

My 1965 GTO

By
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After trading my original 1964 GTO, Tri Power, 4 speed sedan for a nondescript 1969 Catalina hardtop with a 2 barrel carb, I always had the urge to get another GTO. I did purchase a used 1969 Grand Prix a few years later. The Grand Prix was a Model J with an automatic transmission. I loved the styling with the long hood and short deck lid. But it was still not a GTO.

After getting married in 1970, and having two boys, there were no more Pontiacs in my immediate future, just a series of station wagons, a Pinto and a Ford conversion van. However, we did have several sports cars; we owned a Karman Ghia, Triumph Spitfire and a Datsun 280 ZX. Again, these cars were just not the same as a GTO. Finally in 1983, while going through a mid life crisis and a need for speed, I started looking for a 1964 GTO.

In the pre internet and EBay days, I would search the Sunday Post-Dispatch antique car ads. I finally found a 1965 GTO, 4 barrel with a 4 speed. I decided to buy it for 800. Little did I know that the \$800 was just the beginning. The 65 was pretty ugly, but it was a running, driving car that I could have fun with until I decided what I wanted to do with it. This is when the learning process began. The car was in gray primer and had the typical rust areas rear quarters, trunk, etc. This was before many of the replacement panels and trunk pans were available in reproduction; however, parts and trim could still be found in salvage yards.

To assist me in my restoration, I purchased Paul Z's Restoration Guide and started subscribing to various GTO newsletters and Hemmings Motor News. From these publications I determined that the car was originally burgundy with red interior. Prior to Pontiac Historical Services, you could write to Fred Simmons and PMD. If you were patient, he would send at no charge, the same information that is now available for a fee from PHS. This information con-

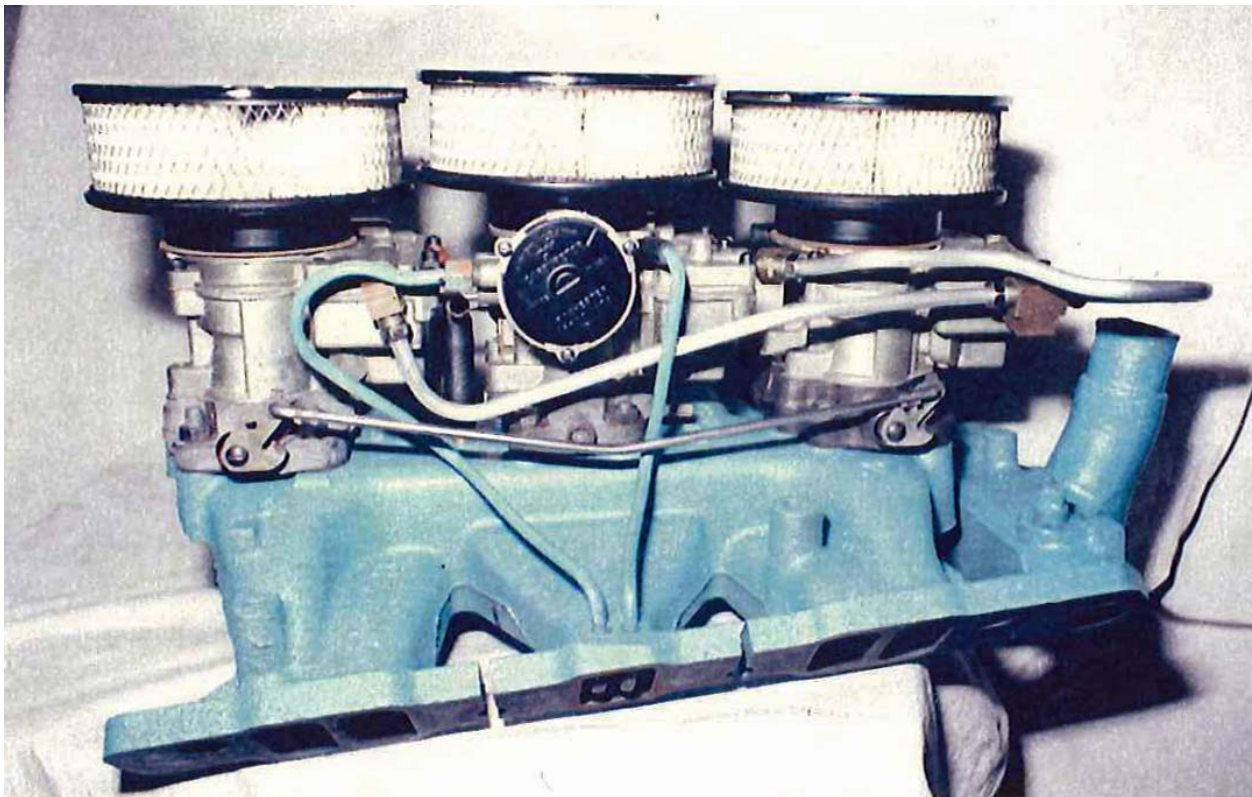


firmed that it was a true GTO. It was born with a 389 4 barrel, 4 speed, console, and radio.

I took the car to a local body shop for an estimate and learned there was no fixed price estimate on a restoration. The work would be done on a time and materials basis and I would need to start rounding up the parts needed. I found many of the missing trim, detailing pieces that I used to bring the engine compartment and interior back to original. My subscription to HEMMINGS came in handy. I was able find a complete trunk pan in Arizona, and a back seat without the stuffing coming through. The interior was actually in pretty good shape and only had to have a couple of areas re-stitched, new carpet, headliner and package tray.

I took the car to a local body shop owned by a guy I had gone to high school with. After the car was stripped, the typical rust on a '65 was found. Fortunately, lower quarter patch panels were available. It went into the shop and the work was begun! It seemed like the process took forever! When it was time for paint I decided to paint it with Montero Red rather than the original burgundy.

Since the motor was a non-original 400 with a 4 barre, l the obvious next step was to build a Tri-Power. I was fortunate to find a set of NOS carbs in the Post Dispatch for a total of \$150. Seemed like a lot of money at the time but what a bargain! A manifold was located in Hemmings and the linkage, air cleaners, etc. were available in reproduction.



The Tri -Power was a great addition, but it brought to light that the 400 was getting pretty tired. At that time Pontiac engines were plentiful in junk yards. I was able to find a 455 at Speedway Auto Salvage for \$100! It was a 1972 "YC" motor with "66" 108 cc heads. The next

stop was a visit to Jim Moran for a rebuild. Thirty over with forged aluminum pistons, Ram Air III cam, roller rockers, screw in studs, larger push rods, etc. Aluminum heads were not available until years in the future. The "66" heads actually worked out well on the street as they were big valve and about 9:1 compression. I also installed HO exhaust manifolds with cutouts. After trying several rear end ratios and breaking a 4:11 -10 bolt, I ended up running 3.73 - 12 bolt that seemed to produce the best times.

In those days the "club" would have drag events at Gateway for members; as well as, challenge matches with the Ford and Corvette clubs. The '65 always performed well, turning consistently in the 13:20's around 106 MPH.



After seeing an ad indicating that a new GTOAA Chapter was being formed in the St. Louis area, I drove the GTO to the first public Gateway Club meeting in South County at the Midas Muffler Shop. I'll never forget the ride to the meeting as transmission linkage loosened up and the car would not shift into 4th gear! Fortunately, even then, club members were willing to lend a helping hand and I was able to get home with no further problems.

I eventually sold the car to another club member, Doug Wollgast who installed a 389 and took it back to original burgundy color before selling. John Folluo purchased the Moran motor from Doug and ran it in a '70 Le Mans that he was building at that time.

A lot of memories and good times with the old '65!