

The Elusive and Rare 1974 GTO

By Chris Winslow



In this year where we have celebrated the 50th anniversary of the 1964 GTO, the 40th anniversary of the 1974 GTO, and the 10th anniversary of the 2004 GTO we have run multiple articles on cars from these years. For the 1964, we have run articles on some great cars, including two that were used by model companies to make 1964 GTO models. The 2004 GTO owners in the club have also stepped up with some great articles. One of these articles was recently re-run in *The Legend*.

The one article missing from the pages of *The Hoodscope* for this anniversary year is one on the 1974 GTO. The 1974 is indeed a very rare model. Pontiac officially canceled it mid year in 1974 and based on their published totals, only 7058 of the cars were produced (1723 hatchbacks and 5335 coupes).

The 1974 GTO was an option on the 1974 Pontiac Ventura. The Ventura itself was a essentially the Chevrolet Nova adapted with some Pontiac styling cues. The Ventura was an early volley in what would come to be called badge engineering later in the decade. This was also part of an overall move by the US automobile industry towards smaller, safer, more fuel efficient cars in the wake of the double whammy of skyrocketing gas prices and climbing insurance rates. In this case, Pontiac realized that they needed a smaller car and found the chassis they needed over at Chevy in the Nova. Pontiac's sister divisions Oldsmobile and Buick also followed suit in this trend, Oldsmobile with the Omega and Buick with the Apollo. (Anyone get the sensing a space theme in car names here?).

Styling wise it is arguable that Pontiac did the best job adapting the Nova platform to their genre with the GTO option. They put on a front grill reminiscent of the 1965 GTO, albeit it with a single head light on each side as opposed to the stack headlight pairs from the 1965.

Under the hood, Pontiac fitted the 200 net HP 350V8. This was a direct contradiction to John DeLorean's promise from 1968 that "I will never allow a GTO to have anything less than 400 cubic inches" but it reflected the reality of the times and the dramatic changes that were underway in the automobile market. Many Pontiac enthusiasts were disappointed with the engine choice, hoping instead for the 455 Super Duty from the Trans Am. Unfortunately, that coupling was not to happen, at least not from the factory.

The 1974 did have a rear facing shaker hood scoop. The hood scoop was in keeping with all previous incarnations of the GTO (if not all subsequent ones!). In addition, it came with GTO decals on the grille, fenders, and rear decklid, Rally II wheels without trim rings, E70x14 tires, dual exhaust, front and rear stabilizer bars, outside sport mirrors and a



firmer suspension tuning than the Ventura n which it was based. This option added \$461 to the cost of a base Ventura. This brought the cost of most 1974 GTO's to well over \$4500.

The performance of the 1974 GTO was reflective of the 350 V8 engine of that year. That engine, like most from that time frame, was ham strung with a reduced compression ratio and a number of devices designed to reduce emissions. That, combined with the increased



weight of the vehicle as the car companies complied with a variety of government mandated safety requirements (the GTO version of the Ventura weighed in at just over 3700 pounds), resulted in a decrease in performance. Car Craft's test of the 1974 GTO found a 1/4 mile time of 16.14 at 85.87mph. This was actually quite good relative to many of its peers, although it did lag behind one of its direct competitors that year, the Dodge Dart. The Dart, which was both lighter and had a larger and slightly more powerful engine, was clocked at

15.1 seconds in the quarter. Largely because of the lack of demand for muscle cars by 1974, Pontiac shut down production of the GTO option by the middle of the model year. This is despite the fact that by that point the 1974 had already outsold the 1972 (5673 sold) and the 1973 (4312 sold) models. Had Pontiac allowed sales to continue throughout the model year, the car may well have rivaled the production total of the 1971 GTO (10, 532).

Because of the relatively small production run, finding a 1974 GTO in good condition is rare. There is one such car in our club owned by Rich and Sue Vie. The photos in this article are of Rich's car, a 1974 coupe.

Rich's car represents the end, for a while anyway, of the great run of the GTO. Pontiac had invented and then dominated a new car segment, the muscle car. By 1974, however, the market and the economy had changed and it would be three decades before Pontiac would bring back The Great One.

