTO. Terrie and I began attending club functions including the Christmas Party in 2001 held at Steve and Tammy Hedrick's house. We had a great time.

I have had to do many repairs and restorations to my GTO due in part to the way I drive it. As my buddy said, you need a driver since you are going to fry the tires every time you get in that thing. He was right and 3 engines later, the GTO has a stroked 400 to a 461 with Kaufmann heads, 6.8 inch rods, Tripower, a Tremec TKO600 5 speed and Vintage Air for Terrie making about 450 hp at the rear wheels. I was invited by High Performance Magazine to par-

ticipate in the Pavement Pounder Shoot out at the 2006 Nationals in Louisville, Kentucky. I was trembling on every pass as we drove the GTO to Louisville and I was not sure how I would get it home if I broke it. My best pass was an 8.13 @ 88.37mph which equates to a 12.75 @ 109.58mph. HPP recalculates the best time for temperature, humidity and altitude and that is 12.17 @ 114.82. The article appeared in the July, 2007 edition of High Performance Pontiac.



In 2008, I decided the paint was in need of restoration so I took the car to Cecil Morton's CeeJay Autobody in Granite City. Cecil stripped it down to bare metal and we found 40 years of dings, dents and rust that needed repair. I got the car back in early April just in time to get it out into the sun where the new metallic paint really shines. The body is absolutely straight even on those huge rear quarters that are so difficult to get right. Cecil is an artist when it comes to metal.

This latest engine, the stroked 400 came about after a trip to the Michigan 500 in 2008 with Cecil and Annette Morton. The car had just been painted and Cecil got both of us invited to Vintage Car display with 3M. We were two of about 25 vintage cars located in front of the 3M display which was right in the path that all of the spectators would have to walk to get into the speedway. There was the truck race on Friday, the Nationwide race on Saturday and the Sprint Cup race on Sunday so approx. 300,000 people walked by the cars on their way to the races. The crowds were unbelievable. There was a street rod, a Jack Roush Drag car and mine that could open the headers. Each of us would take a turn starting up the cars and then opening the headers. The spectators were like moths to a flame. Within about 2 minutes, you could no longer see the car as the people were 15 – 20 deep. On the way back to Cecil's brother's house, the engine made a very loud banging sound and white smoke came immedi-

ately out of the exhaust. I was able to stop the engine fairly quick but the damage was done. Cecil's brothers help me pull the head only to find that a screw from the rear two barrel had worked loose and had fallen into the #8 cylinder beating up the piston and aluminum head and cracking the block. That motor was somewhat unique in that it was a 389 bored .065 over and stroked to 4.25 making it a 454. Yes a Pontiac 454. It drove those Chevy guys crazy. Thanks to Cecil and his family, I was able to get the car back, the engine pulled and back into my garage waiting on MBJ Machine and Jim Moran to produce another stump pulling motor, the 461. Hopefully, this will be my last motor for a while. At least that is what I keep telling Terrie.

Terrie has enjoyed the old GTO almost as much as I have so in August of 2007, I bought a red 2006 for our anniversary. The first thing she did to it was to get the personalized license plate: MRS GTO. It fits her perfectly. She does not let me drive it much anymore since I "cratered" the transmission one evening.

Terrie and I cannot express our sincere gratitude to the friends we have come to know with owning a GTO and being a member of the Gateway GTO Club and GTOAA. From Prom Night, to our Route 66 Cruise to California, to Drag Days, Club Picnics, the Christmas Parties and just plain cruising on a Sunday afternoons with friends, we have enjoyed ourselves immensely. Some of my friends have called me the world's oldest teenager but I never had a car like the GTO when I was younger so I have all of this teen aged mischief still inside just fighting to get out.

Thanks everyone for making our GTO such an enjoyable experience.

