

Our 1970 GTO Convertible

Two and a Half Decades of *FUN?!*

by Terry and Gail Schott



Sometimes when I read stories of peoples' cars, they talk about taking 7 or 8 years to complete a project. While they think that was a long time, I wish I could get one done that soon.

The story of our 70 convertible goes back a long way. Gail and I attended the GTOAA Nationals in 1993 at Indy. While walking thru the popular vote cars, we found a 1970 red convertible with Judge stripes. Although it wasn't a Judge, it was a great looking car. Gail told me that she thought we needed a 70 convertible like that. Although I was not in the market for another car, I did start looking for a 70. We used our "Google Search" which, back then, was the St. Louis Post Dispatch classified ads. (That's how we really did things back then!) Almost 2 years went by and then one weekend I saw an ad that looked interesting. There was a 1970 convertible for sale in Affton, MO, about 25 miles from our house. Those ads were strictly a few lines with a vague description and no pictures. I called the number and set it up to look at the car on a Sunday afternoon.

When we pulled into his drive, I saw it sitting beside the garage. ...They never look quite like you think they will. Our first impression of it was that it was "a little rough". It was a numbers matching GTO; that was good. The car had the original Cardinal Red paint and a black convertible top. Both the right and left side of the top had beautiful gray duct tape sealing them up, a LOT of duct tape. The hood was intact but a little sprung and didn't close all the way. It had a new black right front fender and the original left front fender had quite a bit of rust around the wheel opening. It matched the rust on the left rear quarter around the wheel opening and to the rear of the quarter. The right rear quarter wasn't quite as rusted because most of it had been knocked off when the car had side-swiped a telephone pole! The right side really looked bad.

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The deck lid was black primer with rust along the bottom edge and a dented area where the lock cylinder had been broken out. The frame was solid, and the floor pans and trunk did look good, so that was a plus.

The engine was correct, although the Quadrajet was long gone and had been replaced with a 650 Holley carb. It had an after-market air cleaner, as well. The engine was intact and would start and run. It had power steering, power brakes, and A/C (not working). Gail really wanted a car with A/C since we didn't have a



GTO that had it. I thought it was an odd option on a convertible, but it had it. It didn't sound too bad for a car with 115,000 miles on it. It had a turbo 400 automatic transmission with a console and the car would move, so that always helps. I could not drive it because the rear brake lines were rusted through and there was very little pedal.

Another plus for the car was that the owner had a lot of parts that he was planning to use to restore it. He had camshaft, lifters, rockers, remanufactured stock connecting rods, and TRW forged pistons. He also had a new Mellings oil pump. (More on that later.) He had a new rear bumper and both rear quarters for hardtop. After a little discussion, we finally decided to buy it.

The following day, May 15, 1995 (our 19th wedding anniversary) we picked up the car. (Happy Anniversary, Honey!) I was able to drive it on the trailer in spite of the fact that both front wheels were pointed to the center. He had replaced the tie rods and had it way out of adjustment. I had enough brakes to get it stopped and hauled it home.

The first job was to replace the brake line to the rear. Since it runs with the fuel line, by the time I got them both loose, the fuel line had broken, too. He had a replacement steel line for the rear brakes, and I fabricated the fuel line myself. After that we were able to drive the car, at least up and down the driveway.



The car was a local car, purchased by Ronald Mason, on July 6, 1970, from Vincel Pontiac at Kingshighway and Fyler in South St. Louis. I've got the bill of sale and "Protect-o-plate" for the car. The original sale price was \$4,706.00. I purchased the car from Peter Ma-

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son, his son. He told me his brother had the car for a time while stationed in Texas, and that he was the one who hit the telephone pole.

In September of 1995, I hauled the car to a friend of mine, Dave Ross, who taught auto body at the vocational technical school in Washington, MO. He put it in the shop and taught the kids how to repair it. The frame was checked and found to be straight and true. He cut off most of the rear quarters and cut up the hardtop quarters to fit properly. No convertible quarters

were available at that time. After getting it apart, I had to get him both rear wheelhouses to replace the old ones. Dave and his students did a great job and in May of 1996, I picked the car up with rear fenders in primer. Dave also worked on the hood while the car was there. He got it fixed and primed it. I parked the car in the garage at home and got busy with work and other projects.

It was almost 2 years later, in May of 1998 that I worked on it again. There was some minor floor pan rust in the front on both sides. I cut out those sections and welded in new metal



to repair it. I reinstalled the sound deadening and carpets and reinstalled the seats to get the interior intact.

My parents were both starting to have health issues and my priorities had to change. The car sat from 1998 to the end of 2004. In late November 2004, I finally had some time to work on it. I pulled the motor, pressure washed the front end and rebuilt the A-arms and steering linkage. Both fender wells, not available aftermarket, were removed from a salvage yard donor. I reassembled the front end again and trial fit the fender wells.

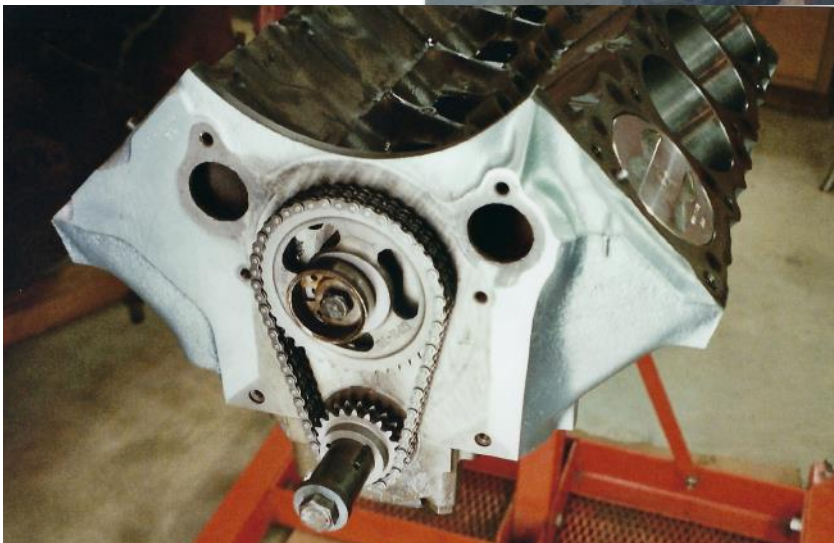
In 2006, I got a 1975 400 block and had it bored .030. I assembled the short block and

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double bagged it to keep it clean. It sat on the engine stand awaiting completion.

With the help of Chris Simmons, the convertible top was removed. We removed the folding top framework, I sandblasted it and with the help of Leroy Brune, painted it.

I found some rust by the front body mount at the firewall and determined the only way to fix it properly was



to pull the body off the frame. The body mounts looked pretty bad anyway, so I decided to go ahead and replace them all. I started the process of removing fenders, steering column, brake booster and all the wiring and steel lines under the hood. I removed the fuel tank, doors, deck lid and the dash and all the wiring throughout the car interior and trunk. By the end of March 2006, I pulled the frame out

from under the car. After removing the front-end steering linkage and suspension, I removed the rear end and trailing arms. I sandblasted, primed and painted the frame.

I reassembled all the lines, front suspension and rear end back to the frame. In a little less than a month, I had the frame back under the car and new body mounts installed. I hung the doors and fenders



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back on the car and hauled it to Dave for the stripping and repainting. He had the car for about 3 months and did a beautiful job on the body and paint. By the end of 2006, I had the convertible top frame installed as well.

In April of 2007, Chris finished installation of the convertible top. I started cleaning up and installing all the rest of the parts and pieces. This slow process went on through 2008 and 2009. In 2010, I disassembled the dash and went through it. I replaced all the vacuum lines for heater and A/C and by the end of the year got it installed back in the car.

2011 involved more wiring throughout the car, steering column work and braking system work. More work continued, although not consistent, thru 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016. During that time, we had daughter Kelly's wedding, an Honor Flight for my dad and uncle, planning for our second daughter Jennifer's wedding, and LOTS of planning meetings for our 2017 Nationals. There were lots of things in life that were more important than the car.

In 2017 I did start to gather up, clean and paint engine parts. In my spare time, in 2017 and 2018, I did get the engine assembled and installed on my motor test stand. In



April of 2018, the motor ran. I got it installed in the car. Despite a few small problems, I finally got to drive the car to the alignment shop in August of 2018. It did fine on its 10-mile journey! The next day when I went to pick it up, it had no power steering, at all... It worked fine on the trip over. I had it hauled home by AAA. The power steering pump had absolutely no pressure even though I had had the pump and gear box rebuilt by a great rebuilder several years before.

After getting the steering gearbox and pump rebuilt again, it was up and running. I had really wanted to take it on the Route 66 cruise in September of 2018. I just didn't have enough time to break it in. However, I did drive it to the Big Chief Restaurant, (3 miles from home) when the group came through.

By the time the 2019 GTOAA Nationals came around, I had continued to drive it a little and work on lots of little problems. I had about 80 miles on it and I hauled it to Lawrenceburg, Indiana for the show. We did get the car teched in and a picture taken. The next day, with the Duryea's in their car and Wildebrandt's in their '69, and Donna Bowers in the backseat of our convertible, we left for the Neon Sign Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio. About 10 miles into the drive I lost oil pressure in the car. I caught it pretty quick and shut it off and rolled to the shoulder. Thanks to Don and Janice, I got a ride back to the trailer lot and picked up the truck and trailer. Loading on a narrow shoulder of the Interstate is never good. I started the engine long enough to load into the trailer. I've always heard that if you're going to have problems after a re-build, that it will be in the first 100 miles... and in my case, it was right.

The project had just been completed, and now I get to start over... But that's another

