

DRIVING THE HOT '67s

PONTIAC GTO

Where performance
is the strong suit,
this is the ace to lead.



Not even a fast bend, sizable hump, and wet road faded roadholding of the GTO at test track.

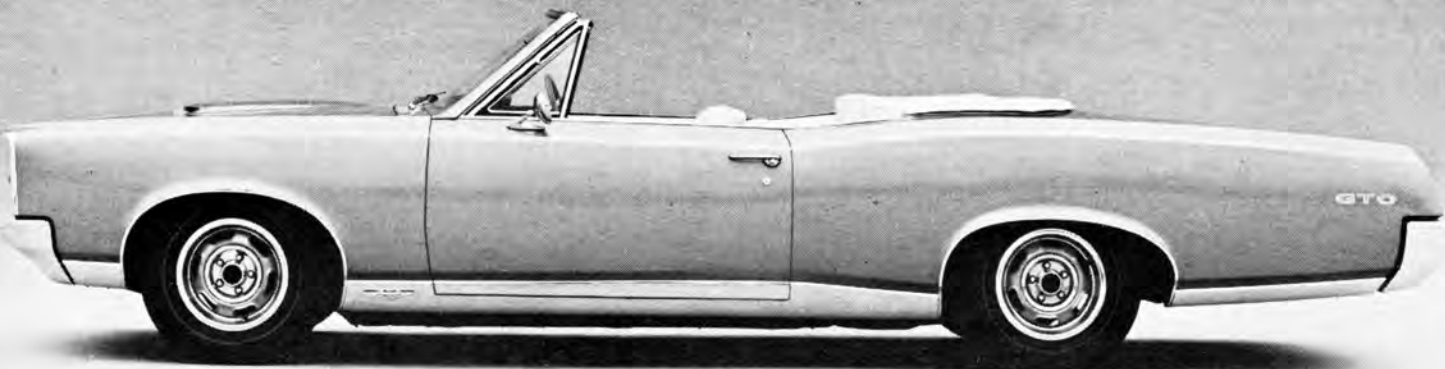
A GLANCE AT PONTIAC'S 1967 line-up can't help but make us think of the famous last words attributed to General Custer, "Where did all those Indians come from?" For Pontiac, which offered 26 models in 1965 and 33 in 1966, expands to 35 in the coming year, plus the possibility of even more introductions at mid-year.

Ever since the late '50s when Pontiac began changing its image from a nice car for Granny to that of a stormer, performance has been one of its strong suits — and 1967 will be no different, although there are no spectacular horsepower increases. The GTO we drove remains at 335 hp, for example, although the displacement was boosted slightly from 389 cubic inches to an even 400. This is with the 4-barrel carburetor, the standard setup. The only result of the extra inches is a slight gain in torque, from 431 to 441 lbs.-

ft. The Tri-Power option, a trio of 2-barrel carbs with progressive linkage, has been dropped in favor of the Ram Air package. Like the Tri-Power, this raises the output to 360 hp, but gets the extra ponies with the simpler single 4-barrel.

Our test car was a convertible equipped with the new 3-speed automatic transmission, a vast improvement over the old 2-speed. An added plus is that the gearbox may be either used as a regular automatic by starting in "D," or shifted manually by holding the selector in the "1" and "2" positions. Purists might argue the point, but we could find little to choose between this and the 4-speed manually operated option. The rear end ratio was 3.36 to 1, just a bit steeper than the 3.23 to 1 that was standard with the 1966 automatics.

A persistent drizzle made it pointless to attempt any serious acceleration tests, but even on the wet surface it was



PONTIAC OHC SPRINT

See in a row don't go? Not so!



The OHC comes in a 100-hp version for the Le Mans (top), or peppy 200-hp option in the well-styled Sprint (bottom).

LIKE OTHER PONTIAC'S, the Sprint features a modest increase in horsepower, from 207 to 215 with the 4-barrel carb option. But unlike the other models, this is achieved without enlarging the 230-cubic-inch displacement. The standard engine remains at 187 hp.

This car was equipped with the optional 4-speed transmission with floor shifter. This gave it the flexibility to perform off the line in the same league with bigger V-8s. This, along with the Sprint suspension, makes it a very acceptable package for the family that wants a sports car, but needs space.

One thing the Sprint does not lack is identification marks, both chrome and paint. The grille pattern has been changed from horizontal to vertical, but this could easily pass unnoticed among all the other lines that identify it as a Pontiac, an OHC Sprint, and a Tempest Custom. In addition, there are triple chrome stripes painted on each side around the painted word "Sprint," a style started by the Shelby-Mustang GT 350 and since used by many others. Some will find it sporty, others merely garish, but it leaves no doubt about what the car is. The stripes were available last year surrounding a more subtle chrome symbol.

Along with the other safety equipment, including disc brakes, this car was equipped with the optional shoulder strap that complements the regular safety belt. Unfortunately, the disc brake plugs are still on the very vulnerable cast-iron. It can be argued that in an accident it is better to have your cast-iron than your head, but we found it a great criticism, both physical and mental, and prepared to live without it.



Small slots for the tail lights help identify the GTO from 34 other Pontiac models. Simplicity and performance mark line.

obvious that GTO's reputation as a tiger is still intact. When we called on it to get up and go, it got up and went.

If a car with this much performance potential is going to be sold to the public it should have a chassis that can keep pace. On the tricky ride and handling course at the GM Proving Ground in Milford, Mich., the GTO came through in thoroughbred fashion. It wasn't as rock steady as a sports car, but it could be driven hard through a variety of bends without doing anything nasty or unpredictable. Because of the wet-and-dry nature of the surface combined with a fair amount of body roll, it was necessary to make frequent steering corrections in some of the turns, but these could be done without lifting the throttle and none was of the opposite lock, panic variety. When the front end did begin to push, it could be brought back into line by feathering slightly and then getting back on the throttle. The power steering gives a disconnected feeling not altogether conducive to this kind of driving, but it doesn't take long to get used to it.

One of the better features of this car were the disc brakes, now optional for the front end. This is the first year GM has made discs available on any of its cars other than Corvette, and they were worth waiting for. These Kelsey-Hayes units, made under license from Girling, are closely related, design-wise, to the very successful brakes on the Le Mans-winning Ford GT Mk II. Despite the weather conditions they were never dicey. A delay valve in the system prevents front brake lockup, while the power assist relieves the heavy pedal pressures that often go with discs. It will be interesting to see if the insurance companies accept this as a safety option or call it a performance feature.

Stylewise, the GTO retains the basic Pontiac identification, the split grille, while adding some recognition features of its own. Most striking is the aluminum mesh grille insert, the first used in the American industry in many years. At the rear, the GTO has new tail lights in the form of four little bars on each side stacked two and two. These are not shared with any of the other Pontiac models, but whether this is "too bad" or "just as well" depends on personal taste. Unlike the bigger Pontiacs, the GTO's and Tempests do not have the unique hideaway windshield wipers that disappear into a slot in front of the windshield when not in use.

Many competitors have come along to shoot at part of the GTO's place in the ever growing youth market. The '67s may not be bulletproof, but we think they can more than hold their own in this war.