

1979 PONTIAC Grand LeMans Safari 400-4 bbl transplant

Written by Double Dragon

Saturday, 23 October 2010 14:14 - Last Updated Saturday, 20 March 2021 18:46

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Metric= 6.6 L engine

EPA MPG OF 1979 PONTIAC LEMANS LINE-UP WHEN NEW

The EPA previously provided a CITY estimate, a HWY estimate and a COMBINED estimate. The January 22, 1979 edition of the EPA guide provides only one number: 'Estimated MPG' which is a City MPG figure that most closely relates to real life drivers. The 'Estimated MPG' mimics errand running and work commutes in mild stop and go conditions through urban and suburban areas without gridlock. The EPA used a well broken in car on level surface in warm weather.

In 1978 Pontiac lopped off wheelbase, length and weight while successfully preserving the distinctive LeMans looks. The long hood short rear deck proportions were retained on a small 108.1 inch wheelbase. Even in Safari form, the total length is only 197.8 inches. Although the bodylines are flatter and squarer than prior versions of the LeMans, the recognizable LeMans split nose grille flows into an 'Indian arrowhead' hood crease that says Pontiac loud and clear. The Pontiac metal arrowhead logo is right where it should be in the center of the grille nose split. A wide chrome strip runs the length of the car low on the body just like it has always done on the Luxury LeMans and Grand LeMans. Extra insulation is included in the Grand LeMans.

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Inside, the classic three spoke Pontiac steering wheel is backed up by a fake wood dash that is an upgrade for the Grand LeMans taken from the Grand Prix. It contains two large gauges in front of the driver and with a central smaller gauge pod above the steering column. To the right, four gauge pods are arranged in the same pattern as two rows of vents creating the impression of 11 gauges in total. The needles on all gauges are white which is a Pontiac trademark. The Grand LeMans door has carpeting along the bottom and a pull handle which is a Luxury LeMans/ Grand LeMans trademark.

The 1978 downsized LeMans and Grand Am platform was well received. In 1979 for its second year Pontiac carried over the popular 1978 platform with minimal changes. The 1979 LeMans managed to squeeze out decent mileage using the base 3.8 L V6 Buick engine. The cubic inch capacity of this 2 barrel engine is 231 and many readers will recognize this Buick engine as the basis for the turbo version that eventually came out in the Grand National. When hooked up to a 3 speed automatic the little engine manages an EPA 19 Estimated MPG. Strangely, the manual 3 speed drops MPG to 18. The numbers drop further to 16 MPG for the 4 speed manual. The standard axle ratio was 2.73 with the optional 3.23 not available with the California certified engine. Only the automatic was available in the Safari.

Pontiac manufactured the optional 4.9 L V8 engine which displaces 301 cubic inches. When the 301 is equipped with a 2 barrel carburetor and hooked through a 3 speed automatic transmission it managed an EPA rating of 18 MPG. Putting a 4 barrel carburetor on the engine with the same 3 speed automatic drops the number to 17 MPG. Combining the 4 barrel and a manual 4 speed took the reading down to 16 MPG. Safari 301s were only available with automatic transmissions. The Pontiac built engine came standard with the traditional ultra-low numerical axle ratio of 2.29. Engines were certified with a particular transmission and axle ratio which explains why the other engines in the Pontiac cars don't have such radical axle ratios. The other GM divisions never delved into the super low numerical axle ratios the way Pontiac did. The four barrel engine also came with 2.29 standard but had a 2.56 option.

The 1979 LeMans Safari station wagon is heavier with a less wind friendly shape but it surprisingly managed to equal the 19 MPG rating of the 231-2 barrel automatic car using the same drive-train. The wagon loses 1 MPG off the ratings of the 301-2 barrel and 4 barrel automatic with 17 and 16 respectively. The EPA doesn't list MPG for a 350-4 barrel equipped Safari or the California bound 305-4 barrel Safaris. The Pontiac Grand Prix gave the same MPG across the board when using the same drive-trains.

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OOCC 1979 GRAND LEMANS SAFARI 400-4 BARREL TRANSPLANT/ MPG

The OOCC 1979 Grand LeMans Safari had fairly low mileage when the original engine blew up in the mid 1980s. A junked Pontiac 400 4 barrel was bolted in to prevent a repeat engine failure. The newly hooked up engine worked well. The 400 came out of a wrecked mid 1970s Pontiac and had never been opened up. The only thing done to it aside from engine mount/ exhaust tweaking was an oil change.

As is typical of Pontiac 400s the newly installed engine ran hot. The 400 lit up the temperature warning light on the dash anytime it was driven far enough to achieve normal operating temperature. Aside from the replaced drive-train, the LeMans had oversized new radial tires which lower engine RPM at a steady cruise speed. The factory offered either 195/75R14s or 205/75R14s while the OOCC Grand LeMans rides on 215/70R14s mounted on the great looking Pontiac Rally II wheels.

The OOCC Grand Lemans Safari had few options and stood pat with the standard bench seat, column shift and basic gauges. The dash has multiple pods but in this car very few of them were occupied with gauges. The left pod was the speedometer, the center pod had a blank face with Indian arrowhead logo, and the right pod was a clock. Beside the clock sit four instrument pods. Only the right the top right pod housed an actual gauge (fuel) while the other three pods contained warning lights for oil, temp and generator.

The 1979 OOCC Grand LeMans Safari 400 was driven hard and fast in very cold weather. The 1979 EPA fuel guide states that a 20 MPG car will suffer a loss of 1.5 MPG at 20 degrees F as compared to temperatures above 70 degrees F. On the plus side of the equation, the Grand LeMans covered a 6 mile work commute which could at least get it up to operating temperature.

These fragmentary gas logs track the Grand LeMans through hard driving city commuting as well as a 120 mile trip to a neighboring city. The road trip took just a minute or two longer than one hour each way which means the average speed on the highway was a true 120 MPH both ways. Once in the neighboring city the car was bogged down in 20 miles of gridlock driving. The trip was made with two passengers and luggage and a full tank of gas pushing curb weight up a few notches.

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