

Little Known Facts about Pontiacs – Number 1

By Bill McIntosh

Most every Pontiac enthusiast knows the distinctive “shark nose” grill that was used on all 1960 Pontiac models. This was a dramatic departure from the traditional “split” grills used on 1959 models and again in 1961 and for many years thereafter. It was not without some trepidation that the “shark nose” grill was introduced. As studio chief (?), Jack Humbert said of that move, “The split grill was dropped in 1960 but we recognized it (the split grill) was such a strong mark that we took it again for 1961.” However, his personal influence on the 1960 model was limited to “a little clean up.”

What most people do not know is that the 1960 Pontiac was slated to have two different grills for that model year. Obviously, the first grill is the famous “shark nose.” This grill consisted of two pieces that mirrored each other. They were die cast and chrome plated with certain portions blacked out (painted) to emphasize the horizontal bars. Further, flat side panels surrounded the parking/turn signal lights. This grill was slated to be use on the upper end models only: Star Chief and Bonneville. Curiously, this grill was also slated to be used on all models equipped with air conditioning: Safari, Ventura, Star Chief and Bonneville.

The second grill, which I will call an “egg crate” style (see accompanying page from the Pontiac-issued shop manual for 1960), was destined to be used on the lower priced models, namely the Catalina and Ventura. The idea of two different grills was meant to be used in order to differentiate the lower-priced models from the higher-priced ones. As you can see in the accompanying page, the “egg crate” grill appears to be one piece (as opposed to two pieces), while the flat part that surrounds the two parking/turn signal lamps looks identical to the “shark nose” version.

Though I have done a fair amount of research, I have found almost nothing about the thinking behind the Pontiac designers for coming up with two grills (other than the fact that the two would distinguish high- and low-priced models). As a single piece design, it is difficult to imagine that this was stamped out in one piece so, perhaps, the horizontal portions were stamped and the vertical bars attached afterward. Maybe it was a series of stampings that were bolted or riveted together. Could it be that this grill or parts thereof were stamped aluminum – the same material used on the headlight surrounds? Other car models of that vintage used single piece stamped aluminum grills (my 1959 Ford for instance), but it appears too complicated to me to be a single stamping nevertheless. I speculate that the “egg crate” grill was scrapped because of the costs associated with producing two versions. Did the accountants win in the end?

The one thing we do know for sure is that the “egg crate” grill never made it into regular production. The mystery of the 1960 Pontiac “egg crate” grill will remain so unless a reader out there can share any new knowledge.

