

# '73 GTO The Black Goat of the Family

by Tim Dye



**T**he 1973 GTO received little respect from day one. Consider the fact that the GTO was a totally redesigned model from the previous year. Yet where was all the hoopla, promotion and excitement that normally came with the introduction of a new body style? There was no print ad in magazines, no post card for the salesmen to mail out to prospects, no poster on the wall for showroom visitors to see, no TV commercials, and no stories in the paper from press releases. If you were looking through the showroom brochure and had a sharp eye, you would have spotted the little water color illustration down in the corner on one page of the LeMans section.

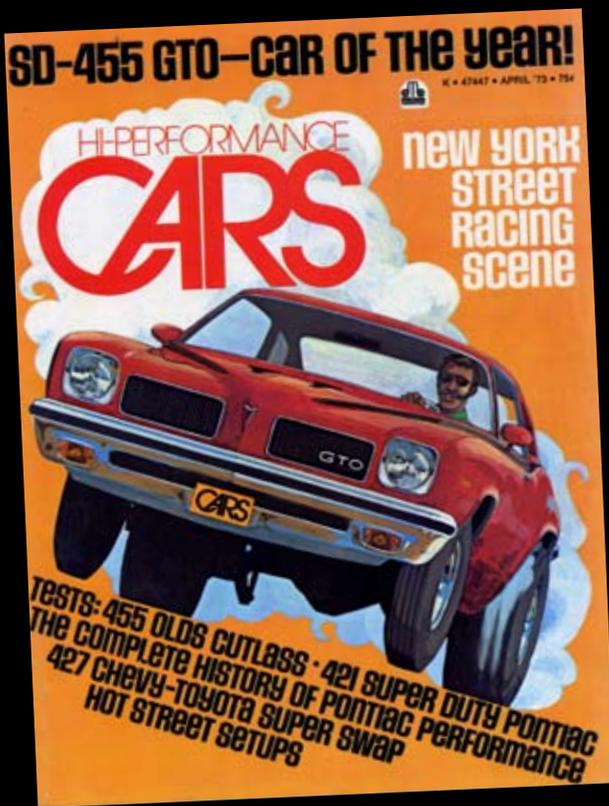
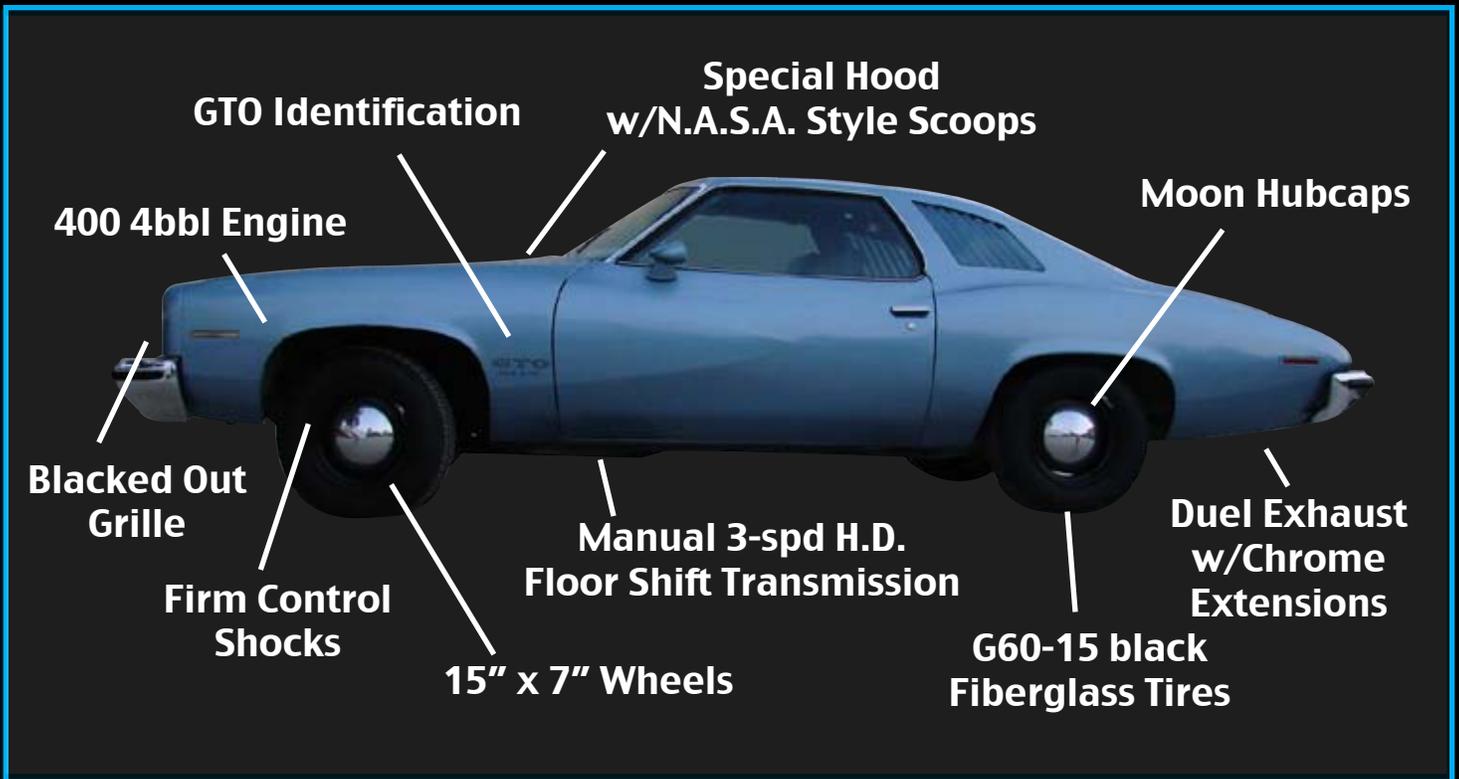
There is no doubt the '73 GTO was treated like an ugly step child and all the praise, attention and accolades was given to the new kid in the family, the Grand Am. All the previously mentioned promotional methods and then some were employed in the promo-

tion of the Grand Am. Little wonder that a mere 4,806 GTOs were sold that year.

There was one brief bright spot for the '73 GTO when Hi-Performance Cars magazine named the GTO their "Hi-Performance Car of the Year". However that was short lived when Pontiac decided not to include the SD 455 and Ram Air as options on the GTO. The magazine wrote a glowing article about the GTO and Pontiac being the one car, and car company to carry the torch for the enthusiast/performance car market. They turned a little red in the face, and recanted the award later when they learned the car they tested would never be released.

The one thing that did remain on the car that was highlighted in the article was the ride and handling characteristics. The '73 was the first GTO to come standard with 15" wheels and a fat 1 1/8" front sway bar and a one inch rear bar. Quite a difference from just a few years earlier when the GTO had no

# 1973 GTO Standard Features



*Hi-Performance Cars magazine cover featuring the 1973 GTO as their Hi-Performance Car of the Year.*

rear sway bar. The SD 455 engine ended up being offered only on some Firebird models for 1973 and 1974. Those so equipped are highly sought after collectibles today.

There were basically two motors offered that reached production for the 1973 GTO; a 230 horse 400 and a 250 horse 455. A standard shift transmission was only available with the 400. A 455 C.I.D. or 400 C.I.D. decal was placed under the GTO identification on the front fenders. Other GTO identification includes a decal on the trunk lid and very small GTO metal badges on the door panels. The GTO continued as an option for '73 so there is no way to identify one by the V.I.N.

The GTO option was available on two body styles, the LeMans Coupe or LeMans Sport Coupe. The quick way to tell the difference in the two is the rear quarter windows, on the Coupe these are exposed, flush with the body, while the Sport Coupe windows are inset and covered by louvers. In both cases they are fixed and do not roll down. As the name implies, the window treatment on the Sport Coupe

gave it a much sportier look which buyers favored. Just under 500 of the Coupes were sold. Likewise buyers preferred the automatic transmission as just over 900 of the standard shifts were sold.

Any color and interior trim combination that was available on the LeMans was offered on the GTO. Optional accent stripes that ran back from the nose, running the length of the hood and ending just behind the doors was available in red, black or white.

For the better part of three decades I have owned a 1973 GTO, three different ones.

*Jim Wangers seen here by our '73 GTO. Jim is a long time friend of ours and is not shy about his dislike of the '73 GTO. We all had a great laugh when we joked about taking his picture sitting beside his favorite GTO.*



Little has changed in that time in the area of respect so far as the '73 is concerned. As I noted at the start of the story, the 1973 GTO has been the black goat of the family from day one. Jim Wangers, a respected figure in the hobby, openly shares his dislike of the '73 with anyone who may bring up the subject. I don't share Jim's viewpoint on this particular subject, so we respectfully agree to disagree.

I agree it is not everyone's cup of tea, but I have always liked some of the cars in the Pontiac line-up that were not so popular. Jim refers to my collection as an orphanage of sorts, a home for wayward Pontiacs. On the other hand he has no problem loving our Can Am, a car based on the very same body style. I don't see them as being so different, but you have to consider that our varied opinions may have roots in the fact that I am a collector, and Jim is the guy who helped create the cars, and their image.

I have heard negative comments about the '73 GTO from other collectors over the years as well, but I found that none of them

*This 1973 GTO is a good example for showing standard features as it has very few options. It does have a 4-speed transmission, A/C and a console. Owned by Tim & Penny Dye.*

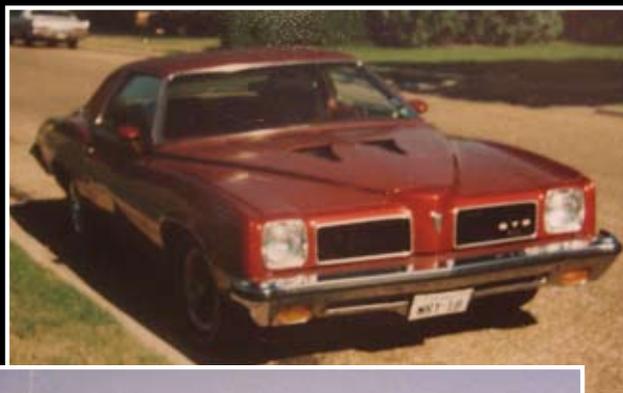


ever owned one. I think in recent years the popularity of the '73 may have risen somewhat. Yea I know, when you're at the bottom there's no where to go but up. I think several things have contributed to this. One being the high price of the earlier GTO's, a '73 is still reasonably priced. Also with the advent of the internet, networking with other people who have the same interest became much easier. There are other people out there that like '73s!

I guess I sort of had a thing for '73s early on. When I was around 19 years old I spotted a black 4-speed car with camel interior. I lived in Ohio at the time and if my memory serves me right, this car was out of Muncie, Indiana. I even went to the bank and got a loan to buy the car, but ended up purchasing a '67 GTO with the money. The next year (1980) I moved to Lubbock, Texas and soon spotted several '73s there. I must have been bound and determined to own a '73 and bought one I found on a United grocery store parking lot. It was Verdant Green with white interior. It originally came from Foster Pontiac in Memphis and was a 400 automatic car. I later sold it to my brother who still owns it today.

I found two others in Lubbock, a bright blue one with a white vinyl top, and a maroon (Florentine Red) car with a 455. It was so odd to me that I never spotted a '73 in Ohio, but moved to Lubbock where they seemed to be all over the place. In general there were early GTOs in Ohio while the later models were much more common in Lubbock.

Much more recently I bought the Porcelain Blue/blue interior car you see featured in this story, and a rougher '73 out of Missouri. Both of these cars are 4-speed cars. The blue one is sparsely optioned. With no trim rings, no wheel well moldings, rocker moldings or optional stripe, I call it my "so ugly it's cool" car. It does have one rather odd option, code W59. I had to ask my late friend John



*Top: I photographed this 455 '73 in Lubbock, Texas in the early 1980s. It belonged to Frank Foley at the time. The middle pictures are of a Verdant Green '73, I found in Lubbock. I bought this one and later sold it to my brother. Bottom: This is a 4-speed GTO that friend Art Barrett helped me acquire in Missouri.*

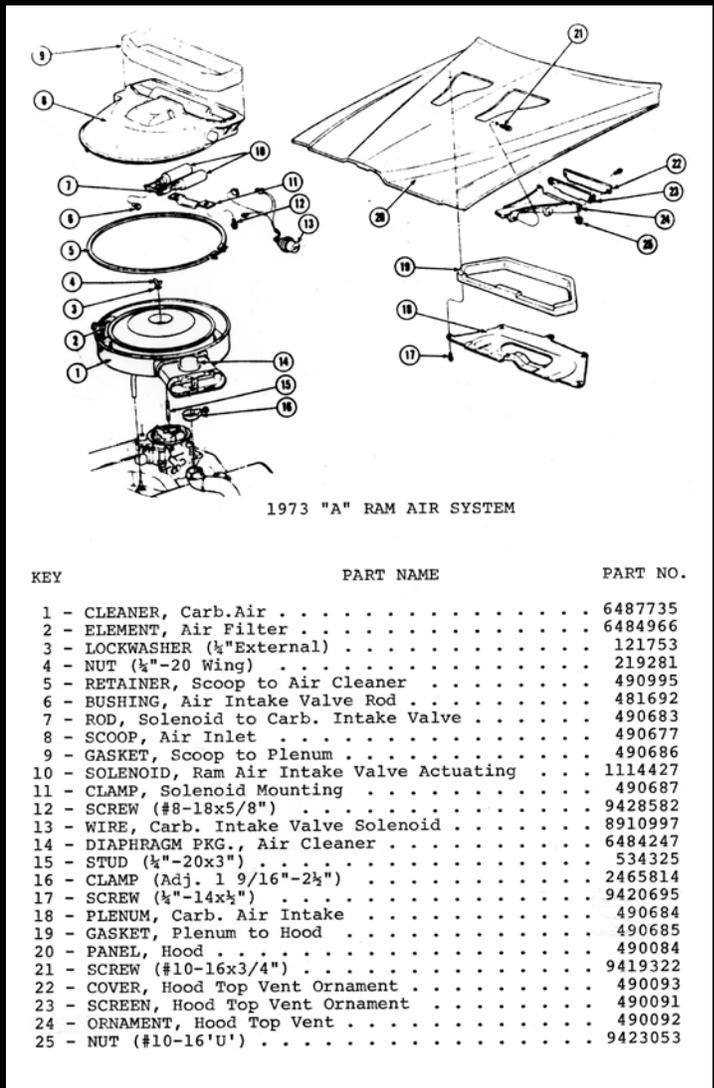
Sawruk what in the world it was, as I could not find information on it anywhere in my literature. He told me W59 was "prepare for export". It was sent to New York City for export, but for some reason never left the country. I hope to find out more about it someday; I find oddball stuff like that very interesting.

The other '73 I have, the one I picked up in Missouri and refer to as the "rough car" was sold new at a dealer in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, very near to where I live now. Although this car was not extremely loaded, it has more options than the blue car we have. Of course they both have the GTO option which cost \$354.00. The rough car did have a vinyl top, Safe-T-Track rear, A/C and body side moldings, but was still void of the wheel opening moldings, rocker moldings and trim rings. The only one of the three to have these is the green car. It had the optional stripe as well, which cost an extra \$31.00.

I have heard the 1973 LeMans body style described as looking like something that two people designed, one guy assigned to the back and another guy the front. Then when you throw in the new bumper style designed to meet government regulations the result was something that looked very different from previous years.

Today, there are enthusiast like myself preserving the history of the 1973 GTO. And although it won't win any beauty contest, the '73 GTO is a fun, affordable and rare Pontiac. It may be a dirty undesirable job caring for the black goat of the family, but somebody's gotta do it!

*Right: This is the invoice on the "rough" car. It was originally sold at Frank Morton in Sapulpa, Oklahoma. Although it is hard to tell now, this car is Florentine Red with a black vinyl top and white interior.*



*This is the parts book diagram and parts list of the Ram Air system for the '73 GTO that never was. Some parts must have been made as a handful of collectors have been able to piece a system together, I believe less than five.*

PONTIAC MOTOR DIVISION				PONTIAC, MICHIGAN 48053				351882	
2F3T32108933	52	521	20M5 12K5 653218	LMHS 2 DR HT	2919.46	2364.94	12.60		
GLASS-S/M-AL	42.00	A01	32.76	M/DGS-B/SIDE	31.00	884	24.18		
CONDOVA TOP	97.00	C08	75.44	AIR CON-CSTM	397.00	C60	309.66		
CONSOLE-FRT	59.00	D55	46.02	SAFE-T-TRACK	48.00	G80	35.10		
PWR BRK-DISC	46.00	JL2	35.88	A SPD TRANS	190.00	M20	155.80		
RADIO-AM	65.00	U63	50.78	SPEAKER-WEST	18.00	U80	14.24		
GTO OPTION	354.00	W62	276.12	SPORT OPTION	88.00	W70	68.64		
AMOUNT	3489.52		86.78	12.60	146.00			3489.12	
DATE	01-02-73	DATE OF SALE	01-10-73	DATE OF REGISTRATION	01-02-73	PZA351882			
FRANK MORTON OLDSMOBILE-PONTIAC				20 392		SAPULPA OK 74066		2F3T32108933	