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1970 Pontiac Firebird Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1970 Pontiac Firebird

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1970 Pontiac Firebird — 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

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

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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 Firebird

The Pontiac Firebird arrived in February 1967 — five months after the Chevrolet Camaro — as Pontiac's entry in the pony-car wars, riding the same new F-body platform as the Camaro but powered exclusively by Pontiac engines. Where the Camaro leaned on Chevrolet small-blocks, the Firebird offered something no other pony car had: Pontiac's overhead-cam inline six, standard in base cars and genuinely advanced, with the four-barrel Sprint version making 215 horsepower — enough to embarrass plenty of V8s. Above the sixes sat the 326 V8 (250 hp, or 285 in HO form) and the Firebird 400 (325 hp), Pontiac's big-car V8 in a 3,400-pound pony car.

The first-generation Firebird (1967-1969) matured quickly. For 1968 the six grew from 230 to 250 cubic inches, the 326 became a 350 (with the HO version jumping 35 horsepower to 320), the 400 gained five horsepower, and a new 400 HO arrived at 335 — with the midyear Ram Air II (340 hp) as the exotic option. For 1969 the Firebird got new lower-body styling with a prominent 'bird beak' grille surrounded by body-color Endura plastic like the GTO's, and the big news: the Trans Am, a handling-and-image package on the 400 Ram Air cars, built in tiny numbers — 689 coupes and 8 convertibles.

The second-generation Firebird — the 1970-1/2, delayed to February 1970 — was a clean-sheet design and one of the most beautiful American cars ever drawn: long hood, low roofline, Coke-bottle fenders, and a body-color Endura nose that Pontiac stylist Bill Porter fought to include. The lineup settled into base, Esprit, Formula, and Trans Am (VIN series 223, 224, 226, and 228), with engines from the 250 six to the 455 HO. The 1972 model year was gutted by a 174-day GM strike and Van Nuys stopped building Firebirds entirely; 1973 brought the legendary Super Duty 455 to the Trans Am and Formula.

For the restorer, the Firebird is an F-body first and a Pontiac second: the platform, suspension, and glass interchange with the Camaro, but the engines, sheetmetal, trim, and performance hardware are pure Pontiac. First-generation cars were built at Lordstown, Norwood, and Van Nuys; second-generation cars at Norwood and (through 1971) Van Nuys. The cowl tag, the VIN, and PHS documentation are the three legs of authentication — on Trans Ams, the WS4 imprint on a Norwood cowl tag is the mark that separates the real cars from the tributes.

3. What Makes This Year Unique

1970 Pontiac Firebird

The 1970 Firebird is the first of the second generation — the '1970-1/2,' delayed to February 1970 by tooling and a strike — and one of the most beautiful American cars ever drawn. The long hood, low roofline, and Coke-bottle fenders were pure Bill Porter, and Porter fought to give the new Firebird the body-color Endura nose he had pioneered on the 1968 GTO. Every 1970 Firebird wears the Endura nose — standard, not optional.

The lineup settled into four models with their own VIN series: base (223), Esprit (224), Formula (226), Trans Am (228) — body style 87 across the line, so a Trans Am VIN reads 228870N. The cowl-tag story matters: Norwood Trans Ams used the base Firebird style (22387) on the data plate with WS4 imprinted, while Van Nuys cars carried the correct 22887 style. Know which plant built your car before decoding the tag.

Engines for 1970: the 250 overhead-cam six (175 hp) in base cars, the 350 two-barrel (255 hp), the 400 two-barrel (265 hp), the 400 four-barrel (330 hp), and — Trans Am only — the 400 Ram Air III (345 hp,

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