

Mike and Becky McNeil

2006 GTO

Becky and I purchased the 2006 GTO in July of that year. Laura Pontiac Buick GMC, of Collinsville Illinois, had several GTO's on their lot. The GTO's colors on the lot were silver, black and red along with the Brazen Orange Metallic that you see here. The only other variations in the cars were auto or 6 speed manual transmissions and 17 inch or 18 inch wheel and tire combinations. All of the modern GTO's were equipped the same except for the tire/wheels and transmissions. I was set on a 6-speed and 18 inch wheel package. I started many trips to the lot to see and study the cars.. That orange color sure reminded me of the wild colors that some muscle cars had in the late 60's and early 70's. Becky reminded me that we have had enough black cars. I took this to be an endorsement for the Brazen Orange GTO. I finally went on a test drive and was impressed how strong it ran. I had not experienced that much power since my 69 Camaro. I got Becky to drive and told her to floor it in 2nd gear and she was on board after that.

I had read many things about these cars and remember a video of the introduction of the 04 models with Jim Wangers. The cars were originally 350HP LS1 equipped. The 05 and 06 cars were LS2 400HP motors. This was accentually Z06 Corvette drive trains! Along with independent posi-track rear ends and super brakes and suspension systems, and great interiors, the GTO was a true modern muscle car. In 2006, these cars were, in a dollar per horse power comparison, the best value in the market. Then the word was out that 2006 was to be the last of these cars. Now I'm thinking these cars would be collectable in time. Remember how we have all said if we knew then what we know now we would have stashed away Ram Air cars, Judges, ZL1 Camaros, and Hemi Cudas? Well this might be that opportunity again.





The combination of color, transmission and wheel/tire combo makes our car 1 of 484.

As an owner of the modern GTO, It is interesting to see how the new generation GTO owners care for and modify their cars. Since the cars came out, they are now trading to the 2nd owners. This is when 04-06 GTO's will start to end up in younger hands and many will meet with abuse and wear and tear. The high mileage cars I've seen seem to be holding up well.

Many, if not most of these cars, have been modified. The cars can gain tremendous horse power increases to already impressive motors with forced induction. It is fun to watch what these cars obtain with mods. I have not done any mods to ours for two reasons. 1) I find the survivor cars at shows interest me greatly.

2) No Cash.

The most fun I've had with the GTO is when I entered in Autocrossing events. Our club has been invited the last three years as guests to the Route 66 Corvette Club's autocross at the Wentzville GM plant. I have had more fun participating in this form of motor sport then drag racing. It gives you the chance to go nuts with out a ticket, use your horsepower, power slide or drift, shift up and down, and use all of the suspension system against the clock. We found out that our cars are respectable against Corvettes. Most of the Corvettes that ran those days are modified for the track. Stock Corvette and stock GTO's are close.





I have been a Gear Head for the major part of my life. It started as a child with toys cars, such as E Type Jag, 64 Mustang with working head and tail lights, Indy cars of the day.

I also had Tonka Trucks and Fire Engines. As I grew older and more sophisticated, HO scale slot cars and model building was cool to do when you were still many years from a driver's license. I grew up in Macomb Illinois. Western Illinois University is in Macomb, We lived a couple of blocks from the campus and the student's park along our street while in class or at the dorms, I had every kind of muscle cars to see and study along that street.

One day I came in the house excited about a new Pontiac model called "Gran Prix" I had seen on the street for the first time.

I told Mom the name of the car, as I thought it was pronounced, to which she corrected me on the "Prix" part. I was amazed Mom knew so much about cars....



In 1966, our sister Sandy became the proud owner of a 66 GTO. Our cousin had first owned the GTO as his Mother had promised to buy it provided he not get back together with that girl his Mother despised. You can figure out how that worked out.

The day Sandy drove into the drive way with the GTO was big for my brother Dave and I. It was Burgundy. Dave and I were all over that car checking it all out. First thing we inspected was the hood scoop. We soon discovered it was non functional. As we continued our inspection, it became apparent this was not the fire breathing GTO we have read about in Hot Rod. It was absolutely gorgeous but a low performance version. Maybe that's why our cousin got back with that girl.

I have been involved in the maintenance and construction of golf courses and sports fields for my entire working career. I currently work for Schaefer-Meyer Seed and Sod of St. Charles Mo. I'm involved in the Laserturf Leveling division of the company that utilizes laser controlled grading equipment. I started as a golf course superintendent with a degree in Turf Management from Penn State University. I managed 3 golf facilities over a 16 year period. I then became involved in golf and sports field construction and have been building since 1994.

Turf is how I bought my first car. I mowed lawns since I was 11. First car was a 69 Chevelle SS 396 350HP. I had it for only a short while and traded for a 69 Camaro. The Camaro started life as a small block 350. I was the 2nd owner and the previous owner had installed a Holley carburetor and aluminum intake, along with Crager SS wheels. I had the Camaro thru high school and 2 years of college. During that period I had added headers, replaced the Transmission with a M21 with straight cut gears, Added a Hurst Competition Plus Shifter, changed from a 780 CFM to a 600 CFM Holley carburetor, added air shocks to handle the larger Crager SS rear wheels and tires, installed Sun Tach and oil pressure and water temp gauges.



I had the opportunity to drag race the Camaro in Beardstown Illinois when I was 16. I was petrified I would break the car but that never happened. A couple of guys from Macomb High were there to run also. A friend of ours had a 67 GTO. It was a Black 4 - speed 400 with Cragers and a white interior. That car was very sharp and probably one of my favorite color combinations.

The Camaro was traded away when I was in college at Penn State. The car was not reliable for my time out east. Several years after school, I found the Camaro in pieces and bought it back to restore. After a 2 year restoration it was reborn with a 396 ci 375 hp motor and new steel and paint. The pictures were after the renovation.

Over the years I have owned four Pontiacs. First one was a 1977 Trans Am with the 400 Pontiac motor. It was strong and handled very well. I traded a couple years later for a 1979 Trans Am. It had a low performance 301 motor. That car was a beautiful brown

with T-Tops. I had put a gold mini-lite style wheels on it that went well with the color of the car.

The car was a great cruiser but not impressive in the horse power department. This was a sad period for us Gear Heads.



The next Pontiac I had was a 1986 Fiero GT. This was in my opinion was a great car. V6, 4- speed, mid engine, 2 seat, sports car. From an engineering point this car broke ground for Pontiac. The composite body parts that didn't rust or dent was new to the auto world. This car had a sun roof that opened and also could be removed and stored under the front hood. There was a small plastic spoiler that attached to the front of the roof that smoothed the air over the opening and stopped the air buffeting in the cabin. This worked very well. I had over 175,000 miles on the GT when I sold it. Auto critics of the period were not kind to these cars but my experience was fantastic.



We joined Gateway GTO in 2006 when our car was new. I was happy that the members with the vintage GTO's were welcoming to the "new wave" owners. A lot of things have changed in this period for us Gear Heads. Pontiac was scuttled by GM. GM was almost scuttled. Mustang was joined by the retro Challenger. The Camaro returned, and Cadillac has a 556 hp Coupe with a 6 speed. The horsepower wars seem to be continuing into 2011.

Maybe this is a great time to be a Gear Head

