

Wisconsin Society of Automotive Historians



Carhart Chronicle

WINTER 2023

MEETING AT THE EAA, OSHKOSH (B'GOSH); DON'T FORGET TO PAY YOUR DUES; AND ROYAL PONTIAC AND THE ROYAL "BOBCAT"

WINTER MEETING ON ON SATURDAY, JANUARY 21ST, AT THE EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT ASSOCIATION IN OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN

Our Winter meeting will be held on Saturday, January 21st at 1:00 p.m., at the Experimental Aircraft Association Museum located at 3000 Poberezny Road in Oshkosh. From U.S. 41, take Exit 116 east (Wis. 44/South Park Rd.). Turn right on Knapp Street Rd. and right on Poberezny Rd. and proceed ¼-mile to museum on the left. There is ample parking on site. The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and members are welcome to arrive early and stay late to enjoy the exhibits. Sign in at the WSAH attendance sheet at the entrance counter upon arrival. WSAH is covering admission.

ROYAL PONTIAC's "BOBCAT"

"Royal Bobcat."

The name is a legend to those steeped in Pontiac performance of the halcyon days of the 1960's, a time when Pontiac was the performance brand, on the strip and on the street.

It was also a time when Royal Pontiac of Royal Oak, Michigan, was *the* dealer that made fast Pontiacs faster.



The story began in 1956, when Semon "Bunky" Knutson was named General Manager of the Pontiac Division at General Motors. A second generation General Motors

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WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

"Planes, Trains, and Automobiles." That was the tease to the contents on a recent Hot Rod Magazine cover. Some of you also recognize the phrase as the title of a comedic movie from the 1980s. When I received that issue of Hot Rod, it set me to thinking about the name of our organization. It seems the bulk of our focus is on autoMOBILES, that is, "cars" - but doesn't autoMOTIVE include much more? One dictionary definition of "automotive" as an adjective (just thought I would throw that in for those who just loved their high school English classes) is: "pertaining to the design, operation, manufacture, or sale of automobiles" then goes on to define "automobile" as "propelled by a self-contained motor, engine, or the like."

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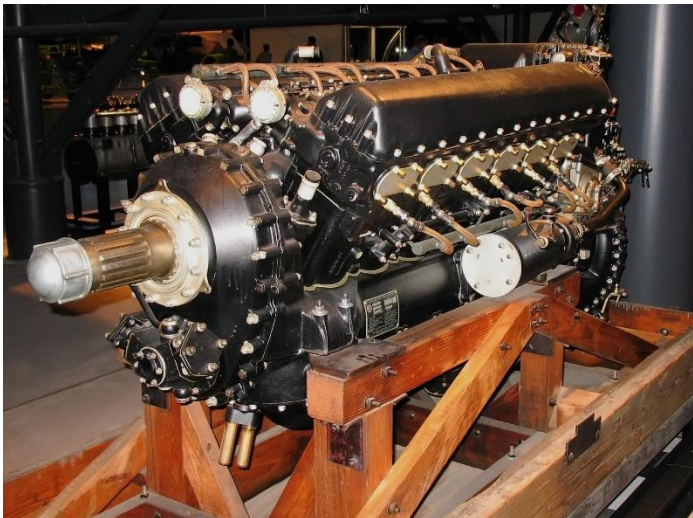
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WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT CONT.

Granted, most of us are interested in a variety of self-propelled, mostly wheeled vehicles, including trucks of all sizes, motorcycles, farm tractors, and more...but I'm guessing many of you are at least somewhat interested in airplanes and trains and motorized watercraft. Furthermore, many are interested in other areas tied to automotive, as the definition implies. The SAH membership directory lists approximately 100 automotive interests from advertising, aerodynamics, and art and illustration, to Wankel engines, wheels and tires, and women and the automobile. I happen to have an interest in, to me anyway, the most obvious connection between cars and planes: the engines. Several car and truck manufacturers produced aircraft powerplants, some before they were in the production of vehicles and some after they were well established in vehicle production. The one that stands out, again to me but likely to many, is the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, a 27 liter V12 with horsepower up to as much as 2,300 by the end of World War II in Merlin-design engines. The Merlin was also produced, under license, by Packard in the U.S. and Ford of Britain. The engines powered the British Spitfire and U.S. P-51 Mustang among others, while the Germans had Messerschmitt and BMW competitors.



Merlin V1650 produced by Packard Motor Company under license.

There are so many other significant automobile connections, such as the familiar Saab and the less well known Hispano-Suiza, that those who are interested can spend hours researching. Oh...did I forget all about trains? General Motors Electro-Motive Division and Winton for research starters - and that's all I'm going to say about trains; for now anyway.

As most of you are now aware, at our autumn meeting we decided to have a winter WSAH meeting and event in

January (Wisconsin weather be damned) and hold it at the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Museum in Oshkosh. (Thus, the preceding paragraphs...I think you have figured that out all by yourselves.) As a WSAH member, you will be admitted at no cost to you, as you have been to other venues over the past year, including The Automobile Gallery, the Wisconsin Automotive Museum, and the Dahl Motors Collection. At that same autumn meeting, the membership approved an increase in annual dues to \$25. I feel any increase should be justified and, especially currently, inflation alone could be enough of a reason. However, since I just mentioned three automotive collections, where you have been admitted at no charge and now the EAA, visiting any of those on your own would cost you an average of at least \$10 each. If you volunteer to help at Iola, you would more than recoup your dues by getting a three-day pass and food voucher. All that aside, receiving the Carhart Chronicle and ...Pollyanna-ish here... pride in membership, are more than reason enough, aren't they?

Here's hoping the worst of our winter weather will be out of the way, at least for a few days around Saturday January 21, 2023, and many of you can make it to the EAA Museum. There is even a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine on display that you can examine up close. I'm quite sure you won't be disappointed.

Ken Nimocks

JANUARY MEETING AGENDA

Secretary's Report/Minutes

Treasurer's Report

Annual Budget – Proposal

Website Revision

Brochure Revision

T-shirt Progress

SAH Report

MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 22, 2022, MEETING

The Wisconsin Society of Automotive Historians convened its fall meeting in the upstairs conference room of the Automobile Gallery in Green Bay, Wisconsin, overlooking the beautiful automobile collection on display. The meeting was held following an illuminating and entertaining tour of the Gallery's exhibits by its director, Darrel Burnett.

The meeting was called to order at 1:28 p.m. by President Ken Nimocks. Waiver of the reading of the minutes of the April meeting and their approval as published in the Carhart Chronicle was adopted by acclamation. Treasurer Gary Koehnke then presented the Treasurer's Report. On motion by William Chartrand, seconded by Gene Steinfeldt, the report was approved.

President Nimocks then introduced for discussion the Plan to Increase Membership presented by the Committee appointed pursuant to the resolution adopted by the WSAH membership at their April 23, 2022, meeting and as published in the Fall 2022 issue of the Carhart Chronicle.

Discussion centered on the importance to continuation of the WSAH to adding new members and activities beyond mere meetings that would attract new members and keep them involved. The discussion also focused on the standing committees that are contemplated by the Plan, and how they can be staffed at present membership levels. To that end Greg VanArk volunteered to head the membership committee and visit as many car shows as possible during the summer of 2023, manning and staffing a WSAH booth reaching out to show participants to encourage them to join our organization.

In further discussion, President Nimocks encouraged consideration of the Plan as a whole, rather than attempting to reinvent it by considering it piecemeal. His thoughts in this regard were met with overall approval.

William Chartrand then moved that the Plan be adopted in whole as the Plan of the WSAH. The motion was seconded by Don Gullickson. The motion carried without dissenting vote.

George Tesar then addressed the membership concerning the importance of creating a Wisconsin Depository for Automotive Literature and Items of Interest to Historians, Scholars, and Enthusiasts. Given the floor by the meeting, George distributed a detailed proposal and outlined his belief that preservation of historically important automotive literature was essential to making scholarly research into automotive history possible and should be a specific goal of the WSAH.

In further discussion of the proposal, members addressed a variety of concerns, among them cost, how and who would determine historic significance, preservation of materials, and whether there were other Wisconsin organizations already performing some of these functions and whether it would be possible to work cooperatively with them, if so. As the time for the meeting was growing short, it was decided to leave further discussion for a future meeting.

Members then fixed the spring 2023 meeting to be held on April 21st at the Wisconsin Automotive Museum in Hartford, assuming facility availability. A consensus then arose for having a January meeting that could be held at a location convenient to an interstate type road to facilitate traveling to the meeting in winter driving conditions. The EAA in Oshkosh was suggested and President Nimocks agreed to determine availability and announce a date.

At the suggestion of President Nimocks, the members then voted unanimously to donate \$400.00 to the Automobile Gallery in thanks for the use of their conference room and the splendid tour to which Mr. Burnett treated us.

The meeting was adjourned by acclamation at 3:09 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph Kalal, for
Dan Manola, Secretary

DUES ARE DUE

At the October meeting, the membership voted to increase annual dues to \$25.00, in accordance with the Plan to Increase Membership. The additional amount will provide expanded activity opportunities for members.

Dues are due on January 1st, annually. We don't send statements – beyond this one – so please send your check for \$25.00 payable to WSAH to our Treasurer:

GARY KOEHNKE, WSAH Treasurer
1696 Delta Dr.
Neenah, WI 54946

WELCOMING GARY KAPHINGST

WSAH is pleased to welcome our newest member, Gary Kaphingst of Black Creek, Wisconsin. Gary spent fifty years in automotive sales and service, has particular knowledge and interest in General Motors history, and is passionate about automotive restoration.

ROYAL PONTIAC AND ITS "BOBCAT," CONT.

executive – his father had been GM's president - Knutson took over a moribund division that sold old cars to old people. It was a problem Knutson identified with a legendary dictum: "You can sell a young man's car to an old man. But you can't sell an old man's car to a young man."

Knutson had five years to change that. To help him do so, he had Frank Bridge as his General Sales Manager. Bridge was the dealers' champion in the Division. To him, selling meant getting the deal done in the showroom. He did not understand marketing. It was a foreign concept to him. Marketing, however, is what gets the prospect into the showroom.



Semon "Bunkie" Knutson

Knutson's background was engineering. Yet, he understood marketing and the importance of product image. Due to lead times, initially he'd been able to make only superficial changes to Pontiac's models, lessening but not eliminating their stodgy styling (a task not helped by Harley Earl's bulbous 1958 styling).



That changed with model year 1959.

1959 was the beginning of the "Wide-Track Pontiac." The widening of the vehicle's track was actually dictated by new the body design, which was notably wider than the

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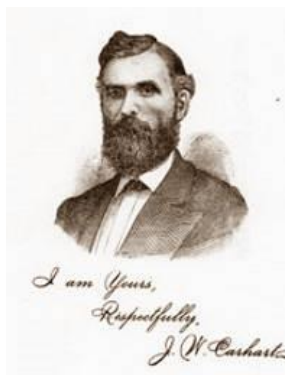
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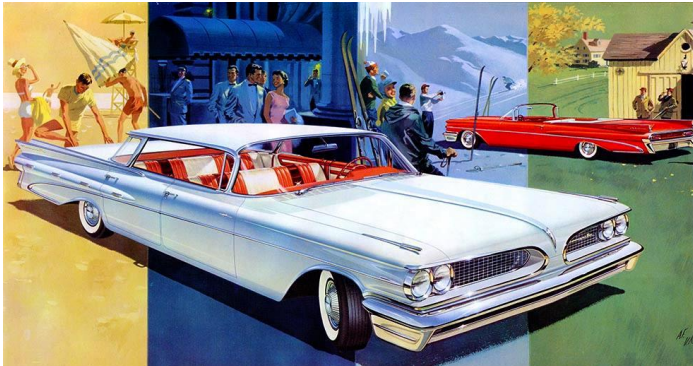
THE REV. DR. JOHN WESLEY CARHART



THE CARHART CHRONICLE IS NAMED IN HONOR OF THE REV. DR. JOHN WESLEY CARHART, CREATOR OF THE "SPARK" STEAM CARRIAGE, CONSIDERED THE FIRST TRUE AUTOMOBILE, AT RACINE, WISCONSIN, SEPTEMBER, 1873.

ROYAL PONTIAC AND ITS "BOBCAT," CONT.

1958 models. Featuring it as a key element of the car was the idea of Pontiac's advertising agency. In the first six months of its production, the 1959 Pontiac exceeded the total sales for the 1958 model.



1959 Pontiac Bonneville Vista four door hardtop

Pontiac was no longer selling old men's cars.

One facet of Knutson's overall program to change Pontiac's image was racing. Knutson had set up a Pontiac racing program shortly after becoming General Manager. At first, it relied on outside suppliers for performance parts that were then cataloged as Pontiac parts. As the Division's involvement in racing grew, Knutson created the "Super Duty Group" to bring production of performance parts in-house. Even after General Motors joined other members of the Automobile Manufacturer's Association to ban manufacturer involvement in racing, Pontiac continued providing favored race teams with Super Duty parts.

Competition success in both NASCAR and NHRA racing had helped change Pontiac's fusty image to one that was youthful and performance oriented. Regardless of the corporate racing ban, selling performance was now the essence of selling Pontiacs.

And part – literally – of selling Pontiac performance was selling Pontiac's Super Duty parts.

Which was not something Frank Bridge cared about.

In fact, he opposed it.

Though these parts were in the Pontiac parts books and could be ordered from any Pontiac dealer, the dealership body as a whole was not attuned to the performance market. Though racing success helped sell Wide-Track Pontiacs, its dealers were slow to appreciate performance *per se* as a marketable feature (as luxury, for example, is a marketable feature). There was no effort within the dealerships to promote sales of Super Duty parts or edu-

cate their personnel about the potential for profit from selling and installing performance parts.

Jim Wangers worked for Pontiac's advertising agency, MacManus, John & Adams. In 1959, he pitched a plan to Knutson, Bridge, and Pontiac's Chief Engineer, Elliot "Pete" Estes, to teach dealers through a class held at the division's zone offices about marketing of performance parts through dealerships and educate them about marketing Super Duty parts to the performance customer. Knutson was



Jim Wangers

interested. Bridge was not. Estes sat it out, without comment. The meeting ended without decision, but the atmosphere wasn't promising.

Though Knutson had been unwilling to outright overrule Bridge, he wasn't going to let Bridge obstruct the idea, either. When Wangers returned to the agency after the meeting, Knutson had already called. When he returned the call, Knutson told Wangers to create a pilot program that would prove the concept: find a dealer, school that dealer in performance, and show what could be done. It was a chance to prove that selling performance across the parts counters and in the service departments of Pontiac dealers would drive sales and create profits.

Wangers approached the largest Pontiac dealer in the Detroit area, who was non-committal.

He then approached Ace Wilson, Jr., owner of one of the smallest, Royal Pontiac in Royal Oak, Michigan, about thirty miles from Pontiac's headquarters in Pontiac, Michigan.



"Ace" Wilson's Royal Pontiac

When Wangers explained the idea, Wilson instantly accepted.

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ROYAL PONTIAC AND ITS “BOBCAT,” CONT.

It was now September of 1959 and Wangers, still as an employee of the advertising agency, became fully involved in setting up the performance parts program at Royal Pontiac.

Though the idea had started as a marketing tool for Super Duty parts, it was inevitable that the tail would eventually wag the dog. Customers who came to Royal Pontiac for parts to make their Pontiac faster and to install those parts also expected the dealership to be able to sell them a faster Pontiac when they bought a new car. They wanted performance built into their new Pontiac.

This was all backed up by Royal Pontiac’s racing program. Wangers may have been an advertising executive employed by the ad agency, not by General Motors, but it was functionally a distinction without a difference. His job at the agency was to promote Pontiac and immersing himself in Royal’s performance program was doing just that.



1959 Royal Pontiac at Detroit Dragway, where it was the first stock car to exceed 100 mph and set a 13.91 ET, both track records.

Starting in 1959, Royal went drag racing. The following year, Pontiac listed a Super Duty package specifically designed for drag racing. Royal ordered a Coronado Red Catalina with that package: 348 hp V-8, floor shifted 4 speed manual transmission (the first year offered), insulation delete, even an aluminum front bumper (an over the counter Pontiac part). But they didn’t delete the heater. (They were in Michigan, and they knew that car would be Royal’s used car lot at the end of the racing season.)

With that Catalina, Royal won the National Hot Rod Association Nationals.

The driver who won the Nationals with that Catalina was Jim Wangers.

When Wangers returned to the office at MacManus on Monday after winning the Nationals, his boss informed Wangers that he’d be having lunch that day in Pontiac’s Executive Dining Room with Pontiac’s Chief Engineer,

Pete Estes, and a few of his “engine guys.”

One of those guys was John DeLorean.

The racing success of Royal’s Pontiacs led Royal to create a specific performance package. Rather than having to select individual parts, the customer could get a package of parts designed to work together to produce seriously improved performance. Available over-the-counter or installed, this was the Royal “Bobcat.”

The Bobcat name was dictated by the individual block letters used on Catalina and Bonneville models in 1962. Wangers played Pontiac scrabble and discovered that “BOBCAT” could be spelled out by selecting letters from the Catalina and Bonneville rear deck trim. Royal also created an emblem, modeled on the emblem Pontiac used for the original Grand Prix introduced in 1962.



The Bobcat package offered by Royal for the 1962 Catalina and Grand Prix models that were already equipped with Pontiac’s most powerful engine included different centrifugal advance springs in the distributor that increased spark advance (while also disconnecting the vacuum advance and changing dwell) and cooler spark plugs. It also included new intake manifold gaskets that blocked off the heat riser passages to reduce heat in the intake manifold, resulting in cooler intake air and less heat sink to the carburetor. New jets were installed in the carburetor for a denser air/fuel mixture to take full advantage of the cooler intake air. Lastly, lock nuts were installed on the rocker arms that prevented hydraulic lifter pump-up at higher engine rpm.

For \$200.00, Royal would install the Bobcat package and also mill the heads and install thinner cylinder head gaskets, then tune the car to take advantage of the increased compression.

Or you could order your new Pontiac already “Bobcated,” in which case the appearance package included the “BOBCAT” lettering in place of the model’s name at the rear of the car – where anyone challenging the car would be most likely to see it.

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ROYAL PONTIAC AND ITS “BOBCAT,” CONT.

But then, in 1963, General Motors decided to ban corporate racing.

This wasn't to be as easily ignored as the AMA ban. There wasn't to be any working around this ban behind the scenes through a favored dealer. Management was serious. This had nothing to do with safety. The federal government's Justice Department's antitrust lawyers were figuratively drooling at the prospect of breaking up GM, splitting Chevrolet off from the rest of the company. Management was terrified and trying to tamp down sales to prevent exceeding a figure – 60% of the market – at which it was commonly thought the government would sue. Even orders already placed for new Pontiacs with the Super Duty package were cancelled.

Pontiac had reached third place in overall sales in 1961, displacing American Motors' Rambler from that spot. Knutson had built Pontiac's sales on performance. His successor, “Pete” Estes, had no intention of abandoning the formula. Pontiac did not have to win at the track to sell performance. They merely had to produce automobiles that delivered performance.

When the ban went into effect in 1963, the design of the 1964 models was already locked in. 1964 would see the end of the compact Tempest that had sold poorly and gained a reputation for being mechanically finicky. The new Tempest model would be based on the new corporate intermediate body, shared with Buick, Oldsmobile, and Chevrolet.

So, it would be just like them, too.

Pontiac needed something to make the new model stand out from the corporate kin.

John DeLorean was now Chief Engineer at Pontiac. He also had figured he was in line for the General Manager job, an aspiration that led him to see engineering from a marketing perspective.

DeLorean held regular Saturday morning brainstorming sessions with others Pontiac engineers at the GM Proving Grounds. There, on a fateful Saturday morning in the spring of 1963, a prototype 1964 Tempest coupe with the 326 cubic inch V-8 was on a lift. The engineers were examining the underside. One of the engineers, Bill Collin, made an observation: “You know John, with the engine mounts being the same, it would take us about twenty minutes to slip a 389 into this thing. We'll probably need some heavier springs in the front end, but

the engine will fit right in.”



John DeLorean during his time at Pontiac

That moment conceived the GTO.

The next Saturday, the group had a prototype 1964 Tempest equipped with the 389 and a four speed transmission at the Proving Grounds. The car would be refined in succeeding weeks to improve the suspension, add a heavy-duty clutch, and find the best tires.

Much has been made of Pontiac's cleverly evading the General Motors rule requiring at least 10 lbs. vehicle weight per cubic inch of engine displacement. Exceptions to the rule had to be approved by the corporate Engineering Policy Committee, and the only exception they were going to approve was for the Corvette. The GTO would never get past the Committee.

The real story is both simpler and more complex.

The simple part is that Pontiac didn't have to evade the Committee. It only had to approve new models. The Tempest was the new model and it was already approved. The GTO wasn't a model. It was an option. Committee approval was not required for options.

The complex part is that there remained a concern that GM's corporate brass would kill the GTO even so. The solution to that problem was to get a sufficient number of dealer orders on the books before they found out. It would make the company look foolish to cancel it if there were already a number of orders for the package. DeLorean wanted 5,000 orders.

But Frank Bridge still didn't get it.

He didn't want the GTO.

Bridge saw no need for the GTO. Pontiac was comfortably in third place in sales. He did not see any need to complicate the line with a car he firmly believed dealers would park in the corner of the lot and never sell. He made his

ROYAL PONTIAC AND ITS “BOBCAT,” CONT.

thoughts known in a meeting with Estes and DeLorean. DeLorean pushed for Bridge to get dealers to commit to sales of 5,000 GTOs. Bridge resisted: “Frankly, this thing is going to be a pain in the ass.”

Finally, Estes delivered the knockout punch – to Bridge’s ego.

“Come on, Frank. You know you and your boys can sell 5,000 of anything.”

Bridge caved. He said he’d have the District Managers see what dealers would order. “If they can take 5,000 orders, I’ll commit to it. But I don’t want any more, and I bet you won’t sell even 500.”

Pontiac sold 32,450 GTOs in 1964.

Among the legends of that introductory year is the *Car and Driver* magazine GTO vs. GTO comparison test, the cover story of the March 1964 issue.

The idea originated with Wangers, based on the use by both Ferrari and Pontiac of the GTO abbreviation for “gran turismo omologato” – Italian for grand touring homologated, a racing classification and, thereby, a name that neither could copyright. He pitched the idea to David E. Davis, the editor at *Car and Driver*. The magazine had only recently been reformatted from *Sports Car Illustrated* and Davis was anxious to expand circulation. Davis saw the potential – not just for sales of a single issue, but to establish *Car and Driver* as the magazine about American performance cars.

Ferrari was not interested. That did not deter Davis. They already had performance numbers for the Ferrari GTO.

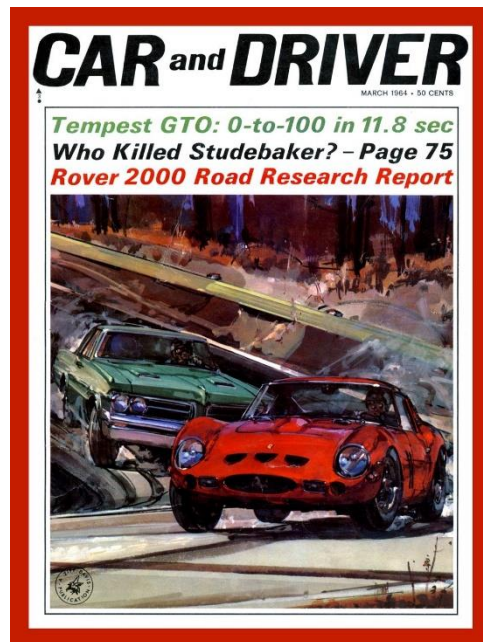
Pontiac provided two GTOs for the test, one blue and one red. The blue car was driven by *Car and Driver* staff from Detroit to the Daytona International Speedway where testing was to be performed. The red car was shipped to Daytona after a stop at Royal Pontiac. It was to be the GTO fully optioned for performance.

Pontiac made no secret that the red GTO was a Bobcat. It was equipped with the 348 hp, 389 cubic inch engine, Tri-Power carburetor option, close ratio 4 speed transmission with Hurst shifter, 3,90:1 limited slip differential, to which the Bobcat modifications had been applied. Wangers and the Pontiac staff told *Car and Driver* what modifications had been made to the red car.

Except for one.

The performance numbers turned in by both cars were exceptional, but those of the red car were astounding. Car and Driver reported 0 to 60 in 4.6 seconds, 0 to 100 in 11.8 seconds. Part of that was due to the magazine’s crude timing methods – just a stopwatch. But part of it was due to that one undisclosed modification.

Wangers would later admit in his memoir, *Glory Days*, that the engine in the red car was actually a 421 cubic inch V-8, which had been – this part was true – Bobcatted. The 389 and 421 blocks looked the same, provided that one portion of the distributor boss casting was removed and the block casting number conformed.



In 1965, Royal Pontiac sold 2,500 new Pontiacs, of which 1,000 were GTOs (out of total Division GTO sales of 75,000). The Bobcat package now included a revision to the induction system that opened up the hood scoop and coupled it with a revised upside-down “umbrella” air cleaner under the hood sealed to the bottom of the hood. That assured the engine received only the cool air coming through the scoop, lowering intake air temperatures as much as 50 degrees. This would shortly become the “Ram Air package,” a production option supplied to Pontiac from Royal. Royal would also introduce a progressive linkage for the Tri-Power package, again ultimately adopted by Pontiac.

Royal would continue to produce Bobcat GTOs through the halcyon years of Pontiac performance. It would build the prototype Judge, the car Pontiac evaluated for production.

Jim Wangers would remain with MacManus until acquiring a Chevrolet dealership in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which he later sold before returning to MacManus.

The red car survives in the hands of a private collector.

-- Ralph Kalal