

A PONTIAC OF MY GENERATION

By Harry Dinch

I bought my first car in 1984. It was a 1974 Pontiac Firebird, which began my life-long fascination with Pontiacs. I've owned several of them, but my 1974 was the car I used to learn how to upgrade muscle cars. As time went on, I learned to upgrade engines and started to search for a car in which to transplant many of my high-performance parts. My next Pontiac was a 1972 Firebird, which after much work and time spent, had an unfortunate and rather crazy demise, another story unto itself.

After I lost my 1972, I searched again and found two cars. One, a 1973 Firebird that would work nicely and the other a 1968 Firebird with no engine or transmission, but had potential for racing due to its light weight. My father decided to buy the 1973 and I bought the 1968. My 1968 Firebird took on a life of its own and became a serious street machine for its time. I sold this car after enlisting in the military.

With the help of friends, I worked on my father's 1973 Firebird. I transplanted a 1974 Pontiac 350 engine out of my mother's 1974 Le Mans into that car. After we completed the engine and transmission install, my father took care of it. The 1973 moved with my parents to Pennsylvania and had a short life on the road. Eventually, it found its way to the barn where it stayed for 22 years.

The years passed and after retiring, I settled in Virginia. In 2012, my parents gifted me the 1973 Firebird, which by then was in really rough condition. **But** I got it on the road after a little bit of tuning and a few upgrades. This also turned out to be a perfect time to teach my son how to work on cars. We started upgrading the car with a new carb, starter, ignition, and all the basic items to get it going. We completed that in short order only to blow a lifter after three months. That's when the rebirth of that car truly started. I figured if I was going to redo the car I would tear it down completely.

The journey started with buying parts, removing the body from the frame and taking everything to bare metal, underside and the inside. Part of the job was to apply POR15 to the floorboards and occasionally wearing it on my body as it won't come off once dries. I went to work with a silver ear for a week.

This transformation took a few years and all my work was done in a one-car garage using logs to hold the body up when it was separated from the frame. While working on the car, I transported a newly acquired 400 Pontiac motor to Central Virginia to be reborn as a 461 roller motor. The specs on the motor ended up being 600 lift solid roller cam with 1.65 rockers, forged pistons and crank, and Kaughman aluminum heads. A Holley 850 sits on top of an Edelbrock Performer intake. A DUI ignition with an MSD handles the spark and Doug's headers completes the exhaust with Magnaflow mufflers in the back. The engine produces approximately 550 horsepower and 575 lbs of torque.

As the car came alive, it had a serious problem with the brakes. Research revealed the problem was caused by the radical cam. The solution: Hydroboost. This system utilizes the power steering pump in lieu of the vacuum brake booster. Once that was installed, the braking problem was resolved. To further improve it, I upgraded to rear disc brakes. Also, I installed new Moser axles thinking about those soon-to-be hard launches at the track. Toward completion, I put in a new custom dash and gauges, and completely new factory-style upholstery with new foam. While not perfect, it turned out very well for a first-timer.

Now mostly complete, I sent the car for paint and minor body work. This took a number of months, but the result was worth the wait. The 1973 Firebird with no real tuning went to the track and ran a 12.3 with street tires. While the track is a fun event, driving on the highway with 373 gears was challenging so I went back to Google for answers. This led me to drop in a Gear Vendors overdrive unit.

This bolted right to the Turbo 400 transmission, a shortened drive shaft being the only requirement. It did the trick by dropping my final drive ratio to

approximately 297. That unit operates on an electronic switch you can turn on or off. Street driving is now so much more enjoyable. It does 65 mph at 2500 rpms. The car currently runs 11.7 with drag radials, which is about as fast as I plan to take it. It is a street car first and foremost.

While the 1973 Firebird has been to car shows and events, and won a few awards, I find discussing and hearing other people's journeys with their rides the most enjoyable part of owning a classic car. My 1973 Firebird continues to be a source of enjoyment and is a great car to drive. The plan is to keep the car in the family for many years to come.





