

## 1965 PONTIAC Bonneville- Gary and Patty

Written by Double Dragon

Thursday, 17 May 2012 14:52 - Last Updated Wednesday, 13 August 2014 17:23

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Gary ordered his 1965 Bonneville new at the age of 24. That statement doesn't mean too much right now, but if you review the high status enjoyed by the Bonneville at that time it was quite unusual for a young man to be able to afford this car, and more atypical that he would bypass the obvious young man's choice of Pontiacs such as the Tempest or the GTO.

The Bonneville name first appeared on a 1954 Pontiac show car. Pontiac revived the name to make a statement with their extra special 1957 Bonneville. The year before this, Plymouth released its special gold colored 1956 Fury which focused some attention on Plymouth. Pontiac wanted to accomplish a similar effect with their specialty car named for the Bonneville Salt Flats where speed trials are held and world records are made. The aura of the speed trials would hopefully create a sense that the Bonneville production vehicle was a performance car.

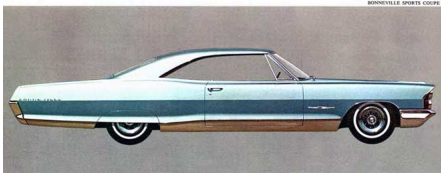
In 1957 Pontiac Bonneville was a limited edition special car based on the Star Chief. The 1957 Bonneville had fuel injection and a plethora of options making it truly a performance vehicle. Like the Plymouth Fury specialty car, the Bonneville later became a regular model. Below is a two door hardtop 1965 Bonneville taken from the pages of the 1965 Pontiac dealer brochure.

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The Bonneville was top of the Pontiac line for decades. The Star Chief upon which it was originally based faded out in the mid 1960s, but the Bonneville name survived until 1981. Below you can see why: Gary's 1965 Bonneville is one very nice looking car.



The Star Chief and Bonneville were built on the "B body" shared with Chev, Olds and Buick. The Pontiac "B body" had better handling than its cousin GM division "B bodies" due to greater tire track width. "Wide Track" advertising created a strong identity for Pontiac as well as genuinely superior handling. The Wide Track complimented the performance engines being developed at Pontiac. Performance focus was still on the full-size cars in the early 1960s. The compact Tempest LeMans 326 was a sporty car, but didn't become a ferocious tiger until the 389 found a home in the 1964 Tempest GTO which ignited the super car era, retroactively named the muscle car period.

The Pontiac Grand Prix (named after the famous race) was another "B body" that made a big splash in the 1960s. The ultimate Pontiac "B body" performance model was the Catalina "2+2". The 421 HO engine made the 2+2 into a scorcher, but the bombshell created by the intermediate sized "A body" GTO diverted attention away from it. The irony was that some of the B bodies had better weight distribution enabling these giant boats to launch better than the new intermediate sized musclecars.

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The ranking in the Pontiac full-size car line began with the Catalina, rising up through Star Chief, Grand Prix and then finally reaching the pinnacle with Bonneville. Below is a 1965 Bonneville convertible in the same Cameo Ivory as Gary's car as seen in the 1965 Pontiac dealer brochure.

Maybe the year of the Quick Wide-Tracks is your year for moving up to Bonneville. There's no mistaking, Bonneville deserves first place among Pontiacs. Look at its longer, lower silhouette for 1965, subtaken from wraparound front bumper to massive rear deck area for one sweeping accent to stainless steel. The side glass is gracefully curved to allow extra room inside. Interiors are beautifully coordinated throughout. The Bonneville Brougham (a page back) is all this and more, from its limousine interior to the padded Cordova vinyl roof you'll want—obviously the car for people who love luxury but insist on being practical.



Bonneville sat at the top of the Pontiac hierarchy. Not the absolute toughest or fastest, but the acknowledged premium Pontiac. Stylish, comfortable, well appointed. Extra touches that would be options on other models were all standard on Bonneville. The 1965 dealer brochure lists the extras included as standard equipment in the sumptuous Bonneville interior. The gold rear seat shown at top left is from the Bonneville Brougham which was the pinnacle of Pontiac luxury. The red buckets beside that photo are an option and used real leather. The two interiors to the right are standard Bonneville bench seats done in either all Morrokide or a blend of cloth and Morrokide.



The base car included two speed articulated wipers, padded dash, simulated walnut trim on dash, front and rear arm rests, deluxe steering wheel with matched walnut trim, door to door carpeting, glove box lamp, courtesy light, passenger 'grab bar', electric clock, color keyed seatbelts, deluxe wheel discs (hubcaps), fender skirts, spare wheel and tire. Below you can see the interior of Gary's Bonneville with grab bar above the glove box and the gauges that angle

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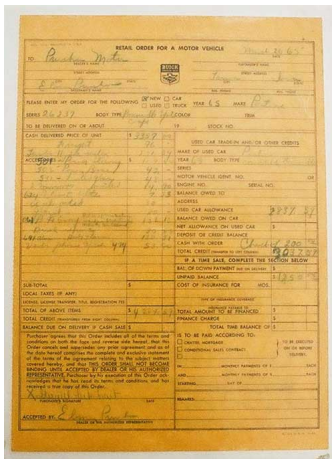
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towards the driver. Gary has a cloth on top of the dash to prevent cracking from the sun.



On March 26, 1965, 24 year old Gary walked into the Anderson Pontiac Cadillac dealership in Marshalltown, Iowa intent on buying a new Bonneville. Businessmen in their late forties or fifties typically traded 'up' to the top prestige model Bonneville. The salesmen in Anderson Pontiac didn't take Gary seriously because of his age, so Gary walked out. The second dealer he visited was Prusha Motor Company at 411 Siegel St. in Tama, Iowa. The salesman listened to Gary and signed a contract. Included in the price was a trade-in allowance for Gary's current car: a used 1963 white Bonneville convertible with the optional wheel covers. See stories on Prusha and Anderson in the DEALERSHIP section of this website filed under IOWA Dealers.

A scanned document titled "RETAIL ORDER FOR A MOTOR VEHICLE". The form is filled with handwritten information. At the top, it says "RETAIL ORDER FOR A MOTOR VEHICLE". Below that, there are fields for "DEALER'S NAME", "ADDRESS", "CITY", "STATE", and "ZIP". The main body of the form contains various sections for "VEHICLE INFORMATION", "FINANCIAL INFORMATION", and "CUSTOMER INFORMATION". There are several tables and checkboxes. At the bottom, there is a section for "ACCEPTANCE" with a signature and date. The document is dated "MARCH 26, 1965".

The base 1965 Bonneville sport coupe cost \$3,357.00 and provided everything you needed right out of the box. The standard 389 was fast enough for almost anyone, while the "Wide Track" handling could outgun most cars of the era. Gary stood pat with the Bonneville standard 389 4 barrel 325 HP engine which had more than sufficient power for a car he didn't intend to race.

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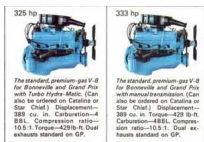
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The base engine was rated at 325 HP with auto and 333 HP with the Synchronesh. Here is an excerpt from the dealer brochure explaining the standard engines on the Bonneville.



Note that the Grand Prix and Bonneville shared the same high compression four barrel as standard fare, but it was upgraded to dual exhaust on the Grand Prix. Gary ordered optional dual exhaust on his Bonneville making it equal to the performance of a Grand Prix. You can see the duals sticking out beyond the bumpers in the photo of Gary's car below.



Gary had extenders put on his exhaust pipes to divert the fumes further afield from the rear bumper to preserve the chrome. Other one owner collector cars employ this exact same trick because the owners foresaw the future value of the car. Frank did this to his 1969 Grand Prix



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brakes (\$43.00). Gary was very particular about what he wanted, and ordered Soft Ray tinted glass all around (\$43.00) and Cushion Custom Foam extra padding in the front seat (\$10.65).

Gary wanted a red car, but none of the available 1965 shades of red were right for him, so he ordered Cameo Ivory instead. Other comfort options included a radio (\$88.77) with 'Verba phonic' rear speaker (\$53.80). The speaker is shown below inset into the middle top portion of the black Morrokide rear seat with the Pontiac crest decorating it. The gap below the speaker is caused by the center cushion being folded down in its arm-rest position for this picture. The full size GM cars got it right. Gary can hear his radio clearly because the sound is being sent forwards from the rear.



Aside from comfort and convenience items, Gary ordered back up lamps (\$14.31), heavy duty air cleaner- paper filter (\$5.38), dual exhaust (\$30.00), seat belts custom retractable (\$7.53) and windshield washer (\$13.02). The total cost of the car was a hefty \$4126.69.

In the haggling process, the salesman pushed to take the eight lug optional aluminum wheels off the list to whittle down the price, but Gary stood firm. Gary knew the price he wanted WITH five 14 inch Kelsey Hayes wheels included. Those \$120.51 extra cost wheels are legendary among collectors. The Kelsey Hayes wheels are finned aluminum with an integral brake drum built into them. The 'wow' factor of the appearance and the 'radical' integral brake drum isn't the end of the story. The aluminum content and the fins produce vastly superior stopping power due to advanced heat dispersal. The 1965 eight lug wheels accommodate more brake lining area than the earlier 1960-64 units.

After anxious weeks of waiting, on April 30, 1965 the big day arrived. Gary and Patty drove his old 1963 Bonneville convertible down to Prusha Motors and traded it in on the brand new 1965 Bonneville. Funnily, Gary's pal Ken bought Gary's cast-off 1963 convertible from the lot the

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following day.

The grand total for Gary's new Bonneville on the receipt was reduced slightly from the order form, but it was still a whopping \$4,087.00! That was a lot of money in 1965.

PRUSHA MOTOR CO.  
PONTIAC - BUICK - STUDEBAKER SALES & SERVICE  
411 SUGAR ST.  
TAMA, IOWA  
No. 8153 Customer's Order No. Date 5/13/65  
Sold to Gary and Patty  
Address 422 W 7th St  
MODEL YEAR MAKE BODY TYPE COLOR FINISH PRICE PAID OUT  
1965 PONTIAC BONNEVILLE 2DR HRTOP 26.7  
Check Down 1452.00  
Total 4087.00  
Salesman \_\_\_\_\_ Reached By \_\_\_\_\_

The 1965 Bonneville VIN begins with 262375P which decodes as follows:

- 2= Pontiac
- 62= Bonneville
- 37= Two door hardtop
- 5= 1965 model year
- P= Pontiac, Michigan assembly plant

The final sequential VIN numbers are left out of this story for privacy protection. Speaking of protection, Gary still has the original Protect-O-Plate. All 1965 model year GM cars came with a Protect-O-Plate. Pontiac pioneered the Protect-O-Plate using a similar booklet called the Ident-O-Plate for 1963 and 1964 model years. The booklet uses a metal plate with raised characters describing the car for warranty records. The dealer sent in a card with the new owner's information on it. Pontiac made a second metal plate with the owner's information and mailed the second half of the plate to the new owner's home address. When Gary received the second plate in the mail, he stuck it into the booklet aligned with the first plate. Now the book had complete warranty information about the owner and vehicle. Warranty work was recorded and verified by the dealer performing the work.



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Gary ecstatically drove his brand new 1965 Bonneville to his mother's house so he could wash the car in her driveway. Back then in that Iowa small town there was no local car wash. Gary was so excited about his new car that he washed it twice!

The two bedroom apartment where Gary and Patty lived included a garage. From day one the Bonneville was garaged. Eventually with more kids coming they bought a house with a garage for the car. Patty drove the Bonneville 3 miles daily to work for 12 years in all weather including rain and snow. Gary took it out on the highway every weekend to clear out the engine. That added up to about 5,000 miles a year. Summer vacations added a few more miles. The first summer with the car, June, 1965 the car was used for a vacation to Charleston, South Carolina. It used about a half quart of oil during the break in process. On the trip oil use amounted to a half quart in between oil changes.

Gary wasn't a hot rodder but he did take the Bonneville up to 100 MPH on one occasion. The gas pedal was nowhere near the floor. The engine was willing but the bias ply tires on the car were the limiting factor. As Gary commented,

"Those old bias ply tires are scary at high speeds."

The car currently rides on radials which create a marked improvement in the ride. The family always had at least two cars, which limited the miles logged on the Bonneville. Gary kept his 1940 Chevy which he bought as a used car as a youth. He went through various used cars for his work commute including a black 1962 Catalina 389 without power steering or brakes, and another 'B body': a 1961 Impala.

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The Bonneville has led a charmed life. Part of this is attributed to living in a small city. It has never been stolen, never had a break and enter, never had any glass broken, never been vandalized and never been in an accident. Big city dwellers and car nuts reading this probably would like to have spent their lives living in a small Iowa town free of the hazards that regularly befall cars in crowded populous areas.

The closest call occurred when a neighborhood kid playing on the street dented the trunk when the car was less than one month old. The trunk was straightened and repainted for the grand sum of \$12.00. In summer 1977 after twelve winters the Bonneville started to get rust through in the right fender well. New metal was welded in.

The interiors of 1960s Pontiacs are noted for their durability and this car is no exception. Gary's kids romped and vomited in the car throughout its life as a daily driver and on vacation road trips. The black Morrokide interior has held up admirably. Here is a shot of the driver's door panel. The door pull is free of cracks and the panel hasn't sagged or warped.



In 1971 Gary decided he didn't want to tent it on camping road trips. He sprung for a 19 foot travel trailer and had a hitch welded onto the Bonneville. He towed the trailer for half a season and then changed his mind. Gary didn't want the strain on the car and solved the problem by buying a 1972 International Travel All for camping tow duty the following year.

In August, 1977 at 57,000 miles the Bonneville was retired from daily driver status and never saw winter again. The Bonneville had zero mechanical problems. The only thing that happened to it was a dead battery which happens to all batteries eventually.

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The 325 HP 389 cubic inch engine delivers an impressive 17 MPG at a steady 65 MPH highway cruise despite the automatic transmission. Back in the 1960s automatic transmissions slipped enough to be noticeably less efficient than the direct drive coupling enjoyed by manual transmissions.

Part of the explanation for such good mileage out of a big engine in a big car is Pontiac's famously extreme low numerical axle ratios. Pontiac began their foray into the world of turnpike cruisers as far back as January, 1959 when they provided Thomas McCahill of MECHANIX ILLUSTRATED with a special Pontiac designed for efficient quiet highway running and decent MPG. Pontiac had axle ratios lower than any manufacturer in the 1960s. The 1967 Catalina 400 came with an astoundingly low 2.29:1 axle ratio! The only other manufacturer pursuing this avenue in the intermediate to large car class was Oldsmobile with their 1967 Cutlass Turnpike Cruiser (see a story on this car in the GAS LOGS).

Gary's Bonneville purrs along the highway with 2.56:1 rear gears which keep noise down, efficiency up as well as reducing wear. The big 389 has enough torque to pull out quickly from a dead stop despite those highway gears. When leaded gasoline was no longer available the engine made the switch to unleaded gas without issues or noticeable change in MPG.

The regular replacement items that arose with this car were few and far between. The upper right headlight burned out in 2006. The other three lights are still original T3 units. The distributor cap and spark plugs have been replaced regularly, but the carburetor has never needed a rebuild. The tires were upgraded to radial tires when the original bias ply tires wore out. That first replacement set of radials are still on the car. The original exhaust pipes lasted seven years until 1972. The replacement stainless steel tailpipes are still on the car today. In 1973 the original mufflers were replaced with glass packs which are with the car today. The car has been through four or five batteries.

Many of the items that seem to need regular replacement on cars subjected to regular usage are clearly mileage dependant and not affected by the passage of time. The Bonneville still has its original brake master cylinder. The alternator finally needed replacement in 2006 after 41 years. The water pump lasted 35 years, until the turn of the century when it was replaced.

The radiator is another story. The current radiator doesn't trace its lineage back to the birth of the car. Like many Pontiacs, the Bonneville was running hot. Gary didn't order A/C so he assumed a 3 core would be sufficient, but it wasn't. Gary went to a four core radiator back in the

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1960s and that radiator is still in the car today. In 2008 the entire car was painted minus the hood which didn't need it.

The Bonneville is driven in summer, including long distances to car shows. Gary starts it up every month while in winter storage. After taking it out of storage the front brakes (remember these are Kelsey Hayes integral drums) are usually seized up but it clears up within two blocks of driving. After being driven about 15 miles for the entire year of 1982, the Bonneville was fired up, given an oil change and driven to the Pontiac Nationals being held in Buffalo, New York. The car made the trip there and back without the slightest problem. The Bonneville was also driven to Denver, Colorado and back without incident. Anderson Pontiac, the car dealership that didn't take the 24 year old kid back in 1965 seriously is gone. So is Prusha Motor Company, but Gary and Patty are still happily married and enjoying the Bonneville after all these years.

