

My Two 1960 Pontiacs – Part 2 of 3
My 1960 Pontiac Bonneville Vista Hardtop
by Bill McIntosh

For the Love of Cars

This is part two of my three-part story about my small, two-car collection of 1960 Pontiacs. For those of you who did not read Part I, you will have to go back to the Winter 2009-2010 edition of *Pontiaction*, the Club's newsletter. In Part 2 and in Part 3, I will refer back to Part I as there are themes that connect all three parts.

I have been in love with cars all my life. As a kid, each fall when the new models came out, I would walk down to "dealer's row" in my hometown of Westfield, New Jersey. There, I would go into each dealer, look at the new cars and pick up literature. It seemed the salespeople didn't mind; maybe they thought I would convince my Dad to buy one of the new cars.

As soon as I could, I bought my first car at the age of 13, even though I did not have a driver's license. My first car, a truck actually, was a 1930 Model A Ford pickup. From there and through college I bought, owned and sold a number of cars: 1948 Plymouth four-door, 1949 Oldsmobile with Hydra-matic, 1950 Dodge business coupe, 1952 Mercury convertible, 1956 Studebaker sedan with V8 and automatic transmission, Simca 1000, 1963 Pontiac Grand Prix. Yes, I saved the best for last!

I kept on acquiring, and, once gainfully employed following college, I tended to keep the cars I bought rather than selling them. By the mid-1980s, I had a garage full of a half dozen cars and another half dozen stored in a bank barn. Because of a job change and relocation, I regretfully had to liquidate my collection in 1987. Everything was sold, lock stock and barrel.

How I Found and Acquired the Bonneville

For ten years thereafter I pursued my career and lived without any old, interesting cars. Needless to say, I missed having a car or two in the garage to tinker with and, finally, I decided that I just had to have at least one old car. It was 1996 and I was living in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. I had been introduced to Art Skaroff -- one of the two owners of "Art & Mark's Auto" on Wood Street in Norristown. Art was a graduate of mechanical engineering school and decided to work on cars rather than taking an office job. He had a repair garage and a "Rent-A-Wreck" franchise. I liked to visit the garage because of the wide range of unusual cars that he worked on. I never knew what I would find. One day while visiting, I told Art of my need to acquire an old car, something from the mid-1950s to mid-1960s. I asked that he keep an eye out and let me know if anything interesting turned up. A couple of months later, Art called to say that I had to come down to the shop right away. He had an interesting car that might be for sale. He said, "come

down, sit in the back seat and turn on the radio. You have to do that for nostalgia reasons alone."

As soon as I could arrange it, I headed out to Art and Mark's garage. In the back, there it was, a 1960 Pontiac Bonneville Vista hardtop. My thought was that it was a really, really big car. Art handed me the keys and said I should take it out for a spin. I got into the front seat and started the engine. It sounded terrific. After easing the Bonneville into drive, I headed out the overhead door. Art shouted: "It's in for a new master cylinder, so you will have to pump the brakes!" After a minor panic attack when the brake pedal went right to the floor, I regained my composure having discovered that with a few pumps on the pedal I actually had some brakes.

I loved the size, color, big chrome bumpers and how easily the Bonneville drove in around the residential sections of Norristown. As a bonus, the car had only 62,000 original miles, all the original documents (including the dealer invoice) and, importantly, no one had worked on it and messed it up in the process. I made up my mind to buy that Pontiac then and there. Art said that the car belonged to the son of one of his customers. He had just purchased the car from its original owner a few weeks ago, but his upcoming wedding was forcing a quick sale. I told Art that I would buy the car pending negotiation of a reasonable purchase price. Art got me in touch with the young man, Stephen W. Maloney, who lived in Wayne. Stephen was asking \$3,000 (as I recall) for the Bonneville. I offered \$2,800, and he accepted. So, in February of 1997, the deal was sealed, and I was now the proud owner of the Bonneville -- 37 years after it was delivered to the original owner.

History of the Bonneville

My Bonneville started life in the Wilmington, Delaware, assembly plant sometime in late fall of 1959 or early winter 1960. Unfortunately, the data plate does not contain details of the date of manufacture. It is also unclear whether or not this car was manufactured to a specific order or was manufactured for dealer inventory. Nevertheless, the vehicle was delivered to State Street Pontiac Company, 640 East Gay Street, West Chester, PA. The original owner, Mr. John E. Friel, R.D. #1, Malvern, Pennsylvania, purchased the car for \$4,342.05, which included sales tax of \$134.76 and license and title fee of \$7.50 (see picture of original sales invoice).

I was told that Mr. Friel purchased two 1960 Pontiacs (including this one) because he was so impressed with the performance of Pontiacs during the previous racing season. This was confirmed by his owners' survey (see below). Remember from Part 1, Pontiac performance on the track netted Pontiac three (3) NASCAR wins in 1958, one (1) in 1959, six (6) in 1960 and thirty (30) in 1961! In the 1960 and 1961 seasons, sixteen (16) of the winners were 1960 Pontiacs!!

As Mr. Friel grew old, he apparently sold one of the two Pontiacs. He kept his Bonneville until he was no longer able to drive and reluctantly sold it. Fortunately, Mr. Friel included in the sale an original 1960 Pontiac shop manual, the original sales invoice

and most of his receipts for repairs and service of the Bonneville. All of this material is still in my hands today.

As part of the paperwork included with the Bonneville was an owners' survey (see accompanying picture) including a business reply envelope addressed to Mr. S. E. Knudsen, General Manager, Pontiac Motor Division. You will recall from Part 1 that "Bunkie" Knudsen was largely responsible for the new performance image of Pontiac. Also in that article was a picture of Bunkie behind the wheel of the 7,000,000 Pontiac, a Vista hardtop. At any rate, it appears that Mr. Friel dutifully filled out the owners' survey but failed to drop it in the mail. In addition to confirming that he had two 1960 Pontiacs, he also indicated the he had considered buying a Nash at the time he purchased the Bonneville. Can you imagine, a Nash-Rambler instead of a Pontiac?

From the file of paperwork I received with the car, it appeared that Mr. Friel was diligent about keeping up with repairs and service. The paperwork suggests that in 1972, 12 years after taking delivery, he had an unusually large number of repairs and maintenance items, including a new muffler and tailpipe, a new battery, and a new brake cable. Also, on November 4, 1972, the Bonneville went into the body shop of J. Dolansky & Sons in Boyertown, Pennsylvania. I wonder why Mr. Friel went so far from Malvern to get the body work done? The Bonneville had some "cancer" in the left front fender and left quarter panel. These repairs were made and the car was repainted with correct original colors.

Technical Details and Specifications

My Bonneville was painted two-tone, Stardust Yellow (Code M) with a Shelltone Ivory (Code C) roof. The interior was fitted with an all Morrokide interior (as opposed to a combination of fabric and Morrokide) and it is tri-colored, brown/beige/white.

As with most Bonneville's, mine came from the factory reasonably well equipped with:

- Hydra-Matic automatic transmission
- Wonder-Touch power steering
- Wonder-Touch power brakes
- The Tempest 425 V-8 with 4-barrel carburetor
- Pontiac issued floor mats
- Electric clock
- Electric power antenna
- Remote control mirror
- Manual heater and defroster
- White sidewall tires
- Dual speed wipers and windshield washers
- Back-up lights
- Rear speaker
- AM push-button radio
- Padded dashboard

- Lamp group
- Mirror group

As to specifications, the Bonneville is a very large car -- almost 18-1/2 feet long, not quite 7 feet wide (80"), but quite low to the ground with a overall height of 54.8 inches. The Bonneville was built with the larger 124" wheelbase, and it had a track of 64" front and back. Front suspension featured fully independent design, coil springs and tube shock. Rear suspension was a "link" design with coil springs and tube shocks. This Bonneville car is equipped with the Tempest 425 engine with 4-barrel carburetor and Hydra-Matic transmission. The engine is rated at 303 horsepower, and 425 foot pounds of torque (this the "425" in its name). Compression ratio is a high 10.25 to 1. It was originally equipped with single exhaust, but dual exhausts were fitted when I bought the car. Axle ratio is 3.08 to 1. An optional performance ratio was available from the factory at 3.23 to 1, and dealer's could install ever higher ratios of 3.64 to 1 and 3.90 to 1.

Getting the Bonneville Ready to Cruise

Once I acquired the Bonneville, I decided that my goal for the car was to make it a respectable "driver." With only 60,295 miles on the odometer (and these cars bringing only modest prices), I could not justify a complete restoration. At the time, I had only a small, single garage and was not prepared to do the work necessary to make the Bonneville roadworthy and reliable. I asked Art if he would be willing to keep the car and work on it only when his other business was slow -- essentially, using it as a "filler" project for reduced repair rates. He agreed under the condition that I chase down all the necessary parts. Over the next couple of months, Art and Mark completed all the mechanical work, which included:

- Engine tune up
- Carb tune up
- Rebuilt suspension: new bushings, springs and shocks
- Complete new brakes, new wheel cylinders (including leaking master) and hoses
- New exhaust system
- All new belts and hoses
- Flushing cooling system
- Rebuilding wiper motor and replacing switch
- Changing ATF and filter

Once in my hands, I did the necessary cosmetic work including:

- New carpet and kick panels
- New padded dash
- Refurbished rear hat shelf
- Replaced some welting
- Installed new trunk gasket and lining
- New radial tires and repainted wheels

- And lots and lots of cleaning and polishing

In the category of "gilding the lily," I replaced the stock wheel covers with spinner type wheel covers, installed a Wonderbar radio and Pontiac accessory under-dash trash receptacle.

Now What to Do?

We have enjoyed our Bonneville for 13 years now. Indeed, of all the old cars in my garage, the original "get me back in the car business" Bonneville is my wife's favorite. The big question is what do I do with the car now? While the car shows quite well, the engine bay is in the identical condition as Mr. Friel left it, with the exception of the mechanical/safety work done in 1997. The paint and body work is presentable but has some serious flaws on close inspection. The chrome and stainless are good-to-excellent, but the front bumper could use a re-plating. The interior is very nice and largely original. The least attractive part of the car has to be the engine bay. So, once I get the Safari wagon up and running, I think that will be the first major work to be done on the Bonneville since it was brought home over 13 years ago.

Yes, you guessed it. The third and final part of this series will be devoted to a relatively recent acquisition -- a 1960 Catalina Safari 9-passenger station wagon. Stay tuned!

Caption copy for accompanying pictures:

Picture 1: "My 1960 Bonneville Vista hardtop seen at the 2009 Norwood Spring Meet."

Picture 2: "Rear view of the Bonneville with the jet plane-like tail light treatment."

Picture 3: "Front view of the Bonneville showing the one-year-only "shark nose" one-piece grill (it is actually two castings).

Picture 3: "An ad for Pontiac featuring a Bonneville just like mine in two-tone, Stardust Yellow and Shelltone."

Picture 4: "The original sales receipt for my 1960 Bonneville."

Picture 5: "The owners' survey form and BRC addressed to Mr. S. E. "Bunkie" Knudsen, General Manager, Pontiac Motor Division."