



8th Annual GTOAA Regional



8th Annual GTOAA Regional in Pontiac, Illinois

by Chris Winslow



As those of us that have been working the GTOAA Regional at the Pontiac Museum since the beginning know, we have been extraordinarily lucky over the past 7 years with the weather. We have had some truly beautiful fall weekends and even a few weekends that were less than ideal. But never a real rainout. This year, it looked like one week after the first ever total cancelation of the Wheels in Motion car show due to a storm, that we could be about to have a second car show canceled in as many weeks.

But, that is jumping to the end of story. The weekend started nicely with many of us meeting at the Hen House restaurant for breakfast on Thursday morning and then caravanning from there to Pontiac. Once we arrived at Pontiac, the plan was to quickly check into the hotels and then cruise along historic Route 66 to the Launching Pad for a late lunch.

When we arrived at the hotels, we learned that Liane Finkenbinder had gotten her finger caught in a door and was at the Emergency room for stitches. So we all gathered in the lobby of the Quality Inn to socialize and wait for Alan and Liane to catch up with us.

Once Liane and Alan arrived, we lined up and headed out. It was a nice afternoon so the most of the cruisers with convertibles had the tops down. In my, case, I had decided that the Trans Am had been sufficiently shaken down that it was ready for a long road trip. So, since the GTO had already had a long road trip to the GTOAA Nats earlier in year, Paula and I decided to bring the TA for the Regional event. We, of course, popped out the T-Tops for this cruise.

The Launching Pad had been recently renovated and they offered a nice menu, including shakes and ice cream.

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After lunch, we all headed outside for a photo with the Launching Pad's iconic Gemini Giant.

Following that, we jumped back in the cars and Alan and Liane led the group to a few other historic Route 66 spots on the way back to the hotels.

On Friday morning, we broke up into two groups. About half us went with Alan for a tour of his 3 buildings of cars, boats and other vehicles. This is a collection that is a



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mix of vehicle he has collected over 30+ years along with vehicles that belong to the Pontiac Museum and other private owners in town. The other half of the Gateway crowd headed to town for some shopping.

The first two buildings Alan showed us were actually old grain storage buildings sitting side by side. They were filled from end to end with dozens of cars. Alan told us at one time when he first started filling these buildings, the idea was to have the cars that did not really run along the walls and the running cars lined up down the middle. Over time, however, many of the middle row cars were now really storage cars too, most of which had not run in a while.





The variety of the collection was impressive. Alan had focused on collecting cars that were unique or rare copies of special cars. In addition to that, however, he had some really interesting vehicles of other types. For example, there was a boat that had been retrofitted for a Pontiac executive with a Pontiac 400 cubic inch engine (complete with badging!)

Alan's third building was a short distance away from the first two. This building had previously housed a printing business. In this building Alan had some of his nicest cars along with a lot of memorabilia like old style gas pumps and gas station signs. The car collection in this building included some GTO's, Firebirds, Corvettes, and a number of truly unique cars.

Alan went through each car one by one, uncovered it, and told the story of how he found each of them and why he purchased them. It was a truly amazing collection.

On Friday evening, we all headed over to the Finkenbinder's for a Bar B Que. There was way more food than



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we could eat and everyone had a really great time. But, now the fun was over. It was time to get to work.

Saturday morning we arrived at the Museum to set up for the registration for the car show. The weather to this point had been generally OK, but that was about to change. The predictions did not look good for either Saturday or the car show on Sunday. At that point early on Saturday morning, it was not raining yet, so we set up and got to work. Saundra was unfortunately not with us due to nasty case of the flu, but Paula and others stepped up to fill the void. Initially we were doing pretty well. The weather was holding and registrations were looking good considering the weather forecast.

Then it started to rain and the winds started to blow.....

Despite this, Alan Finkenbinder had a great cruise and lunch planned, and that went on. As the cars proceeded out of town for the cruise, Paula, Mark Melrose, and I stayed back to hold open registration. Not long after the cruisers left, the rain got harder and the winds picked up. For much of the next couple of hours, Paula and I were trying to keep the registration tables dry and the Museum's popups from blowing away. For me it was like De Je Vu all over again. For the second weekend in a row I was clinging to a pop up in the middle of a rain storm.

As the afternoon drug on, the weather did improve a bit. When it was time to close down registration for the day, we were actually pleasantly surprised at how well we had done in terms of the overall registration count.

Next up on the schedule our traditional Saturday evening activities. A fried chicken dinner prepared by Bernardi's followed by an ice cream social. As usual the chicken was excellent as were all the sides the ice cream was also great.

Then it was time for a little entertainment. This year a pair of sisters put on a show with support from (former) Mayor Bob and his wife.



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Of course, it would not be the same if some of the Gateway members did not get in the act. As seems to always be the case, Rich Vie was chosen to participate.

As the show progressed, other Gateway members participated. Then the sisters came off the stage looking for audience members to dance with them. One of them chose Earl. Those of us that have seen Earl dance, know how good he is, so what happened next was not a huge surprise for us, but it was a really big surprise for Earl's dance partner!

As we all headed back to the hotels after the show was over, the ominous weather predictions for Sunday were on our mind. We all were expecting that the next morning, for the first time since we started doing this show, we would have to cancel it due to weather.



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As Sunday morning broke, we were surprised as the rain that had been predicted to be an all day event for the last several days, now appeared to be several hours off. So, the Gateway crew descended on the town square to set up for the show.



The new weather reports now gave us until 1:00 or 2:00 before the rain would be in, so we adjusted our time table accordingly, telling everyone to have their ballots by noon so that we could tally the votes and begin awarding trophies around 1:00 or 1:30.

The weather predictions had, of course, hurt our attendance. Mark Melrose had indicated that in the runup to the event, he had received a record number of pre-registrations and also phone calls about the event. So, we were hoping for a record turn out, but the weather definitely changed that. That said, however, we had a steady stream of cars roll in and register that morning. We ultimately wound up with enough cars to surround the courthouse.



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With the shortened show people were moving along voting quickly. While that was going on a number of vendors were in the town square selling apparel, food (including what I heard was some really great ice cream). We also had the DJ there, although he had wisely set up his equipment on the top of the steps of the courthouse so that he would be out of the weather when the rain arrived.



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Once all the ballots were in Brian Sorenson and the HOI club once again organized and ran the vote tally using the tool that Tammy Hedrick had put together for this show a few years back.

With the help of about a dozen attendees, and aided by some pizzas that Brian had brought in, we made quick work of tallying the ballots and got them out to the courthouse to continue our efforts to beat out the weather.

As we called everyone to the front of the courthouse for the presentation of the trophies, the rain started to move in. There had been talk of moving the awards presentation indoors somewhere, but we really could not figure out how or when to do that, so we were committed to doing it on the courthouse steps. Thankfully, the rain was light enough that we were able to get the awards all in.



Gateway members took home a number of the trophies. Winners included Alan Finkenbinder, Harry Timmerman, Jon Havens, and Brian Ray.

So, although the 8th Annual GTOAA Regional Car Show in support of the Pontiac Museum was smaller than we had hoped it would be, we did roll out of town with our perfect record of no rainouts intact and when the dust settles we will still end up making a substantial donation to the museum with the proceeds we collected. (See The President’s Scoop for the final tally).

