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The opening pages of

1966 Pontiac GTO Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1966 Pontiac GTO

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

Engines

389: 335 hp 4V / 360 hp Tri-Power Total production 96,946 Note Best-selling GTO year ever Single-year coverage. Factory-correct specifications. No...

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Single-year coverage. Factory-correct specifications. No guesswork.

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet



About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1966 Pontiac GTO — one model, one year, nothing else. Every specification in this guide was checked against marque references, factory literature excerpts, and enthusiast documentation before it was written.

Our operating ethic is simple: we don't lie and we don't steal, we offer value. That means no invented specifications — every number has a source. Where reputable sources disagree, the disagreement is disclosed in the text and the Sources, Conflicts & Omissions section. Where a detail could not be verified, it is omitted and the omission recorded — an honest gap beats a confident fabrication.

How to use this guide: start with the VIN and cowl-tag sections to establish what your car was when it left the factory. Use the engine, transmission, axle, paint, and casting sections to verify what is on the car today. Use the rust and restoration-sequence sections to plan the work — and keep this guide in the shop. A final note: these cars are sixty years old. Parts have been swapped, tags have been lost, and memories have faded. Trust

the metal — casting numbers, date codes, and stampings — over stories. When in doubt, photograph everything, pull the

PHS documentation for your car, and verify against the Pontiac factory service manual for your year.

1. Manufacturer History: Pontiac

Pontiac began in 1926 as a companion make to Oakland, one of General Motors' founding divisions — and within seven years the companion had swallowed its parent: Oakland was gone after 1931 and Pontiac carried on. Through the 1930s and 1940s Pontiac sold dependable, slightly flashy middle-priced cars on the slogan 'dollar for dollar you can't beat a Pontiac,' but nobody called them exciting. That changed in 1956, when 38-year-old Semon 'Bunkie' Knudsen took over the division and decided Pontiac would be GM's performance division. Fuel injection on the 1957 Bonneville, the 1959 'Wide-Track' redesign under Pete Estes and John DeLorean, and stacked-headlight styling gave Pontiac an identity no other GM division had: the driver's division.

The 1960s made the reputation permanent. In 1964 a small team led by DeLorean, Bill Collins, and Russ Gee slipped a 389-cubic-inch V8 into the intermediate Tempest LeMans as a \$295 option package — the GTO — neatly sidestepping GM's ban on large engines in intermediates and inventing the muscle car in the process. The GTO became its own series in 1966 and sold nearly 97,000 copies. In 1967 Pontiac joined the pony-car wars with the Firebird, and in 1968 the redesigned GTO's body-color Endura nose — the industry's first flexible, body-color front bumper — helped win Motor Trend's Car of the Year award. The 1969 Judge and the 1969 Trans Am (just 697 built) turned option packages into legends.

Pontiac's engineering of this era was distinctively its own. The division designed its own V8 architecture — one block family spanning 326 to 455 cubic inches, with the same bore centers and a character all its own — plus the remarkable overhead-cam six, an American OHC engine a decade ahead of its time. The division's performance hardware had its own names: Ram Air, the Judge, Safe-T-Track (Pontiac's limited-slip differential), Rally II wheels, and the Endura nose. For the restorer, the critical institution is PHS — Pontiac Historical Services — which holds the factory invoices and remains the authoritative 1966 Pontiac GTO

source for how any Pontiac left the factory.

The 1970s brought the 455-cubic-inch V8s, the round-port 455 HO (1971-1972), and the legendary Super Duty 455 — then emissions controls, insurance surcharges, and the end of high compression. The GTO faded to an option package and then away; the Firebird's Trans Am carried Pontiac's performance torch through the 1970s. The division drifted toward personal luxury and then anonymity, and GM discontinued



2010. But the 1964-1973 performance cars — GTO, Firebird, Trans Am — remain cornerstone collector cars, supported by factory documentation through PHS, national clubs (the GTO Association of America and the Pontiac-Oakland Club International), and one of the deepest Pontiac-specific reproduction markets in the hobby.

2. Model History: Pontiac GTO

The Pontiac GTO invented the muscle car. In 1964, with General Motors banning engines over 330 cubic inches in intermediate cars, John DeLorean, Bill Collins, and Russ Gee slipped a 389-cubic-inch V8 into the Tempest LeMans as a \$295 option package — violating the letter of the ban while obeying its loophole (it was an option, not a model). The GTO — named for Ferrari's Gran Turismo Omologato, a piece of deliberate Italian bravado — sold 32,450 copies in its first year against a forecast of 5,000, and every division in Detroit started building its own.

The GTO became its own series in 1966 (series 42) and sold 96,946 cars — the high-water mark. The 1967 brought the new 400-cubic-inch V8 and stacked headlights; 1968 brought the second generation with its Coke-bottle styling, shortened 112-inch wheelbase, and the industry's first flexible body-color front bumper — the Endura nose — plus Motor Trend's Car of the Year award. The 1969 brought the Judge, the wildest factory option package of the era; 1970 brought the 455-cubic-inch V8; 1971 brought the round-port 455 HO; and 1972-1973 saw the GTO fade to an option package (W62) on the LeMans as insurance rates and emissions rules strangled the breed.

For the restorer, the GTO is a GM A-body with Pontiac's own engines — the 389, the 400, and the 455, plus the Ram Air induction systems that defined the breed's peak. The 1964-1971 cars carry GTO series coding in the VIN (series 42 from 1966); the 1972-1973 cars are LeMans VINs with the W62 option, which makes the cowl tag and PHS documentation the entire authentication. Judge and Ram Air cars are the most cloned Pontiacs in the hobby — documentation first, always.

3. What Makes This Year Unique

The 1966 GTO is the first year of the GTO as its own series — series 42 in the VIN — and the best-selling GTO ever built at 96,946 cars. The redesign brought the Coke-bottle side sculpturing, the stacked headlights continued, and the GTO finally had its own identity in the VIN: 24237 (hardtop) or 24267 (convertible), 6 for the year, plant code, serial number. For the first time, the VIN itself proves GTO. The 389 continued in its final year: 335 horsepower and 431 lb-ft with the four-barrel, 360 horsepower with the Tri-Power — the last year for Pontiac's famous three-carburetor induction. The 1966 cars are 1966 Pontiac GTO

distinguished by their one-year styling: the new Coke-bottle body, the 1966-only grille and trim, and the louvered rear fenders.

Production of 96,946 makes the 1966 the most common GTO — which is good news for the restorer (parts availability, knowledge base) and means condition and documentation drive value more than rarity. Tri-Power four-speed convertibles remain the blue chips; verify the Tri-Power hardware and the PHS invoice together.

A documented 1966 GTO hardtop in Barrier Blue (paint code O) is the reference specification for the year. The 1966-only details — grille, trim, interior, and the first-year series-42 VIN — are the authentication points that separate 1966 cars from their 1967 successors.

Restoration notes specific to 1966: the series-42 VIN is the new authentication anchor — verify it against the cowl tag and the PHS invoice. The Tri-Power's last year means 1966-specific intake and carburetor tag numbers. The Coke-bottle body's first year means 1966-only sheetmetal and trim in several areas — verify part numbers against 1966 applications.