

My Two 1960 Pontiacs – Part 3 of 3
My 1960 Pontiac Catalina Safari 9-Passenger Station Wagon
by Bill McIntosh

Introduction

This is the third and last of my mini-series about my small, two-car collection of 1960 Pontiacs. For those of you who did not read Part 1 or Part 2, you will have to go back to the last couple of editions of *Pontiation*, the Club's newsletter. As in Part 2, I will refer back to Part 1 and Part 2 as there are themes that connect all three articles. This article is about my relatively recent acquisition of a 1960 Catalina Safari 9-passenger station wagon. As such, its story and its refurbishment is a "work in progress." Perhaps a few years down the line, I will finish the work and write a follow-up article.

Pontiac Station Wagons for 1960/Technical Details

Of the 399,646 1960 Pontiacs built for the 1960 model year, only 35,926 (or 9%) were station wagons. And, despite the expansion of the model lineup to four by the addition of the Ventura, only two models of station wagons were available in 1960 -- the Catalina and the Bonneville. The Catalina was available as a 6-passenger and a 9-passenger with rear-facing third seat. The Bonneville was available only as a 6-passenger. Thus, if you were purchasing a Pontiac wagon in 1960 as a family hauler and had to have 9-passenger seating, there was only one wagon available to you.

Both the Bonneville and Catalina station wagons for 1960 were built on a 122" wheelbase as opposed to the 124" wheelbase of the Bonneville and Star Chiefs. Technical details were much the same as other Pontiacs of the day, and readers should refer to Part 1 of this series for both the history and technical development of the 1960 model. There were some differences relative to sedans, hardtops and other models including:

- A special stabilizer bar installed in the rear, absent from other models.
- Electric rear window was standard on the 9-passenger wagon but optional on the 6-passenger models; switches were installed under the dash and on the side of the third rear-facing seat.
- Folding second and third seats to accommodate very large loads; while a sheet of plywood would not fit in the area, it still was a generous 46.2" by 93.6" with tailgate closed.
- Rear-facing seat on the 9-passenger Safari.
- Special rear bumper with cut-outs for tailgate hinges and steps to allow third-seat passengers access to the third seat.
- Slightly heavier tires were fitted on the wagons and were 8:50-14 versus 8:00-14 for all other models.

Engine and transmission options were essentially the same as other Pontiac models (see Part 1 article) and this included the Tri-Power set-up, although I doubt that many wagons were ever equipped this way.

Despite the limited range of station wagon models available for 1960, Pontiac did offer a full range of "special conversion equipment" to turn the station wagon into an ambulance, hearse or rescue vehicle (see attached page from the dealer catalog). Special equipment included cots, stretchers, mattresses, lights, sirens, drapes, shades, oxygen and emergency equipment, as well as a full selection of accessories for outfitting a hearse.

How I Found and Acquired the Safari Station Wagon

As many of you are, I am a long-time subscriber to *Hemmings Motor News*. When I get the latest issue, I usually look for any "up front" articles of interest and read them. Almost always, I look in the sections of cars I am interested in and particularly scan any Pontiac ads for cars from about 1955 to about 1965. While living in Maryland before my move back to Pennsylvania, I was looking through the July 2006 issue and came across a 1960 Catalina Safari station wagon for sale. What peaked my initial interest was the fact the seller was claiming it had only 64,000 original miles and was in virtually original condition. The owner was in Mendham, New Jersey, so I called and made arrangements to see the car. Both my nephew and niece were visiting at the time and I needed to bring them back to their home in Philadelphia. So, we made an adventure of the day by going first to see the Safari in New Jersey and then to Philadelphia.

We arrived at the house of the owner, Joe Carfagna. The Safari was outside in his driveway and a casual inspection suggested that the vehicle was in pretty good condition. The kids and I spent a long time evaluating the Safari. Joe started the engine and it ran, albeit pretty roughly and the muffler was shot. Transmission seemed OK and went into drive and reverse reminiscent of my Bonneville (see Part 2). The engine bay was pretty nasty looking but it was clear that everything was absolutely original, right down to the hoses, belts, hose clamps, etc. The interior was in almost-perfect condition, very unusual for a 9-passenger wagon which is typically trashed by a bunch of kids. Joe indicated that he acquired the Safari from a party in New York state and that he had the original invoice and other papers that came with the car. That revelation (from upstate New York) set off alarm bells as I figured that the car must be a "rust bucket" underneath. So, I crawled under the car with my trusty pen knife and began poking around, literally. While the frame and running gear had much surface rust, the body was surprisingly sound. In particular, the rear floor pans were in perfect condition. I attribute the relative sound condition to the fact that the Safari was undercoated within an inch of its life! Undercoating in my mind is classic "good news - bad news." The good news: it preserves the vehicle. The bad news: it's undercoated.

After satisfying myself that this was a original survivor with 64,000 miles and would not have to be restored from the ground up, I indicated that I would like to purchase the vehicle and Joe and I negotiated a final selling price. Part of the negotiation was to have Joe continue to store the Safari for the next few months while the garage at our new home

in Pennsylvania was constructed. I had no room for the wagon in Maryland and I did not want to have to move it twice -- once to Maryland and then to Pennsylvania.

My brother and I returned in November once the garage in Bernville was under roof. While my brother has a trailer that will handle the largest of classic cars, the challenge was getting the car without brakes on and off the trailer. Yes, Joe had indicated that the previous owner had started rebuilding the brake system and got only as far as disabling them by cutting the brake lines!

One of the bonuses of visiting Joe Carfagna was that he was an avid collector of late 1950s and early 1960s vehicles. His garage was four bays wide and two bays deep, high enough to accommodate lifts in all bays -- and it was stuffed to the gills with vehicles, so many that he had to store the Safari off site! In addition to a wide range of cars, he was an avid collector of station wagons and thus, his buying the Safari. He had some most unusual makes and models of station wagons including a 1959 Oldsmobile and a 1959 Mercury with wood siding. My favorite car in his collection though was his restored 1960 Pontiac Catalina convertible in Skymist blue with a white convertible top!

History of the Catalina Safari

My Safari started life in the Linden, New Jersey BOP assembly plant in May of 1960. It is not clear if this Safari was manufactured to a specific order or was manufactured for dealer inventory. Based on the documentation I have, I suspect that it was a special order. The Safari was delivered to Albee Motors, 401-409 State Street, Elmira, New York. On May 27, 1960, the Safari was prepared for customer delivery and the next day the Safari was delivered to Paul M. Brown, RD #2, Pine City, New York. The purchase price for the Safari was \$4,257.70. Mr. Brown's trade-in was a 1959 Chevrolet Kingwood station wagon. He received \$1,490.30 for the Chevy. Can you imagine, a one-year old 1959 Chevy station wagon for \$1,490?

I was told that Mr. Brown was either a fireman or fire chief in his hometown of Pine City. As part of the dealer preparation of the Safari, the dealer installed two round, red-lensed Dietz lights in front of the grill (see front shot of the wagon). It was wired such that a switch under the dash activated them and they were connected to a separate flasher so when activated they flashed on and off. In addition, Mr. Brown installed a high-quality fire extinguisher on the interior between the front and rear driver-side doors. Based on the immaculate condition of the interior, it appears that Mr. Brown used the Safari to go to "fire events" and only rarely did other passengers ride in the Safari.

Technical Details and Specifications

My Safari was painted two-tone, Coronado Red Metallic (Code L) with a Shelltone Ivory (Code C) roof. The interior is fitted with all-Morrokide seats in two shades of metallic red and maroon. Doors are two shades of red and white. Apparently, Mr. Brown wanted a well-optioned Catalina Safari and this one was equipped with:

- Hydra-Matic automatic transmission
- Wonder-Touch power steering
- Wonder-Touch power brakes
- The Tempest 425 V-8 with 2-barrel carburetor
- The Basic Option Group including: Circ-L-Aire heater and defroster, "Wonder Touch" deluxe radio with manual antenna, back up lamps, heavy duty air cleaner, full-flow oil filter and Custom Latex Foam front seat
- White sidewall tires
- Dual speed wipers and windshield washers
- Rear speaker
- Padded dashboard
- Lamp Group
- Mirror Group
- Decor Group including, De Luxe Wheel Discs, custom steering wheel, instrument panel custom trim and custom exterior trim

Getting the Safari Back on the Road

Once I acquired the Safari and brought it to our new home in Bernville, it sat there undisturbed for 2-1/2 years. I had no time to work on the car as we finished up building our new home, sold the old one in Maryland, moved back to Pennsylvania and began to settle into our new home. In the fall of 2009, I was determined to take the cover off the Safari and begin working toward an interim goal of getting it back on the road. While progress is slow due to the other demands on my life, I am beginning to see daylight. The engine bay has been completely restored including rebuilding the heads and installing all new service parts (water pump, hoses, belts, ignition parts, fuel pump, etc.) as well as cleaning and repainting all other parts. As of this writing, I am now in the process of installing all new brake components and refurbishing those that I am not replacing (backing plates and drums). Wheels have been blasted and powder coated and a new set of wide white wall radial tires are on order. I am hoping to have my first test ride (with brakes!) this summer.

Future Directions in Refurbishing the Safari

After reaching my goal of getting the Safari back on the road, I hope to continue the work with the goal of having a very nice driver that could win a trophy or two in a local show. Because the value of these cars will never be high, it simply does not make economic sense to do a complete restoration unless you have a special car such as a 1960 Bonneville convertible. I will be looking to restore the paint work where necessary, do some limited re-chroming, install new carpeting and do other "touch ups" on the interior.