

# DO THE RIGHT

The first trip to the body shop for this 1971 GTO ended in a complete frame-off restoration

BY RICK JENSEN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS A. DeMAURO

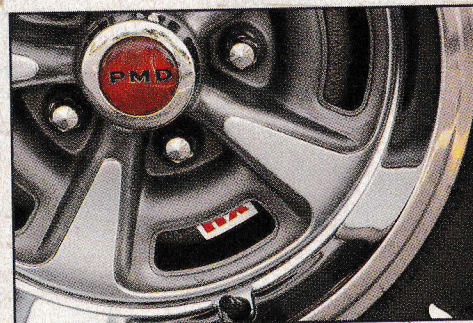
In the automotive arena, it's very easy to let the small things slide when it comes to repairing your pride and joy. In some cases, it's simply an issue of finding the time (and conviction) to lay on a cold garage floor and get things fixed. But mostly, it's a money issue. Many times, the amount of cash needed to fully restore your dream car is downright ludicrous—restoration and bodywork is truly an art form, and you really do get what you pay for in this regard, but is it ever pricey. It's too bad that being financially strapped keeps most of us from acting until our babies are a step away from the crusher. With this in mind, we could learn a few things from Jim and Gerry Kerna.

Gerry, a 44-year-old information systems manager, has always been into musclecars. Once her 1970 Chevelle SS left the driveway for good, she searched around her hometown of Baden, Pa. for a worthy successor. Her luck led her to the Holy Grail of automotive classified ads in 1977: *1971 GTO, never raced, always garaged, original owner*. After the inevitable purchase, Gerry enjoyed the 64,000-mile beauty in daily driver mode for five years, then relegated it to recreational use. Time passed and, in 1992, Gerry married Jim Kerna, another Pontiac nut whose

weapon of choice was a '79 Trans Am. The GTO now had two doting parents, but it gradually became a little rough around the edges. In 1996, Gerry contacted Palermo, Auto Body in Wexford, Pa. about making some minor repairs to the now-83,000-mile Pontiac.

"Well, we took it in to have some door and radiator support rust removed," Gerry explains. "That's really all we were going to do. But once the doors were off and a little more rust was found, one thing led to another. We started talking seriously about doing the entire car, and knew that Bill Hahn at Palermo had a great reputation in the restoration business, so we decided to go for it."

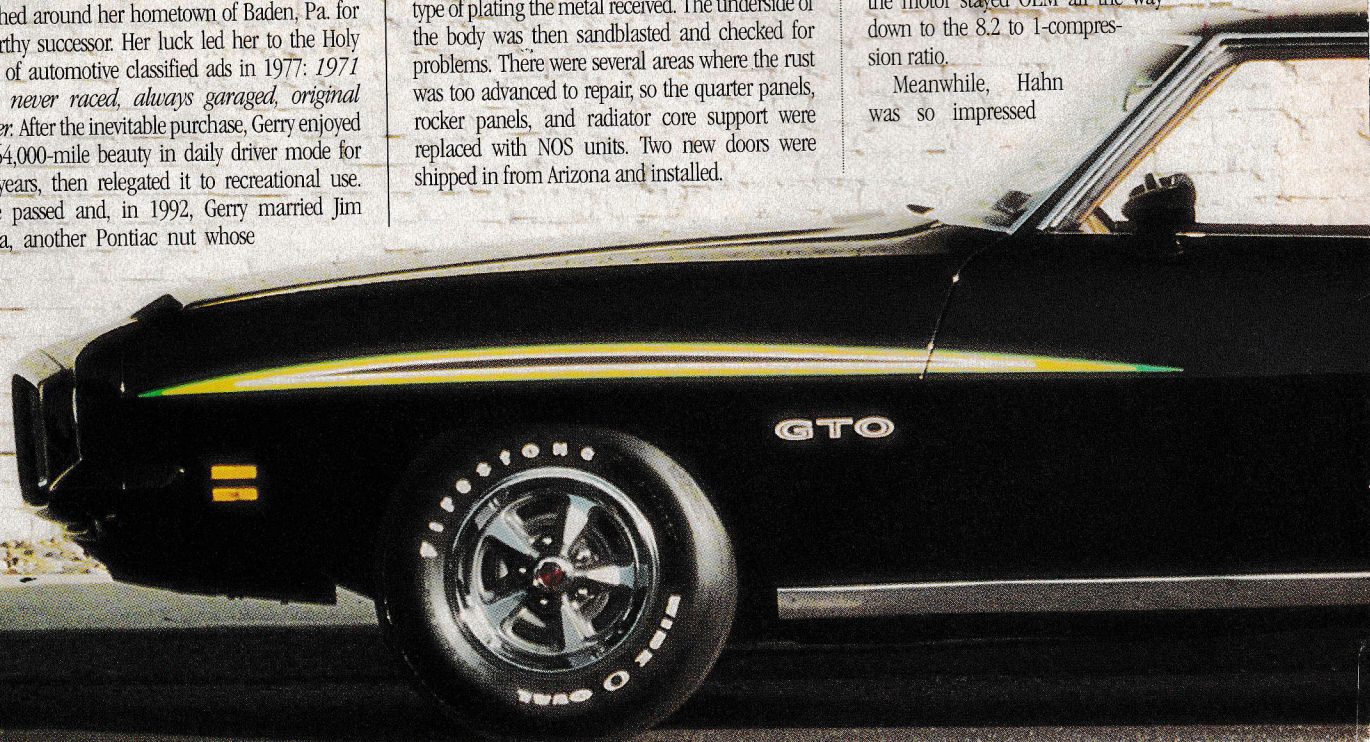
After an agonizing two-year wait while Bill was finishing another GTO, Gerry's Starlight Black '71 was disassembled. To start things off, the frame, along with all of its hardware, was alkaline dipped. Then each bit of hardware was logged into a notebook by the location of the head marks and the type of plating the metal received. The underside of the body was then sandblasted and checked for problems. There were several areas where the rust was too advanced to repair, so the quarter panels, rocker panels, and radiator core support were replaced with NOS units. Two new doors were shipped in from Arizona and installed.



Besides a code stamped in the axle tube, Pontiac placed a decal on the left rear brake drum to denote the differential code.

The 300-horse 400 traveled to Dunk Competition Engines in Valencia, Pa. for a stock rebuild. Gerry didn't have any notions of improving upon this car's already stellar performance, so the motor stayed OEM all the way down to the 8.2 to 1-compression ratio.

Meanwhile, Hahn was so impressed





# THING

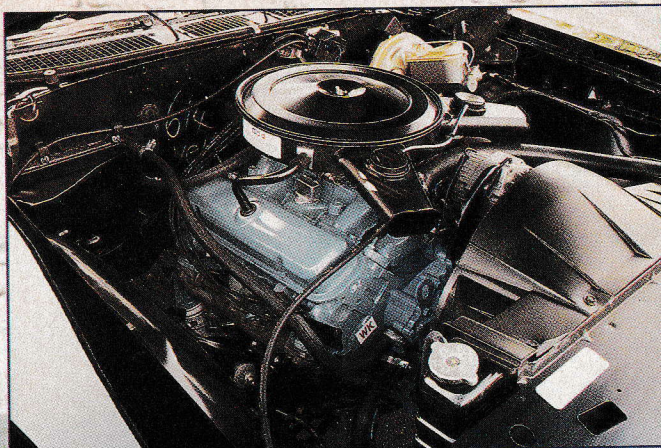
with the condition of the door and dash panels gracing the Poncho's interior that he decided to reuse them. The seat cushions and carpets are reproductions from Year One, and the AM push-button radio was removed and repaired, as well.

The chassis was then treated to a slew of new and revived parts. An aluminized exhaust system was created by Tom and Eric Gardner and bolted to the newly reinstalled engine's factory manifolds. Upper and lower control arms went in, and the front discs and rear drums were bolted back into place. Covering those binders is an original set of Rally IIs that Gerry kept and Bill refurbished, and G70-14s with raised white letters encircle them. The only upgrade to the otherwise stock GTO, a set of gas shocks, helps soften the Y96 Ride and Handling package. While all 1971 GTOs were fitted with a 1.125-inch front and .875-inch rear stabilizer bar, computer selected springs and HD shocks, the Y96 option added even stiffer springs and shocks.

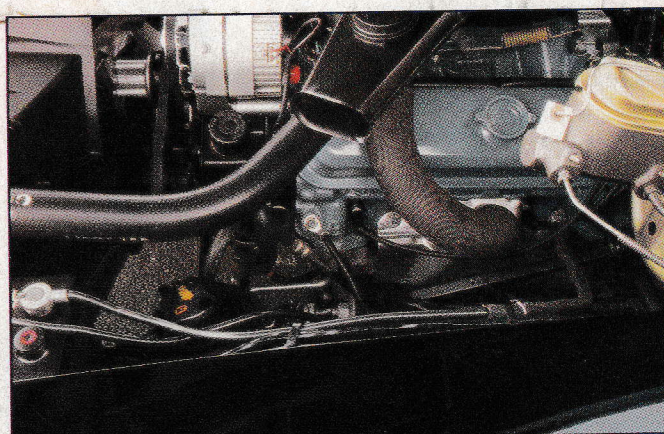
Under Bill's watchful eye, Chuck Bummer smoothed out the small imperfections on the body,

and Cliff Dischler applied the PPG 270 primer with four coats of PPG paint. Three coats of clear were added, then wet sanded, compounded, and polished with machine glaze.

"You know, I really didn't have any problems with this job," Hahn states when queried about obstacles encountered. "It was a very original example, and not only that, but when I started the research necessary to ensure the car would be as the factory made it, I found the paint scheme to be unusual, too. I learned that you



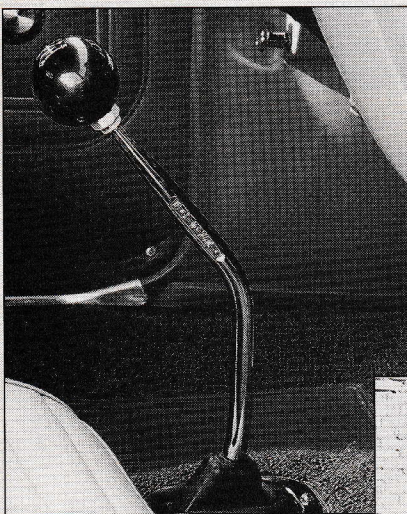
*The WK-code 400 was rebuilt to its former 300-hp glory with 2.11/1.77-inch valves filling the #96 D-port heads and a replacement 067 cam with 273°/289° duration and .410/.413 lift dictating the valve events. She's stock all the way down to the oil pump. Code "614" scrawled on the firewall denotes the Rally Stripe option to the assembly line workers.*



*As you can see, care was taken to replicate the markings and tags in the engine compartment.*







"We spent a lot of money to restore it," Gerry admits. "But it was completely worth it. We love driving this car, and we couldn't be happier with the work Bill and his crew did. It wasn't easy, but the more we talked about fixing little things, the more we knew we had to do it right. And I'm so glad that we did."

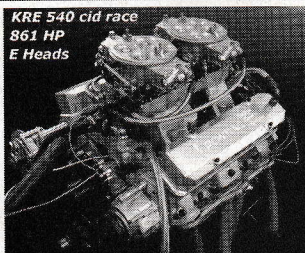
As stated, in the automotive arena, it's very easy to let the small things slide when it comes to repairing your pride and joy. It would seem, however, that no one has explained that to Gerry and Jim Kerna. 🐐



Just 406 Starlight Black 1971 GTOs were built. Throw in the green Rally (Judge) Stripes, which were frowned upon at the factory (Pontiac recommended blue stripes with yellow and red accents on Starlight Black GTOs), the Formula steering wheel and the 4-speed sans console and we doubt you'll ever see another spotless Goat like this. Gerry wrestled with the decision to change the stripe color, but feels much better after deciding to keep it original. With the exceptional body that they're applied to, wouldn't you?



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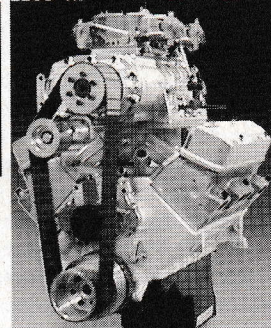
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