

## R69 GTO

By Kerry Friedman

When I was growing up, the first car I remember was a black '49 FORD, and I probably only remember it from seeing pictures. We only had one car and my father worked downtown at a dress factory. Dad would either take the bus, or ride his old fashioned, no gears, no fenders, and no brakes bicycle. Either way he would pass by Thom's Pontiac twice a day.

One Sunday morning, Dad saw an add in the newspaper that had a color picture of a 1956 Pink and Grey 2 door Pontiac. He cut out the add and taped it to the kitchen wall and said he was going to buy that car. Not too long after that, he saw the car in the showroom on his way home one afternoon. The next day, he came home with it. That was our first of quite a few Pontiacs. I can remember taking a trip to Florida in it that summer, and the automatic transmission broke down. We had an unexpected delay before reaching our destination.



I started borrowing the Pontiac at night when my parents were downstairs watching TV. I was 14 years old. That didn't last too long because one time, I ran out of gas, drained the battery down, and got home after Dad had tried to go bowling and found no car. My folks and the Police were waiting for me when I finally got back.

That same year we got a 2<sup>nd</sup> car, a 1964 Lemans hardtop with a 6-cylinder, bucket seats, and a 2-speed Powerglide. I then had two cars to borrow, and yes, I got caught again. 1965 and it was time to trade in the old Pontiac. They got another Lemans, turquoise with similar options. After

I got my license, and was a senior, I was in a car accident where a car broad-sided the '64. It was a mess, but it got fixed. I also had an accident where I rear-ended a couple of cars with the '65 and it was totaled. When we bought the Lemans, I got a GTO poster and hung it up in my room. I'm not sure but I probably said, "I'm going to get one of these someday."

During high school I bought a '57 Ford Fairlane, 4 door, blue and white, for an astounding \$ 80. I couldn't keep it since I was going to college and sold it for \$200 to a fellow I worked with. After it stopped working, he beat me up.

My first new car was a 1969 Malibu Convertible, red with white top and black interior, 350 V8 auto. It had a bench seat with column shifter. My first Pontiac was a '78 Grand Prix all decked out, but I lost custody of it in my divorce. Years later, I bought Debbie a Grand AM that we would trade in for a Malibu SS, and the latest Pontiac was a 2004 Grand Prix GTP.

After experiencing health issues in 1996 and 2001, Debbie asked me: "If I could have anything, what would I want?" Maybe she thought I wasn't going to be around much longer and needed to start emptying my bucket list. I told her I wanted a car. Not being prepared for this, I then started looking online, in newspapers and magazines. It didn't take too long to remember the GTO poster, and narrow my selection to a GTO. Then I just had to decide which year. Having had the '69 Malibu, and liking that body style, it was going to be one of the years 1968-1972.

I was traveling a lot in those days, especially in the Chicago area. I went to the VOLO Auto Museum on one trip but didn't see anything I could afford. Back at home the following weekend, I saw a 69 GTO advertised on the VOLO website that I could afford. I had totally overlooked it when I was there. The next weekend, we had appointments to look at a 1970 GTO in St. Charles, IL, and to see the GTO at VOLO. The 70 was OK, but after seeing the 69 in bright lights inside the showroom, that was my choice. I couldn't test drive it until the next day, so we stayed overnight and took it for a spin on Sunday, after which I bought the car. The next Friday, the boys got to take off school for this very special occasion. I rented a UHaul trailer and the three of us drove up to get the car.



There were several issues with the GTO that I new of when I bought it; the top of the dash was cracked, the front bumper needed work, and it had a new radio/cassette player in the dash.

My first project was going to be fixing the front bumper and getting the car ready to be used in our niece's wedding. I found a body shop in Alton that specialized in muscle car rehab. We dropped the car off and didn't get it back until Friday, the day before the wedding. To get job done for less, I had all the trim and headlights, etc., to clean up, paint, and put back in before it was ready. I worked all night on the car. I even had to remove the bumper to get some wiring in before the bumper. After a few hours sleep, I washed and waxed the car, got cleaned up and started for the wedding in south county. As I crossed I-44 on 270, I floored it to see what it would do. It went fast, and then suddenly, white smoke started pouring out of everywhere. I

limped the rest of the way to the wedding and had to have it towed home.



The head was cracked, two pistons had holes in them, and it had to be rebuilt. So much for an engine that was supposed to have just been overhauled. Over the years, the more I did to the car, the more I found out that what was supposed to have been done to the car before I bought it, had not been done, or needed to be done again. That tradition goes on as sometimes I must do something three times to get it right.



Over the years since then, I have had the front clip reworked and painted, then the whole car redone and painted including repairing floor pans, replacing hood and a quarter panel, trunk floor, and gas tank. The interior has been completely redone, with Legendary upholstery, new carpet, headliner, correct year radio, and more. Due to overheating, the water pump has been adjusted, the fan has been replaced and finally an aluminum radiator to resolve that problem. The Turbo 400 3-speed automatic transmission has been replaced with Tremec 5-speed manual for more fun, better highway driving, and better gas mileage. And, as you all know, something is always breaking or just needs replacing, so what still needs to be done? There is some rusting on the frame, there is an oil leak, the gas pedal doesn't always go down the way it should, and on and on. Will it ever be finished? Now I wonder if the great looking Judge, that was just professionally restored, was really too expensive, when I consider what I have spent on this one.

It was either just before or just after buying the car, that I joined the Gateway GTO Association. The first year or so, I couldn't take the GTO to the events for one reason or another, mostly because it was in pieces. I got involved with the GTOAA National Convention that we sponsored in 2005, at the now Double Tree Hotel in Maryland Heights. I was really impressed by how Gateway could come together to pull it off as such a success. Next, I inherited the Secretary position when the Secretary left the Club. Four years as Vice President, Missouri, and four years as President, leaves me at ease when I go to the monthly meeting and don't have to do anything. It has been a lot of work and a lot of fun, but mostly a lot of exceptional people. That being said, the best part of my GTO is the GTO and Pontiac people.

We have driven the GTO as far as Dayton and Columbus, OH, Wichita, KS, and Louisville, KY. It has been towed to Pittsburgh, PA and Saratoga, NY for GTOAA National Conventions.

