

GTO of the Month

A Tale of Two Judges
by Guy Gordon



As with most current GTO owners , more specifically the historical variety, my love for this car started in my youth and quite by accident. During my high school years two friends of mine, Peter Swanson and Pete Ponzio, and myself dabbled in auto salvage and body and paint work. This not only satisfied our desire to work on cars, but it also had us buying a lot of the "junk" in a small area of northern Wisconsin. We would typically buy a car or truck, remove the parts we could easily sell, then scrap the rest. On the body side we repaired and painted a number of cars that the severe Wisconsin winters had taken their toll on. One day, one of the Petes informed me of this white muscle car sitting in someone's yard. This was the type of second hand information we typically received. He felt it was obtainable since it hadn't moved in some time. My curiosity got the better of me and we went to see if the car did indeed exist. It did and was sitting as described. We decided it would not be one for our salvage business since it was too expensive and still in decent condition. Since I had the most interest in the car I was given the opportunity to purchase it. Without my parents knowledge, I struck a deal with the owner for \$400 and the car was mine.

This car was a 1970 GTO Judge, Ram Air IV, 4 speed. The exterior was white with the interior being blue. Options on the car were hood tack, power drivers seat, Safe-T-Trac, power steering, power brakes and an 8-track. The only change that was

made was the replacement of the Rally II wheels (yes, the original engine was still in it). Now I was only 16 at the time and had absolutely no idea what I had or how special this car really was. I just liked the looks. We immediately started the body work and got it to run well (a good tune up solved this). Surprisingly it ran great. We got the body work done and in primer in time for our local track's Street Eliminator race. This was on a 3/8 mile asphalt oval which ran every Friday evening during the summer. A couple times a year they would sponsor a Street Eliminator race allowing street legal cars to race each other two at a time, side by side, once around the track (boy how times have changed). At this time, I still really didn't know what I had but I was going to find out. Sixteen cars had shown up that night ranging from an SS Chevelle, 440 Dodges, big block Mustangs, and others that were heavily modified. Again, I was 16 and very naive about the whole process, let alone how to get the most out of the car. The racing began and before long I found myself in the finals against a Chevelle SS 454 with an automatic. Although that car won, it wasn't due to it being the faster car. I made a choice not to shift to third gear on the back straightaway allowing him to catch me. With the momentum he had, he was able to pass me and win by less than 6 inches. Following this experience two things happened, first, I gained an education on what this car really was, and second it became recognized as one of the fastest cars in the area. I know I don't have to explain to anyone in this club what that reputation had in store for me the remaining time I owned that car.

That car got me through high school and my first year of Technical College. With my desire to go on to get my Bachelors degree and some of the offers I was getting, I sold the car and started regretting it once I was out of school.

In college, I bought and restored a 1973 Corvette which, ironically, was purchased new by the original owner of the Judge. He traded the Judge for it in '73.

Like most, graduation was followed by marriage, kids, and all the other responsibilities that carry a higher priority than the pursuit of a dream (owning *that* muscle car). For those that fell in love with muscle cars, it was either the car you've dreamed of, restoring one you've been fortunate enough to keep, or looking for the one you wish back. With me, it was a couple of lame attempts to get back into the hobby. First, it was someone's unfinished project, a 1966 Chevelle convertible. Nothing special and my heart wasn't really into finishing it. Next was a daily driver, an 1985 then 1997 Mustang GT Convertibles. Although they were nice and fun, it didn't really hit the spot. Then I purchased a 1969 Mustang Mach I which had been sitting in a warehouse since 1979. A pretty good find but not a big block. Oh yes, remember that marriage I mentioned earlier? Well, I met Gina in college and she has always been very supportive of everything I've done. She also ensured me that I would be able to pursue my desire for cars when the time was right. Knowing her, this was not just talk to redirect me. I knew she meant it. So back to that Mach I. As we discussed our plans for it, Gina made an observation of me, something I probably don't do very well myself. She told me she didn't think it was the car I really wanted, and I should pursue *that car*. No punch-line here, what I really wanted was a white 1970 GTO Judge 4 speed (I had to let go of the RA IV part). So I sold that Mustang and bought her a Mustang GT/

California Special convertible as a daily driver (the least I could do for such good advice), and started the search for a Judge.



The one I found was located in Jacksonville, Florida. Originally an Ohio car, it had excellent documentation including a Silver Concours at the 2000 GTO Nationals held in Columbus, Ohio. PHS documentation verifies the car's originality as well as two dealer's invoices (due to a dealer trade). Additional documentation provides all owners back to 1974. This Judge is white, with a red interior, M20 4 speed, hood tack, 3.55 Safe-T-Trac, AM/FM (mono with front and rear speakers), and power steering and brakes. The car is an absolute joy to own and brings back memories that are priceless.

During my search and seeking advice, several Gateway members graciously obliged to provide knowledge, including John Johnson, even though I wasn't a member yet. Once I joined, the members welcomed me in and I truly enjoy the events I am able to attend.

As an added benefit, the GTO has opened up the car hobby to my two sons, Brett (20) and Brock (16). Last year both accompanied me to the Troy Car Show. Even though it poured on us, it was the most enjoyable time I have ever had at a show. Their interest in something I love was priceless. Brock has since informed us he is interested in pursuing a career in auto restoration. We already have visits planned to

Macpherson College (a 4 year Bachelors program in Kansas), and Ohio Technical College. Both are considered the best in the country. I guess taking a kid to a car show really does pay off.



As for Gina, she will come visit me at shows, but it isn't really one of her interests. Yet, her support for my interest in this hobby has made me realize even more of how lucky I am.