

# African Traveler 1982 Grand Prix

by Tim Dye



**J**ust looking at this car... you see nothing very remarkable about it. The 3.8 litre V-6, automatic on the column and bench seat are certainly nothing to write home about. The only thing that even comes close is the fact that it is thirty-years-old and still runs and drives. This may impress the average person, but to car collectors like us, it's nearly a new car compared to the ones in the garage or building out back.

When you really think about it, there is

nothing very remarkable about any of the 80,367 Grand Prix's Pontiac produced in 1982. There was no Ram Air, Super Charged or Super Duty engine options. Nor were there convertibles, spoilers, shaker scoops, air extractors, racing stripes, exhaust splitters or ground effects. It makes one wonder how they managed to sell any of them at all.

There were T-Tops, a sun roof or two-tone paint options offered, but this car doesn't even have those. It's just gray with a gray

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padded vinyl top and gray cloth interior. The color combination could be attributed to the dealership that it came from, Bob Gray Pontiac, Buick in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. Bob may have ordered lots of gray Pontiacs. I can hear his slogan now, "Get your Gray Pontiac at Bob Gray".

Siloam Springs is located near the Oklahoma border. This car remained there for some time. Changing hands several times, the Grand Prix called several small, eastern Oklahoma towns home including Wagoner. In August 1991, someone bought it there and only drove it a little over one hundred miles

before trading it again in December of that year. The odometer read 83,000 miles at that time. Then a woman bought it and drove it only fifty miles, deciding she did not like it then traded it in at James Hodge Ford in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

While sitting on the Ford lot, the plain gray Grand Prix caught the eye of Basil and Ann McLaren. That's when this car's life gets interesting. Basil had retired in 1986 from General Motors of South Africa. He was in Muskogee doing some contract work for the local Cadillac dealership. Basil and Ann being long time car enthusiasts decided to pur-

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chase the Grand Prix in May of 1992. Having been born in South Africa with a long career at General Motors, Basil has a diverse and international taste in cars. Their well cared for and documented collection includes vehicles from Opel, Mazda, Chevrolet, MG and, of



course, Pontiac.

Basil and Ann keep detailed service records on each of their cars. When they purchased the Grand Prix, they started a log book. The book included all service work performed on the car such as oil changes, as well as replacement belts and hoses. This may not seem that unusual, but they took it one step further. They also kept a record of each and every gas station visit; noting the mileage, gallons, price and where the gas was purchased. This would become particularly interesting in 1994 when Basil received a call to return to South Africa for some contract work at a dealership there. After accepting the job, Ann and Basil packed up and headed to another continent, taking the Grand Prix along with them.

Notations in the log book show that in

November of 1994 the Grand Prix was driven to a shipyard on the east coast. The book indicates gas stops in Springfield and Rolla, Missouri; continuing onto Effingham, Illinois; all the way to New York City. This is where the car would be placed in a container and loaded on the ship, St. Francis. It would arrive in Durban, South Africa on December 14, 1994. The next entry in the log book showed that the car had 106,422 miles and that 49.6 litres of gasoline were purchased.

Once there, the McLarens took up residence in Johannesburg, where they participated in car shows and tours with the Crankhandle Club. They also took sightseeing trips on their own around South Africa

*This is one of three log books documenting every gas stop and service work done to the car. I continue to keep them current.*

in the Grand Prix. One such trip took them on *continued*



*This motel in Colesburg, South Africa was an overnight stay on one of the McLaren's many tours with the Grand Prix.*



I had told my wife, Penny, how I would like to buy a good daily driver. And of course for us that means it has to be a Pontiac. We had several new and old Pontiacs, that you would call collectable cars. We try to keep them up and preserve them as best we can. Honestly, I was looking for a car that was just normal, less responsibility, not rare, not an antique, not a limited edition. Something that I would not care if I got a door ding in. I had seen the car before and knew it was the perfect candidate for what I was wanting, so I told him I was interested in the car. There was only one question, does the air conditioner work? He said yes, so I said "sold". You have to have a working air conditioner in Oklahoma.

When Penny and I bought the car, we



a route along the Indian Ocean all the way to Cape Point, which is the very southern most point of South Africa. The McLarens would log a total of 21,441 miles on their gray Grand Prix while in South Africa. In November of 1998 the Grand Prix and them would move back to Oklahoma.

*Ann McLaren poses with the 1982 Grand Prix at a mountain overlook in Franchhoek, Cape Province, South Africa.*

Basil called in January of 2005 to see if I knew anyone that would want to buy their Grand Prix. We had met the McLarens through a local car club. It was quite a coincidence that he called because just days before

received a large folder full of paperwork documenting the cars history, which included a lot of the McLaren's history as well. Among the papers was a map of South Africa with the routes highlighted that they had taken on their trips. There were also numbered photographs they had taken of the car, which corresponded with the various locations noted on the map. The Grand Prix's voyage from South Africa to the Port in Houston

was documented as well, with pictures of the truck and driver who drove the container with the car in it from the port in Houston to the Port of Catoosa near Tulsa.

The car came with a trunk full of parts. Basil was ready for many types of repairs while

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in South Africa. I suppose parts for American built cars may be kind of scarce there. So far, I have only had to use one of the parts, a center cap from the snowflake wheels that



*Here the Grand Prix sits at Chapman's Peak Drive, a scenic route to Cape Point, the very tip of South Africa.*

had fallen off, which he had an entire set of spares.

While picking up the Grand Prix they told us the background of the car and showed us all the paperwork. We knew it was like a member of their family, which they were entrusting us with. So here we went again, I care about what happens to this car. If it gets another chip in the original paint or door ding, I don't like it. And yes, in case you are wondering, I have kept the log book going. Every time I get gas, change the oil or do any service work, it

is documented. We did use it as a daily driver for a while, but now it has become part of our collection and sees limited use.

It may look like a Plain Jane 1982 Grand Prix, much like the other 80,366 that were produced. But what makes this car special is the previous owners and the part of their lives spent with it.

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## The 1982 Grand Prix Brochure

For 1982 the Grand Prix had its own brochure. It measures 9" x 11" and has 12 pages. Featured is the Grand Prix Brougham, Grand Prix LJ and the Grand Prix. There is quality photography throughout portraying the

Grand Prix as a richly appointed luxury car. There is one page showing options such as the sunroof, power seat, cruise control, and remember the Rally IV wheels? Another page of text tells potential buyers the standard options. The back cover has all the facts and figures including engine options, they are the 3.8 litre V-6, 4.1 litre V-6 and the 5.7 litre V-8 diesel. Did you

know the optional digital quartz clock was not available with the diesel engine?

