

Love At First Sight!

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The Pontiac GTO has always been my favorite automobile. I loved them from the first time I saw one.

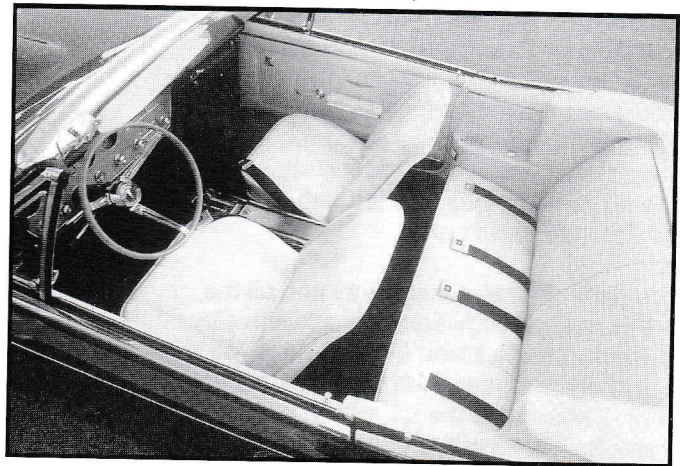
My uncle bought a new 1966 GTO which had been special ordered by a customer who changed his mind after the car arrived. I remember being told it had a specially ordered engine in it. Could it have been a 428? Anyway; my uncle happened to walk in the dealer's showroom at just the right time. Man, was that car fast! The only car around here that could run with it was a Mopar Hemi.

The 1966 GTO pictured here is my second GTO. My first was a 1971, purchased at the end of the year. It gave me a high horse power per dollar ratio.

One night I was driving to Baltimore. I was cruising at a civil speed, as I was still breaking it in. In my rearview mirror, I saw two sets of headlights closing in very quickly. As I hugged the berm to give them passing room, a Corvette and an Oldsmobile 442 blew past like I was standing still. As I glanced at my speedometer, I noticed the odometer just turned over 3,000 miles. Break in time was over, boys. I put the pedal to the metal. At 135 I passed the Vette and 442. I never saw them again.

Many years later, while recovering from a very near death accident at the mill where I worked as a welder, I wanted to buy something to lift my spirits – what better than a Pontiac GTO?

After searching for a perfect GTO to no avail, I guess I began to panic. It was during the "feeding frenzy of 1989." When I saw the advertisement in Hemmings, I was



determined to bring a GTO home. My brother Mark and I drove to Columbus, Ohio with a trailer in tow. The goat was a bright red 1966 convertible, just what I wanted. It wasn't as nice as I hoped, but I thought someday, I would restore it to its original beauty myself. After all, I had worked as a body man when I was younger. In the meantime, it was a very nice driver.

Unfortunately, my fine motor skills never returned to the point where I could master the meticulous skills needed to restore my GTO to the level I wanted.

A few years later, I started to look for a shop to restore my GTO. One of the recommendations I was given was Palermo Auto Body. Unknown to me at the time, a well known restoration specialist, Bill Hahn had started working for Sonny Palermo about a year earlier. Bill and Sonny said it would be quite sometime before they could work on my project, as Bill was the only restoration specialist in the shop and they already had two jobs in process. They offered to at least disassemble the car, and send everything out to the various sub-contractors. The overall restoration time would be longer this way, but the end result would be, it might be finished sooner. I told Bill, "I want the car to be as correct as possible." It was a total ground up restoration – no bolt was left unturned and no expense was spared.

The body, frame, sheet metal and all the brackets and hardware were alkaline dipped at Pennsylvania Metal Cleaning. I found a pair of NOS fenders. Although the original engine was not in the car when I bought it, the seller did have the original 389 block, which I bought with the car. The block was rebuilt and we located all the correct pieces to go with the engine. 1966 was the last year for the 389 engine. I was disappointed when Bill told me he thought the car had possibly had a dash fire at one time. He also informed me the car has last been assembled with a lot of 1967 GTO parts.

Although, I was dismayed at the news, Bill assured me not to worry that he would make the car "like brand new." Bill also surprised me when he asked if I knew the car was not originally bright red, but rather burgundy. He recommended I go back to the original color. At first I was hesitant, but I'm certainly glad I took his advice. Now I like the car better in burgundy than the bright red.

