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1968 Pontiac Grand Prix Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1968 Pontiac Grand Prix

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1968 Pontiac Grand Prix Restoration Guide — 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 three things for this guide. First, no invented specifications — every number has a source. Second, where reputable sources disagree, the disagreement is disclosed in the text and in the Sources, Conflicts & Omissions section rather than papered over. Third, where a detail could not be verified, it is omitted and the omission is recorded — an honest gap beats a confident fabrication.

How to use this guide: start with the VIN and door data plate decoding sections to establish exactly what your car was when it left the factory. Use the engine, transmission, axle, paint, and casting sections to verify that what is on the car today matches what should be there. Use the rust and restoration-sequence sections to plan the work. And keep this guide in the shop — it is a working document, not a coffee-table book.

A final note: these cars are sixty years old. Parts have been swapped, plates have been lost, and memories have faded.

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

verify against the factory service manual for your year.

1. Manufacturer History: Pontiac

Pontiac began in 1926 as a companion make to GM's Oakland division, named for the Ottawa chief who besieged Detroit in 1763. It survived the Depression by selling more car for the money than Chevrolet — the 1932 Pontiac offered a straight-eight when rivals offered sixes — and the Silver Streak styling of the late 1930s gave the brand a visual identity. Oakland was gone by 1932; Pontiac endured.

The postwar Pontiacs were solid, conservative cars until the division's 1955 overhead-valve Strato-Streak V8 (287 cubic inches) gave it modern power. The 1957 Bonneville — fuel-injected, limited-production, and glamorous — announced that Pontiac intended to be noticed. Then came the leadership that changed everything: general manager Semon 'Bunkie' Knudsen, engineer John DeLorean, and marketing man Pete Estes, who repositioned Pontiac as GM's performance division.

The 1960s were Pontiac's glory decade. 'Wide Track' handling (1959), the Super Duty 421 racing program (1961-1963), and the 1964 GTO — the car that named the muscle era — made Pontiac the excitement division. The Grand Prix, introduced for 1962, was Pontiac's other masterstroke: a full-size car with bucket seats, console, and performance manners that invented the upscale personal-luxury coupe years before the term existed.

The end of high compression in 1971 and the 1973 Colonnade restyle closed the performance chapter. Pontiac soldiered on with the Firebird, Grand Prix, and Bonneville as its flagships, but the brand gradually lost its distinct engineering identity inside GM. General Motors discontinued Pontiac in 2009. For the 1968 Pontiac Grand Prix

restorer, the good news is documentation: Pontiac Historic Services (PHS) can supply factory billing records for these cars, and Pontiac V8 mechanical parts interchange deeply across the division's full-size and intermediate lines.

2. Model History: Pontiac Grand Prix

Pontiac introduced the Grand Prix for 1962 as a single-model series — one body, one attitude. The

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as simple and new: take the full-size Pontiac hardtop coupe, give it bucket seats and a console, a floor shifter, the top standard V8, and the division's performance suspension tuning, and price it against the Thunderbird. The 1962 car sold 30,195 copies; by 1963, with stacked headlamps, a concave rear window, and the full coke-bottle treatment, sales more than doubled to 72,959. The Grand Prix had invented the upscale personal-luxury coupe years before the term existed.

For 1964 the Grand Prix got a revised grille, hidden taillights, and 3 more horsepower; for 1965 it got a full restyle on the 121-inch B-body, the Turbo Hydra-Matic in place of the Roto Hydra-Matic, and the 389 at 333 horsepower. The 1965-1966 cars carried 389 and 421 power with Tri-Power available through 1966; for 1967 Pontiac moved to the 400 and 428 and built the only Grand Prix convertible — 5,856 of them against 37,125 hardtops. The 1968 car, the last on the big-car platform, offered the 400 in 265 and 350-horsepower forms and the 428 in 375 and 390-horsepower High Output tune.

The 1969 redesign changed everything: the Grand Prix moved to its own 118-inch-wheelbase A-body-based platform with the longest hood in production-car history, a driver-cockpit interior, and a two-model lineup — the base Model J and the SJ performance-luxury package built around the 428 (370 horsepower, 390 in High Output form). Sales nearly quadrupled to 112,486. For 1970 the SJ's engine grew to the 455 at 370 horsepower and 500 lb-ft; for 1971 a boattail rear deck arrived and compression fell across the industry; for 1972 ratings switched to SAE net. The 1973 Colonnade redesign — 5-mph bumpers, fixed rear quarter glass, the SJ carrying a 250-horsepower 455 — sold a record 153,899 Grand Prixes and closed the era this sub-wave covers.

For the restorer, the Grand Prix is the best-documented Pontiac of the period: Pontiac Historic Services (PHS) holds the factory billing records and can supply the original invoice for the car — engine, transmission, axle, color, trim, options, dealer, and build date. The 1965-1971 VIN does not encode the engine, so the PHS invoice is the deciding document on any high-performance claim. Pontiac V8 mechanical parts (389/400/421/428/455) interchange deeply within the family, but the long-hood 1969-1972 sheet metal, the SJ-specific equipment, and the 1967-only convertible parts are Grand Prix-only and priced accordingly.

3. What Makes the 1968 Unique

The 1968 Grand Prix was the final year of the second generation — the last of the full-size-based Grand Prix before the 1969 move to the intermediate platform. End-of-generation cars carry a market premium when documented, and the 1968-only details are the scarcest of the 1965-68 run.

1968 Pontiac Grand Prix

The convertible was gone for 1968 — the Grand Prix was hardtop-only. Any 1968 presented as a convertible is misidentified.

Hideaway headlamps continued for 1968 — the vacuum-operated concealed-headlamp system introduced in 1967, now in its second year. The hideaway system (vacuum canister, actuators, hoses, and the grille doors) is a restoration project in its own right: verify the system is complete and functional, because the parts are year-specific and the vacuum plumbing is fiddly.

The 400 continued as the standard engine, with the 428 and 428 HO as options. The HO verification standard is unchanged: unit code, casting numbers, and PHS invoice must agree.

The SJ package did not exist in 1968 — the J/SJ nomenclature arrived with the 1969 redesign. A 1968 presented as an SJ is misbadged or a retrofit; the 1968's performance identity is the 428 and 428 HO option set, verified by block unit code and PHS invoice, not by badges.

The 1968-only grille, trim, and tail panel — the final evolution of the second-generation face, with the hideaway headlamps — is the scarcest bright metal of the generation. Restore an original where possible. Inside, 1968 upholstery and trim patterns are one-year-only. The bucket-seat sport interior continued with

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