

Gone, but Not Forgotten

By
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In 1985 two big things happened to me; I met Mary Ann in Feb, who I married a year and a half later, and I bought my first GTO. I was raised with Pontiacs and I had previously owned a Lemans, but I always wanted a GTO. I had been out of college for a little over a year and as a Second Lieutenant in the USAF, I wasn't exactly rolling in dough, but I scraped together \$1300 to buy a primer gray 1968 GTO. It was an automatic car with the "His & Hers" Hurst shifter, black vinyl interior, manual drum brakes, and a worn out 400. It wasn't much, but it was mine. Eight months later, I had it paint dark blue, and while it looked fabulous, I knew the drivetrain would need some attention in the future. Around the same time I had the car painted, I found out I had been selected for pilot training at Laughlin AFB near Del Rio, TX. I also was getting married at the same time, so the GTO would have to wait. I did drive it down to Del Rio from Dayton, Ohio, and during that trip, both the engine and transmission started a death rattle. I made it there, but, once parked in the apartment parking lot, the GTO would stay there until I graduated the following year.

My next assignment was to fly the EC-130H Compass Call in Tucson, AZ. I had to go through C-130 training at Little Rock AFB, AR, so I made a side trip by towing the GTO up to my uncle's shop in Waukegan, IL to have the engine and transmission rebuilt while I was in training. Mary Ann and I picked up the car at Christmas, and after blowing up the rear end in Dayton (the only drive-train part that wasn't rebuilt), we caravanned back to Tucson.

Unfortunately, the rear end wasn't the last of my mechanical issues. In addition to get-



ting hit in the passenger door two weeks after we moved, the TCI torque converter came apart only weeks later, forcing another transmission rebuild. Two months later, two rocker arm studs broke due to geometry issues with 1.65 rocker arms. The resultant loss of oil pressure meant another engine rebuild, with new rings, oil pump, valve seats and rocker studs. While that was being done, a new fan and shroud were installed for better cooling (its HOT in Tucson) and a Holley 700 double-pumper and Offenhauser aluminum manifold were also slapped on.

By September of 1988, the car not only looked like a muscle car, it went like one! The Comp Cams HE 280 cam, with 280 duration and .480 lift (actually .528 with those 1.65 rockers) was a beast with the new carb & manifold. While out driving one Saturday morning, I saw a bunch of Pontiacs heading down the street, so I caught up and followed them into the a huge



car show in Reid Park. This was the start of our car club days after talking with then-President Thom Sherwood (now owner of two XXX GTOs) as we joined the AZ Chapter, POCI right there.

We had a lot of fun cruising and going to a car show or two over the next few months, but in early 1989, all of the fun with the 68 came to an end. Mary Ann's grandmother had passed away, so we flew back to Pittsburgh for the funeral only to come back five days later to an empty carport except for a coat hanger. The car had been stolen, and since Tucson is only 60 miles from Mexico, it likely ended up there. The only good thing to happen was that my insurance company finally paid me fair value for the loss, which enabled me to buy my 1970 GTO... but that's a story for a couple years from now.

