



# Hot Air!



## Arizona Chapter #29 Volume 40 Number 5/6 May/June 2021

Founded 1981

Hot Air is the official publication of the Arizona Chapter #29 of the Pontiac-Oakland Club International. The publication will be distributed monthly. Editorial contributions welcome. Please submit articles for publication by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the preceding month of publication. Classified ads for members are free of charge. For advertising rates contact the editor. **LOCAL DUES are \$18.** Send to William Corbin, 13401 N Rancho Vistoso #104, Oro Valley, Az. 85755. This publication recommends chapter members to join our National club Pontiac-Oakland Club International. **NATIONAL DUES are \$45** for printed magazine, \$25 for electronic magazine. Contact POCI National PO Box 68, Maple Plain, Mn. 55359 e-mail [pociworldhq@aol.com](mailto:pociworldhq@aol.com) Ph 877-368-3454 Fax 763-479-3571. Renew memberships online at <http://www.poci.org> and go to the membership renewal tab or mail check to POCI, PO Box 68, Maple Plain, Mn. 55359 be sure to include your member number on your check.

**President** Thom Sherwood  
4348 E Timrod  
Tucson, Az 85711  
520-798-3200  
E-mail [output@colorteks.com](mailto:output@colorteks.com)

**Vice President** Bob Francis  
5821 W Belmont Rd  
Tucson, Az. 85743  
520-576-3143

**Treasurer** William Corbin  
13401 N Rancho Vistoso. #104  
Oro Valley, Az. 85755  
520-219-3481

**Editor** David A Green  
2113 S Avenida Planeta  
Tucson, Az. 85710  
520-747-2901

**NEXT MEETING WEDNESDAY JULY 14** Maria Bonitas Mexican Kitchen, 2708 E Ft.  
Lowell Rd. Tucson

**WEBSITE** [www.poci-azch29.com](http://www.poci-azch29.com)

**SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE**



# **CONTENTS**

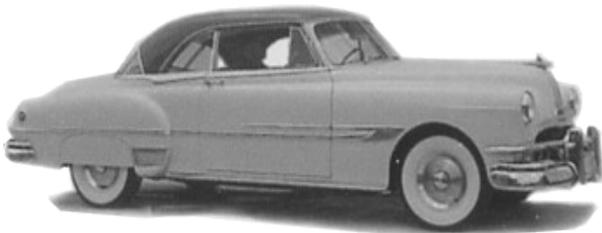
Editor's Report, Birthdays,  
Anniversaries, etc. Pages 2-3  
President's Report Pages 4 & 5  
Muster #8 Review Pages 6-11  
Muster #9 Pages 12-13  
Club Announcements Page 14  
For Sale Page 15  
GM Gold License Plate Page 16  
'67 Firebird Page 17-18  
Rockford/Hemmings Page 19  
Pontiac Drag Night Tucson, Az. Page 20



## **EDITOR'S REPORT**

Our Muster was very interesting with the visit to Truly Nolen's Car restoration facility. Thom picked out a nice spot for a photo opportunity.

We need to figure out how many cars will be showing at Tucson Classics car show in October. Please contact me. I want us to out-do the AACA this time!  
Dave



Cynthia Alto May 4  
Karen Reed May 9  
Randy Willard May 12  
Joe Daugherty May 15  
William Corbin May 20  
Kevin Christiansen May 21  
Santee Corbin May 23  
Becky Dodt May 28  
Virginia Rogers May 28  
Keith Berry June 9  
Laura McLin June 11  
Bob Maslana June 14  
Virginia Rogers June 14  
Sheldon Shafern June 17  
Karen Lynch June 19  
Paulette Francen June 27



**Lou & Cynthia Alto May 3**

**Keith & Jackie Berry May 5**

**Steve & Mary Disch May 6**

**William & Sandee Corbin May 20**

**Randy & Robin Redmond May 22**

**Dwight & Fran Gibbs May 23**

**Shano & Marilou Sancibrian  
June 9**

**David & Susan Green June 18**

**John & Becky Dodt June 21**

**Al & Donna Coloman June 27**  
*If you want your special day listed here  
contact me! [alpdavegre@msn.com](mailto:alpdavegre@msn.com)*

---

**CLUB OUTINGS AND  
OTHER EVENTS**

**OFFICIAL CLUB EVENT:**

**Muster #9**

**Details to be announced in this issue**

More info found at [cruisinarizona.com](http://cruisinarizona.com) and  
[desertcruisers.com](http://desertcruisers.com)

**Note new day and times**

Little Anthony's Car Show

Night Shows 6pm - 9pm

May 29, June 12, 26, July 10, 24, Aug 7, 21

**Please check on the availability of these  
shows.**

Gaslight Music Hall Car Show in Oro Valley

Day time shows, 10am-2pm.

Freddie's Cruise-in, Thursday nights.

Cars & Coffee Car Show: Lowe's Center, Ina  
& Thornydale, Second Saturday of every

Month 7am-9:30am.

Hot Rods at Old Vail Car & Bike Swap Meet

happens Third Saturday of each Month.

All events listed are in Tucson except noted.

**2021**

**July**

**July 11-15 49<sup>th</sup> Annual POCI Convention,  
Uncasville, CT.**





## We Have Saved the BEST for Last!

*The seemingly never-ending “tunnel” of virus restrictions has finally ended. And soon, it will be time to return to our indoor meetings. But first, we’ve got an actual tunnel to drive through!*

While my statement above might sound like some silly attempt at a metaphor, it fully describes what is about to happen with our club. It’ll all make perfect sense in just a moment. Read on...

The past 15 months have been defined by the coronavirus. I’m so glad to see that era quietly slipping away, becoming a thing of the past. While it did encourage our club to adapt to a series of fun, outdoor Musters, few other good things can be said about that timeframe.

During the Driver’s Meeting at our most recent Muster #8, I spontaneously asked everyone in attendance if they were willing to return to our indoor dinnertime meeting format. The response was overwhelmingly in favor of doing so.

I, too, am ready to get back to that, but we’ve got just one more Muster scheduled for June 19th. Seriously, you really won’t want to miss it, as I’ve literally saved the best for last. More on that in just a moment...

This issue of *HOT AIR* is a special one, combining our May and June issue with all sorts of goodies inside.

The month of June itself is very special, as we can very proudly celebrate our **chapter’s 40th Anniversary!** (Cue the balloons, confetti and noise makers!) On June 25, 1981, the POCI Board of Directors approved our statewide charter as Arizona Chapter #29. Congrats to us! Four decades is certainly a noteworthy accomplishment.

We have big plans to mark the occasion later in the year when outdoor temperatures will be much more friendly. Keep Saturday, November 6th open on your calendar for our special anniversary event with a big display of your cars and trucks. We’ll have birthday cake, special recognitions and much more in Casa Grande, Arizona!

Earlier, I mentioned Muster #8, **“Pontiacs on Pontatoc.”** It was, like most all of our previous driving events,

*CONTINUED NEXT PAGE...*



*ABOVE: Thom Sherwood’s black 1970 GTO and Skip Reed’s 1967 GMC Truck.*



**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED...**

a rousing success. I want to sincerely thank everyone for their participation. Look for photos and a review elsewhere in this issue.

So, what's all this talk about a "tunnel" at our upcoming **Muster #9**? Well, I suspect that few of you have ever been beyond the very north end of Thornydale Road. It ends at the base of the Tortolita Mountains where a sign reads "Private Property, No Trespassing." Just beyond that is an actual tunnel carved into the mountain followed by a private gate and a nicely paved two-lane road.

So, guess what? For this next Muster, called "**Northwest Passage**," we'll be allowed to drive our Pontiacs and GMCs through that tunnel and past the gate! There, we'll experience a very exclusive, picturesque area known as Saguaro Ranch. The boulder-strewn and saguaro cactus-studded landscape makes it feel "other-worldly." We'll be the special guests of the yet-to-be opened **Owner's Club at Moonlight Canyon**.

Even the lead-up to that morning's adventure will be equally fun as we first caravan through the community of Rancho Vistoso in Oro Valley (home to our treasurer, **Bill Corbin**). The local residents there will be alerted in advance to our group's passage, so we just might see some of them outdoors as spectators, waiting along the sidewalk to wave hello to us. Be sure to wave back at 'em! Look for all the details elsewhere in this issue.

Please make every effort to join us then for what is expected to be our very last Muster. You'll be very glad you did. *See you there!*



**ABOVE:** Chris Pronneke's 1989 Grand Am LE coupe. **BELOW:** Randy Rogers (left) and Scott Svenheim discuss new-generation GTO performance.



**BOTTOM:** Our Muster #8 kicked-off with a Driver's Meeting which brought everyone together underneath the shadetree behind McDonalds on May 8.



## MUSTER #8 REVIEW: PONTIACS on PONTATOC SATURDAY, MAY 8, 2021

Over the past year, we've visited some obscure nooks, crannies and seldom-driven passages throughout Pima County. Some of our caravans have been on winding, serpentine roads, while others were hilly and adventurous. Our most recent **Muster #8, Pontiacs on Pontatoc**, combined all of that while providing us with a whole lot of fun!

The plan was to descend all the way from the heights of the Santa Catalina Foothills to the Rillito riverbed before visiting a pair of nearby automotive repair/restoration facilities.

Our one piece of bad news that morning came when **Mark Bybee**, owner of Western Differential, had to cancel our planned tour of his shop due to an urgent personal health issue that cropped up the day before.

Regardless, we welcomed a total of 17 Pontiacs and GMC Trucks at our designated rendezvous point in northern Tucson. Our group included **John & Paulette Francen** with their 1955 GMC, but because a flaky battery in their truck made it too risky for them to proceed with our caravan, they wisely opted to head back home instead.

Once the remainder of our caravan was fired-up and ready to roll, we followed through with our run as planned. Our first Photo Stop was at the rustic DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun, once the home of the late, prolific Tucson artist, **Ted DeGrazia**.

Forging ahead, we added a last-minute additional neighborhood climb and descent (*right*) to an overlook cul-de-sac which afforded us a great view of the Tucson valley... again, one of those fun, off-the-beaten path locations.

One fun and quirky moment happened shortly afterwards when our group was seen rounding the corner of *Pontatoc Road* and *Catalina Avenue* — quite an appropriately named intersection for our group, wouldn't you say?

Tagging along with our group that

morning was guest **Scott Svenheim** behind the wheel of his semi-custom bright yellow 2004 GTO. Scott is employed by Truley Nolen's corporate office and was instrumental in helping secure our tour of their restoration shop as the final destination of our Muster.

Upon our arrival at the Truly Nolen facility, we were greeted by a young, enthusiastic host, **Jackson Fuhrman**, who along with his grandfather **Butch**, tend to all the classic cars that make up the pest control company's "antique" inventory.

Jackson began our tour by revealing Truly's very first personal classic, a bright red '57 Chevy convertible. He explained how the company has grown over the years, due in part to the clever use of automobiles bedecked with the founder's namesake which appears as advertising on an impressive mobile fleet. Those cars have become commonly seen fixtures as parked on metropolitan street corners in Arizona, California and Florida.

Currently, their fleet includes only a single Pontiac, a rare 1956 Pathfinder

model from Canada. (That Pontiac, as powered by an inline-6 Chevrolet motor, had recently returned to Truley's Tucson garage following a street-side advertising stint in Yuma, AZ. Sadly, it had to be sent out again just prior to our tour.

Special thanks go to Jackson and to Scott for their spirit of cooperation that morning!

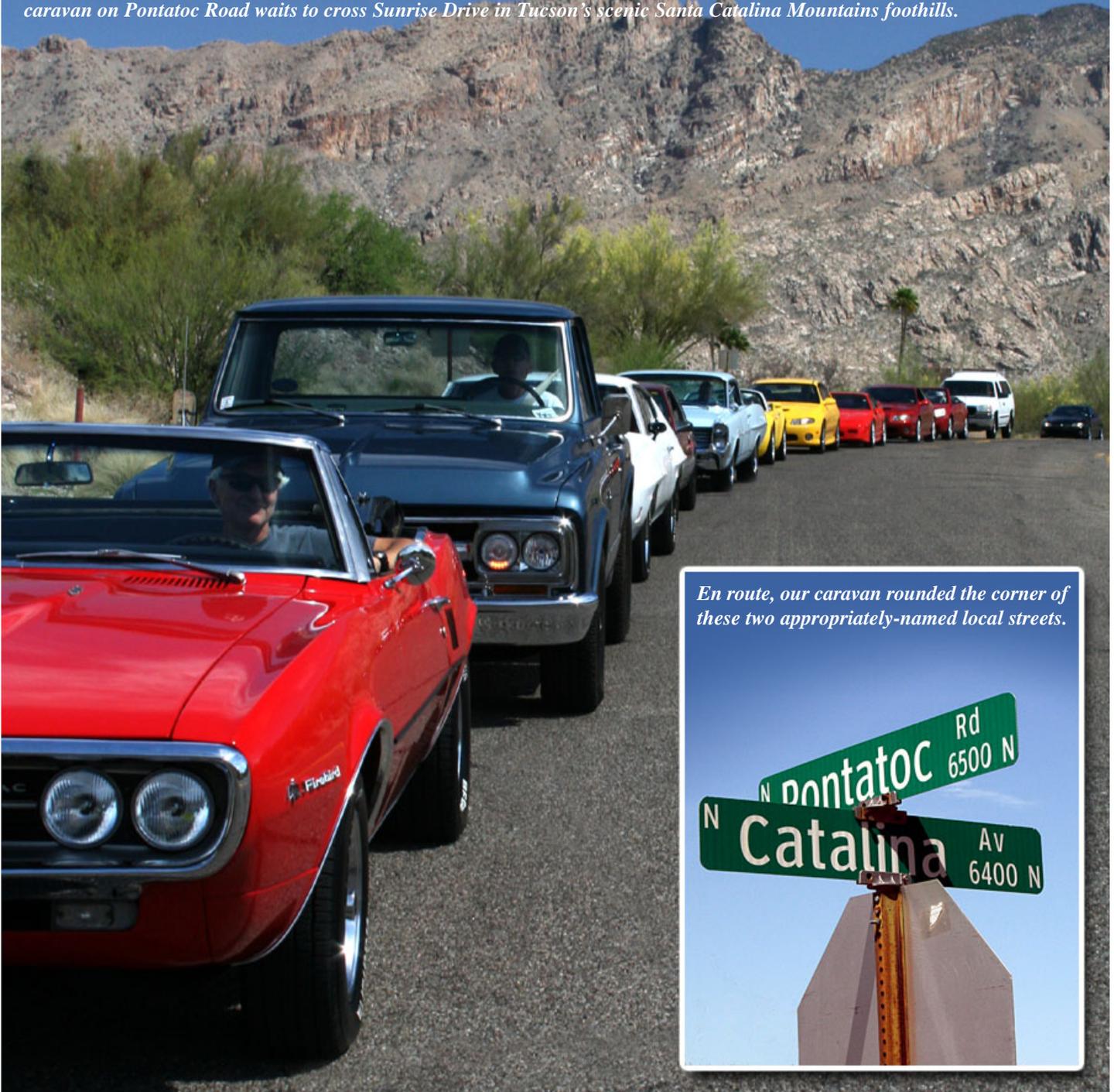
Late to our party but nonetheless warmly welcomed was **David Clark** with his black 2006 GTO. David explained that he had valve stem issues that morning, but was eventually able to meet up with us at the Truly Nolen stop. Once David's *Star Wars*-themed "VADRGTO" joined our handsome lineup of Pontiacs and GMCs, we had no fewer than four "new-gen" GTOs in attendance. *Cool!*

Also joining us that morning for his second-ever Muster was **Steve Conley** with his battery-powered 1985 Firebird. The amount of engineering work that Steve has put into his "Coppertop" Pontiac is no less than exceptional. Great to see you again, Steve!





*ABOVE (from left): Mean Yellow Randy Rogers ('07 Solstice GXP) and Scott Svenheim ('04 GTO), plus Jack Johnson and Cathy Lanigan ('55 Safari Custom) tackle the incline of La Paloma Drive, just below Finger Rock. BELOW: Our handsome caravan on Pontatoc Road waits to cross Sunrise Drive in Tucson's scenic Santa Catalina Mountains foothills.*



*En route, our caravan rounded the corner of these two appropriately-named local streets.*



*ABOVE (from left): Louis & Eddie Adams and Richard Johnson; This 1957 Chevy convertible was personally owned by Truly Nolen, and not part of his extensive classic and modern advertising fleet as partially pictured below with a stretched VW limo.*



*BELOW: Our Muster #8 concluded with a visit to Tucson's Truly Nolen Garage where we lined-up our proud fleet of Pontiacs and GMC Trucks. Steve Conley's electric-powered 1985 Firebird occupies "front and center." INSET: Our group was "Truly" welcomed by a young, enthusiastic host, Jackson Fuhrman.*





**BECKY & JOHN DODT**



**STEVE CONLEY**



**LOUIS ADAMS**



**SUE & DAVE GREEN**



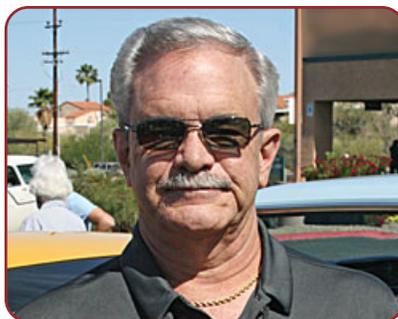
**FRED MICLON**



**SKIP REED**



**BILLIE & RUSS STEINEBACH**



**SCOTT SVENHEIM**



**LOU FELDMAN**



**JOHN & PAULETTE FRANCEN**



**BARRY SPARKS**



**RANDY ROGERS**



**VALERIE & RICHARD JOHNSON**



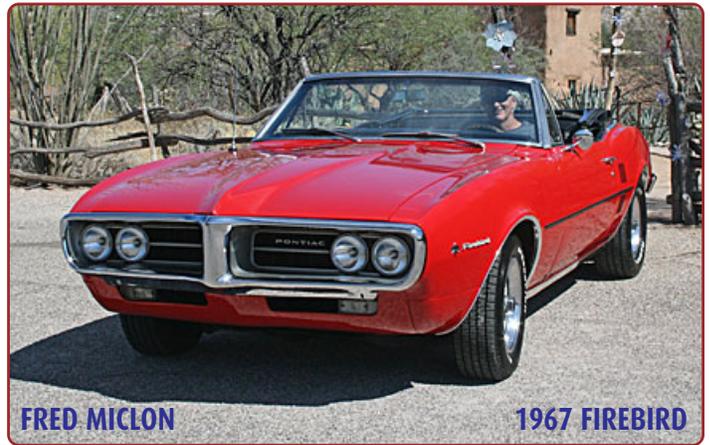
**CHRIS PRONNEKE**



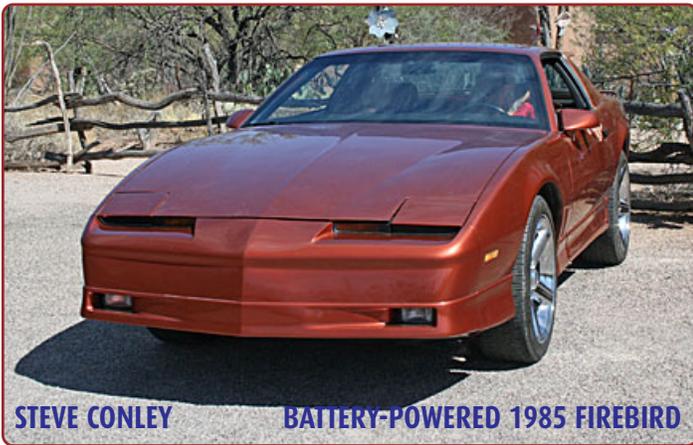
**DAVID CLARK**



**JOHN & PAULETTE FRANZEN** 1955 GMC SERIES 100



**FRED MICLON** 1967 FIREBIRD



**STEVE CONLEY** BATTERY-POWERED 1985 FIREBIRD



**CHRIS PRONNEKE** 1989 GRAND AM LE



**RICHARD & VALERIE JOHNSON** 1988 FIERO GT



**DAVE & SUE GREEN** 2002 GMC SIERRA SLE



**JACK JOHNSON & CATHY LANIGAN** 1955 SAFARI CUSTOM



**SCOTT SVENHEIM** 2004 GTO



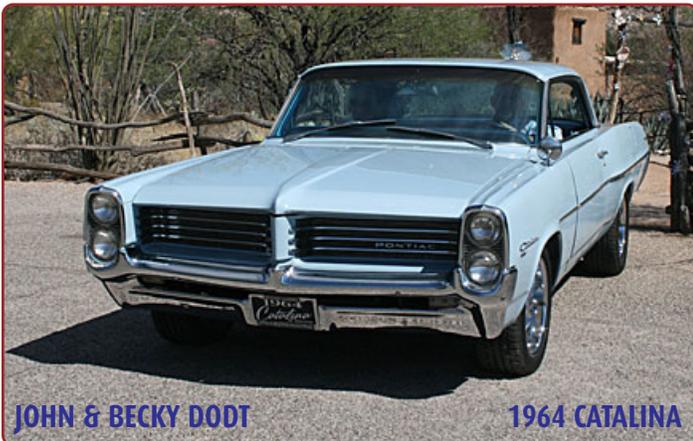
**SKIP REED**

**1967 GMC CUSTOM**



**LOUIS ADAMS**

**1970 GTO**



**JOHN & BECKY DODT**

**1964 CATALINA**



**RANDY ROGERS**

**2007 SOLSTICE GXP**



**RUSS & BILLIE STEINEBACH**

**2007 G6 GT**



**LOU FELDMAN**

**2006 GTO**



**DAVID CLARK'S 2006 GTO and BARRY SPARKS' 2004 GTO**

# NEXT LOCAL EVENT! **Final Muster #9 • “Northwest Passage” • Saturday, June 19, 2021**

**DATE & TIME:** Saturday, June 19, 2021. **Meet at 9:00am.** There is no cost to participate in today’s event.

**FRIENDS and FAMILY:** Friends and family are welcomed to join along inside your Pontiac or GMC Truck. **It’s Father’s Day Weekend, so we encourage you to make it a family outing.**

**TOTAL DISTANCE COVERED:** Today’s route (one way) is approximately 23 miles. All designated roads are fully paved.

**STARTING LOCATION:** McDonalds at 292 W. Magee Rd, Tucson, AZ 85704, **(“A” on map)** on the northeast corner of Magee & Oracle Roads. **PLEASE PARK NEXT DOOR** at Pusch Ridge Automotive (which will be closed this morning, so we can take over their parking lot). For anyone needing fuel, there is a Speedway Gas and convenience store nearby in the same plaza. We’ll depart approximately 20 minutes later following a Driver’s Meeting in front of Pusch Ridge Automotive.

**ROUTE, PHOTO STOPS and DESTINATION:** Our caravan will head north on Oracle Road, approximately five miles, going past the El Conquistador Resort and Steam Pump Village, etc. We anticipate that our group will be split up by the traffic signals along the way, but that’s OK.

Turn right at the light (EAST) into the entrance road for Catalina State Park. Prior to reaching the park’s Ranger Station Gate, we’ll pull over to the side of the road, and regroup there **(“B”)**. Please remain lined-up (end-to-end) for individual photos of all participants and group photos once everyone has caught up. We will NOT be entering the park itself today.

Once everyone has been photographed, we’ll make a U-turn (just prior to the Ranger Station) and wait for the traffic light in order to cross Oracle Road and head west into Oro Valley Marketplace.

Follow that main divided roadway, watching for the speed bumps as we pass the Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Walmart, etc. At the far north end of that shopping district, we’ll cross Tangerine Road at the traffic signal and continue north on Innovation Park Drive, passing Oro Valley Hospital on our left.

At the second traffic light, make a left (NORTHWEST) onto Rancho Vistoso Boulevard so that we can begin our big, counter-clockwise loop around the neighborhoods of Rancho Vistoso. Please stay in the right-hand (curb) lane. Exit the loop by making a right (WEST) at the traffic signal for Moore Road.

Once on Moore Road, continue west approximately five miles. Turn right (NORTH) on Thornydale Road. On the far side of the roundabout, ignore the “No Trespassing” sign and continue north through the tunnel into Saguaro Ranch. On the other side of the tunnel, our caravan will be waved through the guarded entrance gate so that we can wind our way up Old Ranch Road to our furthest destination, the Owner’s Club at Moonlight Canyon **(“C”)**. There, you will need to parallel park along the side of the canyon road before strolling to the clubhouse.

---

**Please note that we have been invited to enter an upscale environment that is not normally accessible to the public. Accordingly, we should present ourselves with appropriate manners and an appreciation for this rare opportunity.**

---

**OWNER’S CLUB TOUR:** We have been personally invited to tour the new construction of the Owner’s Club building. Miramonte Homes’ Facility Manager Peggy McMillen will be our hostess and provide us with a brief introduction and overview of this very exquisite, exclusive development. This stop will last about 20 minutes. Be sure to bring your camera — the views south towards Tucson are priceless!

**SNACKS & RESTROOMS:** Complimentary refreshments will be provided at this clubhouse stop. Restrooms available inside.

**PHOTO STOP #2 and FINAL WRAP:** Following our visit with Peggy at the clubhouse, we’ll reverse our route and head back towards Tucson. With your patience and cooperation, we’ll attempt to photograph each vehicle individually as you SLOWLY EXIT the scenic Saguaro Ranch Tunnel **(“D”)** on this return route.

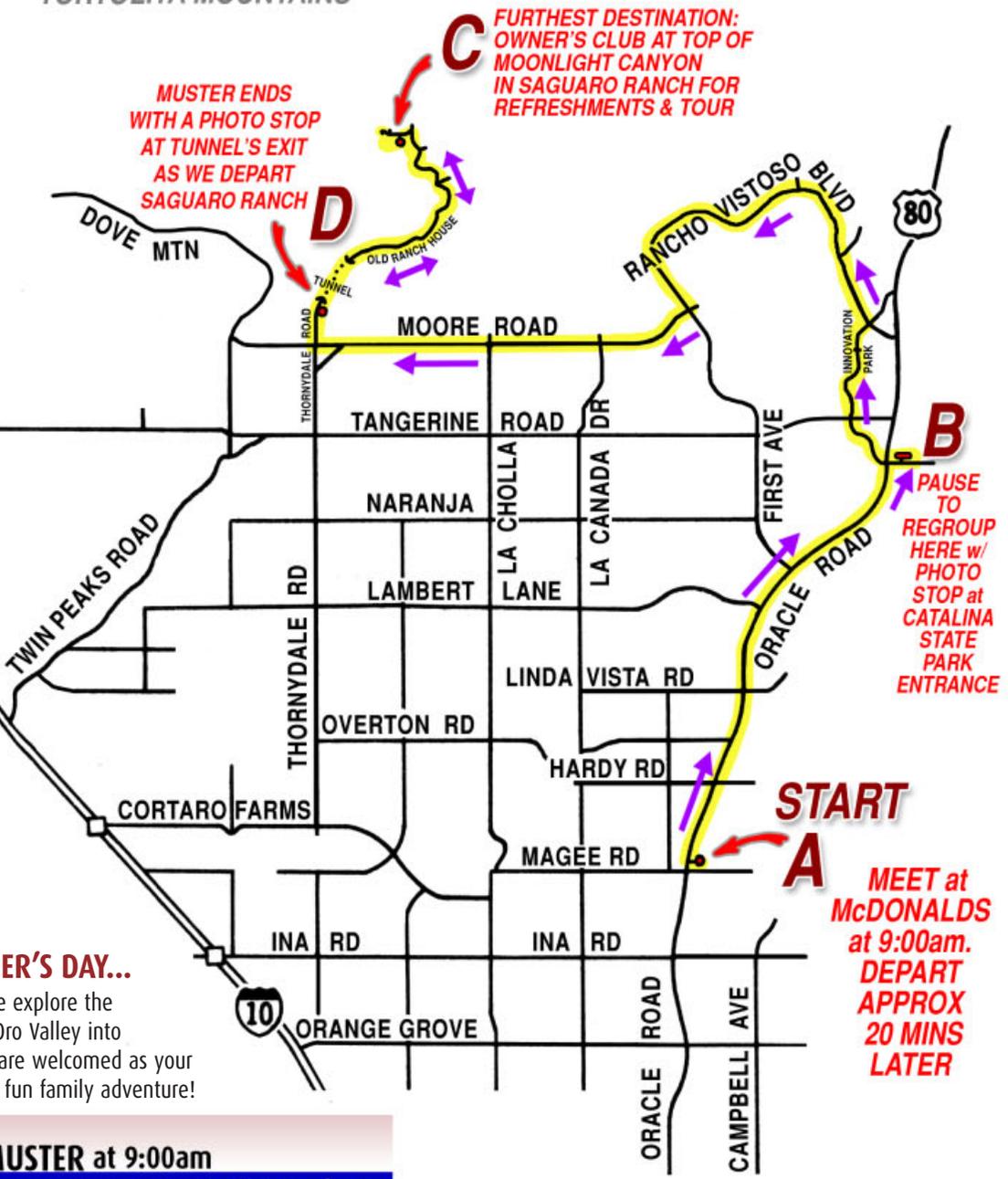
**END OF MUSTER:** Our Muster #9 ends after your final photo outside of the tunnel (please remain inside your car). We’ll look for you next month at the car show during *Pontiac Night at Tucson Dragway* (Saturday, July 10), and upon our long overdue return to indoor dinner meetings on Wednesday, July 14. *Thank you!*

**• YOU MAY WISH TO PRINT OUT THE MAP ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE •**

# FINAL SATURDAY MORNING MUSTER!

**TUCSON, ARIZONA**  
**SATURDAY**  
**JUNE 19, 2021**

**TORTOLITA MOUNTAINS**



**ON THE DAY BEFORE FATHER'S DAY...**  
 Join us during our last Muster as we explore the hidden NORTHWEST PASSAGE from Oro Valley into Saguaro Ranch. Family and friends are welcomed as your passengers this morning. Make it a fun family adventure!

**LEGEND** MUSTER at 9:00am  
 Departure approx 20 minutes later

- A** **START LOCATION:** McDonald's on NE corner of Magee and Oracle Roads. Meet at 9:00am. PARK NEXT DOOR at Pusch Ridge Automotive (they'll be closed that morning). Gas is available at Speedway Fuel in the same plaza, to the north.
- B** **PAUSE to REGROUP:** Pull-over to the side of the divided entrance roadway leading into Catalina State Park to allow our caravan to regroup and for individual photos.
- C** **FURTHEST DESTINATION:** Our journey into Saguaro Ranch will lead us upwards to Moonlight Canyon where we will enjoy a hosted tour and presentation of the new Owner's Club.

- ## PHOTO STOPS
- B** **CATALINA STATE PARK ENTRANCE:** Once you have come to a halt here, please exit your vehicle so that Thom can snap an individual photo of you with all of your passengers posed next to your Pontiac or GMC. Stay remain parked until everyone from our group has been photographed.
  - D** **SAGUARO RANCH TUNNEL EXIT:** We'll photograph each car as it exits the tunnel at the very end of today's Muster. **PLEASE REMAIN INSIDE YOUR CAR.**

## NEW MEETING VENUE!

One of the unfortunate casualties of the pandemic was the closure of our longtime club meeting spot, **Cody's Restaurant**. There, we were quite fortunate to have a convenient, central Tucson location with a "just-right-sized" meeting space, available without a room rental fee. Plus, our members and guests had the ability to order and pay for dinner individually. All of those perks, when added together, remained a hard combination to beat. Sadly, after 17 years, we've had to say goodbye to it.

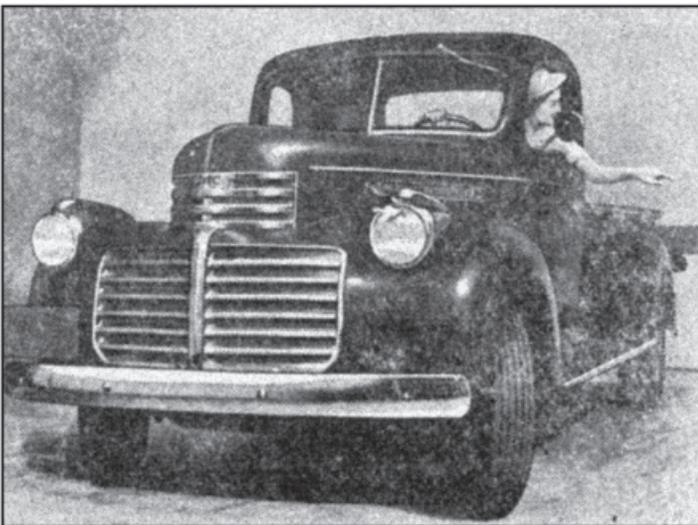
Fortunately, in that very same space comes an all-new restaurant, **Maria Bonita's Mexican Kitchen**. We have recently reached out to its owners (and namesake of the restaurant), **Maria and Mario Gonzales**. They are currently busy remodeling the space and awaiting their liquor license. They are anxious for us to continue on with our second-Wednesday-of-the-month meeting dates... Same address, same time, but with a new menu (including one or two *non-Mexican* food items offered as well).

So yes, we now have a standing agreement to hold our upcoming monthly meetings there **beginning July 14th**. We'll be anxious to check it out! (And, as a fun side note, Mario fondly remembers that his first-ever car was a 1968 Pontiac Catalina, painted Verdoro Green. *How cool is that?*)

### THESE NAME TAGS WILL BE READY FOR PICKUP AT MUSTER #9:

*Richard & Valerie Johnson; Lou, Debra & Eliana Feldman; David Clark; Fred & Jane Miclon; and David Blatt.*

### Passenger Car Steering Ease Featured in GMC Trucks



Here's a truck a woman could drive! This modern General Motors Truck, with its Ball-Bearing Steering, handily placed controls, ample leg room and buoyant seat cushions is

as comfortable and easy to handle as a passenger car. Steering effort is reduced as much as 57 per cent; and today's GMC truck driver finds his driving task much easier and safer.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Also scheduled in July will be our second **Pontiac Night at Tucson Dragway**. Just like last year, we'll open this activity up to ALL members and non-members alike, but because this year's event will be held on a Saturday night, we expect to see greater participation from out-of-towners.

Even if you don't care to run your vehicle down the quarter-mile track, you are encouraged to come out and spectate while supporting the club with our very own **Pontiac-GMC vehicle display in the pit area**. The date for this outing is **Saturday, July 10th**. Look for a flyer with all the details elsewhere in this issue.

Tucson Dragway's *Street Rally* is an event that is meant to cater to the street racing crowd. Drag cars are welcome but not the priority for the night! The track will be prepped and ready for grudge racing, call outs, timed runs and fun side-by-side racing action!

Each Street Rally has drag racing and roll racing to provide racers the opportunity to simulate what they would be doing on the streets but in a safer place with the proper rescue teams and track personal in place.

**ALSO COMING...** On Saturday, August 7th, our club will return to **Little Anthony's Diner for a Cruise Night!** Be sure to save that date. More details will be announced soon.

**POCI 2021 CONVENTION**

PONTIAC OAKLAND CLUB INTERNATIONAL

YANKEE CHAPTER

WICKED FUN IN '21

Mohegan Sun  
a legendary meeting destination

Uncasville, Connecticut • July 11 - 15, 2021

Hosted by the Yankee Chapter of P.O.C.I.



## FOR SALE

These ads will run for 2 months then be deleted so contact the editor before this deadline  
Dave Green [alpdaevegre@msn.com](mailto:alpdaevegre@msn.com) 520-747-2901

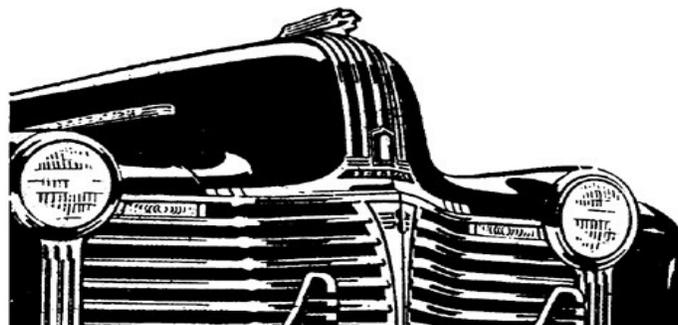
**WANTED** I want to buy a spectacular 1958 Pontiac convertible. Ideally, a former trailer queen that has had a few thousand gentle weekend miles since restoration. "The ultimate weekend driver". I would consider any Bonneville, Chieftain, or Parisienne. Must be a rust free, turn-key condition car. Cash buyer. Steve Edwards (615) 477-2121. email: [sarapalms@aol.com](mailto:sarapalms@aol.com)

**Wanted**; For a 1969 GTO front endura nose. Contact Rich Johnson 208-520-8022  
[johnrich2011@gmail.com](mailto:johnrich2011@gmail.com)

FOR SALE: 1967 Catalina 2-door hardtop. 400-2bbl, automatic, all recently rebuilt. Recent repaint to original Signet Gold with black vinyl roof and interior, new tires. Hasn't been started in awhile, now needs fresh gas. Asking \$15,000. Offered by longtime owner and former Arizona Chapter member Mike Dynka, (480) 830-0847, Mesa, AZ

# CHALLENGE!

WE CHALLENGE YOU TO SPEND TEN MINUTES IN A 1941



## PONTIAC 'TORPEDO'

👉 You'll say it's the greatest car in the world. 3 lines. 10 body styles. Your choice of a six or an eight in any model. Come in today!

*It's Another Big Year For Pontiac!*



As a retired Pontiac-GMC Truck dealer, I've had my share of one-of-a-kind automotive adventures. Here are some fun nuggets from the many great years spent with my two favorite brands.



*Gerson M. Goldberg*

## THE CASE OF THE MISSING LICENSE PLATE

When we moved our Pontiac dealership from our old facility at 9 Thames Street in Norwich, Connecticut, to our new modern (for 1965) facility at 400 West Thames St., we thought it would be a good idea to change our license plate issued by the State of Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. Maybe a number like 400 was available?

The plates issued to automotive dealers in Connecticut featured a contiguous series of numbers or letters. New-car dealers were **Xa-*nnn*** where "a" would be a letter from A to Z and "nnn" would be a number from 1 through 999. Used-car dealers were **Da-*nnn*** and auto repair shops were **Ra-*nnn***. Our street number at the new location was 400, so my

brother, Joe, asked the State Highway Commissioner for help, and we were able to get the X-400 series.

When an employee needed a plate to drive an unregistered car on the highway, they would take one from the office and return it when done. However, a few plates weren't returned. One such

**THE LICENSE PLATE SOMEHOW BECAME 'LOST.' IMAGINE THAT.**

plate was XS-400, which our Service Department decided to keep in the service write-up area.

This practice of mostly haphazard

distribution of plates was not really what the DMV envisioned. By the time in 1969 when I returned to the dealership after my stint in the Army, all dealers had been advised to keep accurate records of who used what plates and when.

Rather than haphazardly assigning plates as needed, I instituted a plan that allowed employees to choose one plate and be responsible for it.

The service department was quick to claim XS-400 as they were already using it; I chose XG-400. Others, within the pecking order at the dealership, chose and were assigned their own plates. Now if someone wanted to know who had been driving XA-400 over the weekend, we knew it was our New Car Sales Manager, Fran, and so forth.

The only problem was now that we had cars like the Trans Am with a 400cid V8, which when the new version came out in a few months, would be my demonstrator. I *really* wanted XS-400 on the back. However, even as the boss's son, I wasn't about to upset my Service Manager who also really liked that combo.

Periodically, the State would replace all plates, typically switching colors from white to blue and the following year blue to white. We turned in all plates, paid our substantial plate fees, and started using the new plates. Well, except for the ones that had become *lost* — as some were wont to do. It seems that just before the changeover one year, the XS-400 plate suddenly became "lost." Imagine that. Later when it was found, it somehow ended up in my desk drawer.

There is absolutely no truth to the rumor that it occasionally showed up on the back of one of my cars at various car shows, especially when I was showing a car which had a 400 engine. *Nope*, not a shred of truth to that whatsoever! 🍌

Share your thoughts with Gerson at [gmgold@q.com](mailto:gmgold@q.com)



# 1967 Pontiac

## FIREBIRD 326



The two-barrel V-8 balances power and practicality in this sporty pony car

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS A. DeMAURO

General Manager Semon E. “Bunkie” Knudsen came to Pontiac in the summer of 1956 with a plan to reinvigorate the division by developing new models that spoke to a younger generation, and it proved to be successful. By 1959, Pontiac had moved up from sixth place in sales to fourth, and in 1961, it rose to third place.

Knudsen was promoted to general manager of Chevrolet late that year, but Chief Engineer Elliot M. “Pete” Estes took the helm at Pontiac and enjoyed continued success. The youth market was then changed forever in 1964 with the release of the highly popular GTO. Estes became Chevrolet’s general manager in 1965 and Chief Engineer John Z. DeLorean, who was largely credited with the GTO’s success, ascended to the top position at PMD.

DeLorean wanted to produce the XP-833 two-seat sports car, which weighed less than the Corvette and had a lower price point. GM had other ideas, however, and instead decided Pontiac would share the already-in-development F-body pony car—Chevrolet’s Mustang-fighter, Camaro. Costs

could be minimized, and Pontiac’s version would also compete with Mercury’s upcoming and upscale Cougar.

Despite concerns over the late start and how little could be changed since the program was so far along, the division got right to work, and the stylish Firebird was released in late February 1967. Though it shared its chassis, inner structure, and much of its outer skin with the Camaro that had debuted several months before, the Firebird still emanated Pontiac charm.

It was visually separated from its Chevrolet sibling with a bumper treatment that surrounded the four headlamps and recessed split grilles, and had a center divider. The hood design was reminiscent of an ironing board, and simulated louvers were added to the quarter panels. Slotted taillamps, a reshaped fuel filler door, and a more substantial-appearing bumper revised the rear view. The seat upholstery and other small items also differed.

The changes were more than just skin deep, however. Marketed as the “Magnificent Five” Firebirds, each was defined by a specific Pontiac engine offering, with com-

plementing revisions to the unequal-length control arm front suspension and mono-leaf rear spring layout. For a few, certain drivetrain parts and more trim items were also added. Each package sought to fulfill a particular set of customer preferences.

The “Firebird 326,” featured here, was the sporty-yet-practical V-8 ‘Bird with a 250-hp 326. A 165-hp 230-cu.in. OHC-straight-six engine powered the economical base model, the European sports-car-like “Firebird Sprint” boasted a 215-hp OHC-6, the sprightly “Firebird HO” a 285-hp 326, and the muscular “Firebird 400” a 325-hp 400 or extra-cost Ram Air 400.

Pontiac’s 326-cu.in. V-8 had been a Division staple since 1963 (it was actually 336-cu.in. that first year) in the Y- and then A-body Tempest and Le Mans models. The 9.2:1 compression two-barrel version of the engine featured cast parts in its reciprocating assembly, a smooth idle was provided by the 269/277-degree advertised duration hydraulic camshaft with .375/.410 lift, and a set of 1.92/1.64 valves, valve springs, and 1.5:1 ratio rocker arms adorned the heads. A single breaker-point



distributor was used, and the spent combustion fumes exited through cast-iron manifolds, and a single exhaust system. (The 326 HO had a four-barrel, dual exhaust, and a higher compression ratio.)

Unless the extra-cost two-speed automatic or four-speed manual were specified with the 326, a three-speed manual transmission was installed. Various rear gear ratios and myriad other options were available, including power front disc brakes to replace the 9.5-inch drums.

How effective was Pontiac's styling? John A. Zampino of Virginia recalls, "I really liked the Camaro, but I felt that the Firebird was even more unique." He was just 22 years old and living in Queens, New York, back when he ordered this Tyrol Blue Firebird from Myrtle Motors Corp. in Maspeth.

He limited the options to the 326, four-speed, Safe-T-Track (3.23:1 gear ratio), Rally II wheels, pushbutton AM radio, rear antenna, door-edge guards, Custom Trim (aka Custom Option Firebird or Deluxe),

Rally gauges, console, floor mats, heavy-duty battery, and the dealer-installed undercoating, to create a practical package that remained within this new accountant's budget.

Now, 53 years on, John still owns his 70,500-mile Firebird and drives it regularly. It remains highly original (paint, interior, powertrain, etc.) with just maintenance items and a few small wear parts changed over the years. He says, "You can always just repair a wrecked restored car to make it as good as new again, but an original car is only original once, so I'm extra careful with my Firebird, as I want to keep it that way as long as possible."

Pontiac was tasked with developing its pony car from the F-body Camaro on a tight schedule, and everyone at the Division knew that for it to be successful, the Firebird had to stand out from its stablemate in every feasible aspect. The collective effort was effective and memorable, as the Firebird is idolized by many today. 🚗

### SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Engine</b>	OHV V-8; cast-iron block and cylinder heads
<b>Displacement</b>	326-cu.in.
<b>Horsepower</b>	250 @ 4,600 rpm
<b>Fuel system</b>	Two-barrel with cast-iron intake manifold
<b>Transmission</b>	Three-speed manual (standard); four-speed manual or two-speed automatic (optional)
<b>Wheelbase</b>	108.1 inches
<b>Length</b>	188.8 inches
<b>Width</b>	72.6 inches
<b>Height</b>	51.5 inches
<b>Curb weight</b>	3,266 pounds
<b>Base price</b>	\$2,666 hardtop
<b>Production</b>	82,560 hardtop and convertible; 40,210 with 326 two-barrel engine; 7,719 with 326 two-barrel engine and manual transmission



Firebird Story (Courtesy of Hemmings Motor News Dec 2020)

# Pontiac People

*With its brilliant melding of style and performance, this GM division left a lasting impact*

COMPILED BY TERRY McGEAN AND MATTHEW LITWIN • PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY HEMMINGS READERS

In 1926, Pontiac was born from GM division Oakland to fill a niche, specifically the spot in the brand hierarchy above Chevrolet but below Oldsmobile. It thrived from the beginning by emphasizing value, soon rendering its parent division obsolete. Over the decades, Pontiac was associated with many things — style and reliability to name a few, but it wasn't until Bunkie Knudsen began to rework the division's image in 1956 that performance really came to the forefront. The 1957 Bonneville was intended to send a message to the world

that Pontiac was a performance brand, and soon the division was promoting its Wide-Track stance, which delivered longer and lower looks and improved handling. The Pontiac V-8 continued to gain larger displacement variants and more power, and had developed a reputation on the street and on racetracks for its power production. Then, in 1964, John DeLorean snuck an A-body option package called "GTO" past company brass, installing a 389 V-8 in an intermediate chassis in direct conflict with corporate edicts. The muscle car era shifted into gear. For the next few

decades, Pontiac was GM's "Excitement" brand, delivering performance and style at an affordable price across a variety of segments. Sadly, the 2008 economic downturn hit GM hard, and one of the casualties was the shuttering of the Pontiac brand, even as it was offering the exciting V-8/rear-drive G8 sport sedan and sporty Solstice two-seater. Gone but never forgotten, Pontiac lives on through its memorable automobiles and ever-loyal fans, many of whom have shared their own Pontiac stories with us for our Special Section dedicated to this legendary marque.



## 1977 Firebird Esprit

JIM SUVA • VIA EMAIL

In 1974, a new TV series debuted called *The Rockford Files*, starring James Garner. Mr. Garner's character, Jim Rockford, drove a Pontiac Firebird Esprit. I fell in love with that car immediately, so I purchased a used 1974 Firebird Esprit, which was gold and had a black interior. (Rockford drove a gold with tan interior version.) I only kept the car for one year before I sold it.

*The Rockford Files* went through Firebirds from model years 1974 to 1978, and I had always wanted to buy another one over the years. Fast forward to November 2002. I was looking for a used car and found a 1977 Firebird Esprit on the internet. It was gold with a tan interior.

It only had 63,000 miles on it and was in great "survivor" shape. I am the fifth owner of the car. The Firebird was purchased new in 1977 in Oregon by a woman who was around 50 years old at the time. In the late '80s, she gave the car to her minister's wife, who kept it for a number of years before selling it to a gentleman around 2000. In March of

2002, that gentleman sold the Firebird to a man named Mike from Rhode Island. In turn, Mike sold it to me. What is nice about this Firebird is that it has not been abused.

Once I owned the Firebird, I contacted Jim Mattison at Pontiac Historic Services for a copy of the original build sheet. The Firebird was built in Ohio and shipped to a dealer in Oregon. It originally had a rear spoiler and a stripe, which I believe was removed at the dealership. It also had wire wheels, which Mike switched out with a set of Rally II wheels to make the car look like *The Rockford Files* Firebird.

Since purchasing the Firebird, I have replaced the wheelwell chrome all around and added a correct AM/FM radio with two rear speakers. Of course, I have done some regular maintenance as well, like brakes, heater core, water pump, and transmission service.

The Firebird has a 305-cu.in. V-8 engine, with power steering and brakes. It also has air conditioning and a tilt steering column with a gold Formula steering wheel. These are the only options on the car.

I used the Firebird as a daily driver for about 11 months. It is now retired as an antique vehicle with just over 72,000 miles. And, it sports the same license plate number that was on Rockford's car on the TV show: 853-OKG.

I have shown the Esprit at a number of car shows over the years and it is always received very well. In fact, in 2010 my Firebird was featured on the "Crime Drama" episode of the television series *Pioneers of Television*. I got to drive it as Rockford, while Garner and producer/writer Stephen J. Cannell talked about Garner's stunt driving abilities. As it turned out, that was the last on-camera interview that Garner and Cannell ever did about *The Rockford Files*.

The visors on my Firebird have also been signed by Garner, as well as a number of cast and crew members from *The Rockford Files*.

# PONTIAC NIGHT



## at TUCSON DRAGWAY

A SATURDAY NIGHT STREET RALLY\* DRAGS EVENT

**SATURDAY, JULY 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**GATES OPEN at 4pm • TRACK HOT from 6-10pm**

\* NO SLICKS ALLOWED. This event is open to all vehicles, especially the Street Racing crowd. Race cars are welcomed but not the priority for the night. Otherwise, it will be similar to an Open Test & Tune event. Track will be prepped for Grudge Racing, Call Outs, Timed Runs and fun side-by-side matchups.

### RACE

RACE YOUR PONTIAC  
OR GMC TRUCK:

\$40 TRACK PASS AT GATE.  
TECH INSPECTION REQUIRED

ARRIVE AFTER 4pm.

### SPECTATE

SPECTATOR ONLY FEE  
with parking OUTSIDE of pit area:

\$10 PER PERSON  
Kids 12-UNDER ARE FREE

ARRIVE BY 7pm.

### or SHOW!

DISPLAY YOUR PONTIAC OR GMC TRUCK IN  
THE PIT AREA, EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT RACING:

REQUEST THE \$15 PER PERSON "CREW PASS"  
AT THE TRACK'S MAIN ENTRY GATE

ARRIVE BETWEEN 6 - 7pm.



PONTIAC-OAKLAND CLUB INTERNATIONAL (POCI)

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

THOM SHERWOOD  
Club President  
(520) 798-3200 (no texts!)  
thom@colorteks.com

DEAN NOUN  
(630) 292-0293  
deannoun@gmail.com

CHRIS STEEL  
(520) 808-0633  
csteel8@msn.com



12000 S. Houghton Rd  
Tucson, AZ 85747

DIRECTIONS: From I-10, take Exit 275 then south two miles

www.TucsonDragway.com • Phone (520) 762-9700