



GTO of the Month

My 1970 GTO Story

by John Hunt



Why did I choose a 70 GTO

While in the service in upstate Illinois in the early 70's, several of my friends were from the St. Louis area. We drove each other's vehicles all the time, I had a 72 Ford Bronco that everyone wanted to use and play in the mud.

A friend (Dan) had a 70 black Judge, Ram Air 3 auto and air. This was a car I drove home one weekend. I had a blast driving this car and never forgot the feeling of power when you pushed the go pedal. A snow plow hit the front and it sat in an alley until it was towed to the junkyard. Dan paid \$800 for this car in 1973.

How did I purchase this 70 GTO

Life takes many turns, I am no different. Another friend (also Dan) had a Yamaha 650. He left it one day when he borrowed my bronco. He did not leave the key for his bike with me. I used a butter knife to turn the key on and got on and rode around town. I had been on several dirt bikes before, how hard can it be. I had a good time.

A couple years later I bought my first street bike a 76 Kawasaki 900. It was faster than the GTO. Someone stole this bike at work and it was never recovered. Bought my first Harley in 79. Hurt my back at work in 81 and doctors said if I did not stop riding my motorcycles, my 56 was a hardtail, I may not walk in a few years.

After back surgery I sold my 3 Harleys. A friend at work said he had a 68 GTO that was wrecked in his parents garage. I went and looked and \$600 later I own a car without a driver's fender, the roof pillar on the drivers side folded back to the top of the driver's seat, and no driver's door. It did have a HO 400, M 21 4 speed and 390 rear gear.

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It started right up, I made arrangements with a friend to go to southern Missouri to pick up the car. With a cutoff tool, overalls, goggles, and gloves in hand, off we went. Cut off the pillar so I could sit and drive. Going up 55 I got a lot of looks, even one highway patrol officer. This car was too far gone to fix, I stripped the car of anything that was of any value and was not damaged beyond repair.

I purchased a green 68 Lemans with a black convertible top to use the running gear from the GTO. One weekend I drove the Lemans to my dad's garage with the 350 auto on the column, my brother and a couple of friends came over to help work. On Sunday we all took a ride in the convertible with the 400 4 speed and 390 axle. I added the GTO hideaways, endurance front bumper, tail lights, and other emblems before I had the car painted white, the color of the original GTO.

Loved to drive this car, and wanted a real GTO. Went to get a haircut one day, workers were working on sewer pipes with a backhoe, and blocking the road. After my haircut, the lady driving the backhoe



stopped me and asked if I had any trouble with the top blowing fuses, she had a 70 black convertible that the top did not work and the fuse was blown each time. I asked her to bring it the next day, I would look at it. When looking at it, I noticed both pistons were bent. This was the cause of the fuse

problem. She stated she wanted to sell this car, she bought it for her son and he wanted a ss Chevelle. We worked out a deal for \$1500 for the car, a couple days later it was mine.

What did I start with





I was now the proud owner of a 70 black GTO, white convertible top with a stock 350 hp 400, 400 auto column shift, power brakes, power steering, buckets seats, rally II wheels, plenty of duck tape, and the worst body work I have ever seen. If you did not hit the spare tire putting things in the trunk, it would fall on the gas tank or hit the ground.

Opening the hood was not much better, there was a bird's nest on the intake manifold in front of the carburetor, I removed the nest so I did not have a fire under the hood.. The fuzzy covers on the seat hid the duck tape holding them together and the carpet was worn through in a few places.

One of the first things I purchased were the pistons for the convertible top. The top motor worked fine after I got the air out of the lines.

I sent my \$25 off to get the PHS paperwork to see what I purchased. The papers matched what was left of the GTO. I started to look at numbers and the original motor, trans, and rear end was still in the car. The engine serial and body plate matched. It did run strong, just used a lot more gas than the 68, which I still had. I sold the 68 for \$4000 to use the money to start working on the 70. I drove it for 7 years and used several rolls of duct tape during this time holding things together.

First engine rebuild-what did I find

One of the first things on my list was to rebuild the motor. I purchased a carb at a swap meet because the original leaked so badly, I still have the original carb in a box in the garage. All motor parts went to my machine shop in town, when they came back, I set them up on the kitchen counter, except the block, to take pictures of all of the date codes.

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Gathering parts from swap meets and junk yards



I started gathering parts for sprucing up the body, it would take a lot of parts. Trunk from Rolla swap meet, rear wing from Lincolnshire IL, whole rear clip from Whites in Rolla, floor shift console from Miami, floor shifter from Key Largo, rear bumper from dealer (original GM), doors from swap meet at Louisville GTOAA meet in 91, traded a 69 GTO hood for a floor shift steering column, rear turn signal lens from swap meet, and other parts from junkyard, and some smaller parts from Year One, Ames, Bob's and other restoration parts people.

Some parts were ordered from the ads in the back of the legend. I had parts everywhere and we



moved to St. Peter's in 91. I built a shelf in the top of the garage to hold all of my GTO parts. My rear clip was strapped to the rear wall in the garage. It looked like a junkyard of parts in all different colors.

Setting up for body work and paint

My dad had retired and moved to the middle of nowhere in Illinois. He said he found a body man that would put my car together and paint it for \$3500. I went to talk to Gary Klutter in Sessor about doing the work. He said he would do the work for this price if he could fit it in with his other work, how could I refuse the price. My car and pile of parts went to Sessor Illinois in the spring of 92.

Many trips to my dad's would include a 20 minute drive to the shop to look at the progress. 13 months later, after much stress on my part, I moved the car across the street to an upholstery shop. The guy put on a new top and redid the seat foam and covers. I had purchased the foam and seat covers from Ames, the upholstery guy supplied the top. This only took one week, I was ready to take my car back home. The top and labor cost less than \$1000.

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I took the rally wheels to a Corvette shop in St Peter's and the guy sand blasted them and then painted them. After a new set of tires they were ready for when my car came home. I paid \$20 each to get them refinished.

I added wheel well chrome from Year One after Indianapolis.



Trophies for popular vote

My first time showing my car was in Indianapolis. My brother drove his car to help with any car problems as this was my first trip after the body shop. On the way home the rubber fuel line on the fuel pump started leaking. I pulled off to repair it and one of the guys went by from the club holding a trophy in the window. At the next meeting he told me I had won second place. I was thrilled. Next came a 3rd place in St Louis, then another 2nd place in Niagara falls.

As a member of the Gateway club since 1989, I would go to many events. I enjoyed a day at Mid America Racing the Corvette club along with wine runs and picnics.

Why a second engine rebuild

Going to Niagara falls, I drove to upper Michigan and went across Canada. I stayed in Niagara Canada for the night before the meet. The weather was nice in the mid 80's. When it was time to head home, it was a lot warmer. Going through Ohio, it was over 100. Do you know what it's like to bake in a car with no air at this temperature? The engine would not stay cool either and was using a lot of water.

When I finally got home, I decided I would have the head checked for cracks. Took the motor out and took it to a Pontiac engine shop in granite city. No cracks were found, I had hardened seats installed to run on today's fuel and the motor balances. The engine shop assembled the motor this time.

Before the engine was done, I was offered a position near Tampa at twice the money I was making, I had to leave in a week. How was I going to get my car and its engine back together. Chris Simmons from the Gateway club lived not too far from me and I worked out a deal with him and my cousin Jeff to get the motor installed and ready to move to Florida.

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Work took a lot of my time while in Florida for six years, did not make many local car shows and only made it to the nationals in Atlanta in 96.

Came back to Missouri in 01. The dash pad had a crack in it from me putting a temp gauge on it to monitor overheating. Sent the dash pad to a company in Texas, the one they sent me back was an AC one from a 72. After many conversations and stress, I did receive the correct one. I installed the dash pad, rally gauges, floor shift steering column, Formula steering wheel, new under dash wire harness, console, floor shifter, and dash insulation that was purchased from Year One.

I had the date code correct carburetor that I purchased out of an ad in the Legend rebuilt by Jonathan Havens. It would not idle properly and he looked at it at the Springfield GTOAA Nats and told me to replace the original return spring. This fixed this problem.



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I decided to refresh the engine bay, it was never painted when it was installed in 1996. I indexed the water pump divider plate and refreshed everything on the engine under the hood. I reinstalled the TCS switch and the spark plug wire holders that had been in a box since the first engine rebuild.

What have I added to make it mine

Several items have been added to making the car look better and keep track of things.

All items added are correct for a 70 GTO.

Purchased rear wing at Chicago GTOAA swap meet in 92. Gauges from add in Legend. Center console from add in Hemings, picked up in Miami, brought home on the plane in a duffle bag. While in Miami I drove to Key Largo and saw a 70 GTO sitting in a lot with no wheels and broken windows, me and my cousin removed the floor shifter. Dash tach from Year One. Formula steering wheel from a local ad. Mounting pieces for Formula wheel from Ames.

I added 15 inch trims for the rear, one from spring swap meet and another one from John Johnson. I had them sand blasted at a gravestone place in Fenton and purchased stencils, painted



them to make them match the 14's that came with the car. I put on 255 60 15's on the rear to reduce gearing so it runs better on the highway.

I do have a correct AM/FM radio on the bench that I wish to install one day.

I am glad that I did most of the body work and paint when the price was not so high as it is today.

Today's needs and wants

Carpet needs to be replaced, I did purchase a cheap carpet to cover the holy one back in the 80's. Repair and repaint of the front bumper and rear decklid, the paint job from 1992 is starting to show its age.



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This car is made to drive, I have driven to many GTOAA Nationals and other car shows. My favorite drives were the trip around the Brickyard and driving across Canada. I hope to be able to have the time to do more car shows in the future.





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GATEWAY GTO



35 YEARS OF SLAMMIN' GEARS