ICD

CAR LIFE

FEBRUARY 1969 The Automotive **ACTION** Magazine 50¢

1969 Engineering Award

GRAND PRIX

FIRST LUXURY ENTHUSIAST'S CAR

PHOTOS BY STEVE SKRITSKI

PONTIAC GRAND PRIX

CAR LIFE'S 1969 ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE AWARD

A SPECIAL STAFF REPORT

THE PONTIAC GRAND PRIX was a car worth waiting for. Reluctantly, for two model years, CAR LIFE's panel of editors had decided not to give an Engineering Excellence Award. During that time, they felt, no new car had shown enough engineering innovation, or expressed enough overall design excellence to represent a significant advance in the automotive art.

The model year 1969 brought a car that did. Surprisingly, it is an enthusiast's car—but in top hat and tails. It is fast, nimble, responsive. Stripped of its luxury touches, it might well have been Supercar of the year. If nobody tells them better, the same elderly crowd which buys T'Birds and Rivieras for their sporting flavor might also respond to this one—and never discover its real potential.

The Grand Prix appears to be many things it is not. And it does several seemingly contradictory things excellently. All of these played an important part in its selection.

• It is not, for instance, a large car. The 1969 Grand Prix has the massive look of the luxury cars of the '60s. In fact, though, it sits on a wheelbase four inches shorter than the 1969 Catalina (118 vs. 122 in.), and is 7.3 in. shorter overall (210.2 in.). It's even shorter than the competing luxury/personal cars in its own GM stable. The Riviera is on an inch-longer wheelbase and is 5.1 in. longer overall—despite the large, hang-on nose of the Grand Prix. The panel of editors felt the car's size was an important element in its success as a total engineering package.

• The editors have no quarrel with a luxurious car—one that delivers precisely what its pricing structure says it should. The Grand Prix delivers. In many important ways, it offers more luxury than any car in its relative price range ever has. For instance, the control cocoon—or driver's cockpit—functions equally as a control center for a sporting vehicle as well as a luxurious box seat for a passing world. On the highway, an automobile is not a democratic entity. Placing all of the controls within the firm grasp of the one person responsible not only makes sense, in many ways it makes the rest of the dashboards in America look ridiculous.

• Its suspension is conventional; but the engineers have honed a fine edge between sporting vehicle handling and luxury car ride. In producing the Grand Prix, its engineers chose to offer a highly developed conventional suspension ideally suited for American freeway, commuting, and sporting driving. Within the framework of the automobile's market, they cannot be faulted for the route they took, despite proponents of completely independent suspensions.

• The looks of the Grand Prix are something of a departure for the Pontiac Division. Elements of several styling themes (most notable the wide-track look of earlier Grands Prix, the roof statements of the Cadillac) are combined with a controversial, large chrome nose. Overall, the package is the most interesting exercise of the 1969 model year—and the most talked about. It is a moot question whether the Grand Prix would have won the award if it were only for styling.

• The engineering innovations in the Grand Prix, while significant, are not as important as the way a total engineering *tour de force* was carried out. Within the framework of modern car-building economics, the Grand Prix expresses fresh thinking (radio antenna in front windshield and uncompromising design of control panel); important adaptations of recent European thinking (heating wires in rear window); and a straightforward approach to the American driver (brilliant acceleration, top speeds and handling in a luxury car).

For all of this, the CAR LIFE editors felt a special kind of award was in order. ▶

FIRE AND ICE FROM WIRE

"NO TROPHY THIS YEAR." That was the recommendation of the panel of editors when the decision to present CAR LIFE's Engineering Excellence Award to Pontiac for its Grand Prix was made.

Who needs another trophy for a trophy case? Certainly not Pontiac. That was the reaction and the beginning of another departure in this five-time tradition. Instead, said one staff spokesman, we'll present Pontiac with a significant piece of sculpture, inspired in some way by the Grand Prix's engineering. And rather than hand out a polished chunk of walnut on which is mounted a typical engineering device, we'll make the award as interesting a design effort as the winning car was. It would have to symbolize both the car and the magazine giving the award—hence *ACTION* sculpture.

The wires in the windshields of the Grand Prix (antenna in front, optional heating wires in rear) were chosen as the theme. And a sculptor who uses wire dramatically was commissioned to create the award. You see the result on these pages.

What you don't see is the motion, reflection, and sparkle from the tiny wires (no engineering specifications, OK?). The slightest air movement sets the sculpture into motion; and any shadows or lights crossing it set off a shower of contrasting lights.

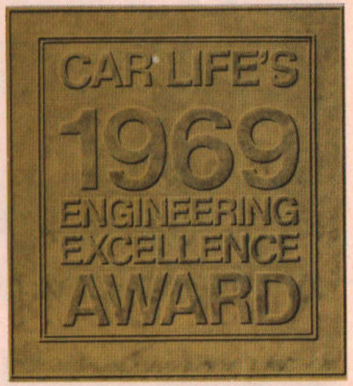
The base is polished, lacquered aluminum. The spray of wires is stainless steel. Its proportion is such that it may be used outside to catch breezes as well as inside a lobby, office, or—heaven forbid—a trophy case.

CAR LIFE Editor Jim Hamilton presented the award at a luncheon in Detroit on December 17 to John Z. DeLorean, general manager of the Pontiac Division. Publishers John and Elaine Bond were hosts at the luncheon to over 100 executives of General Motors, Pontiac Division, both GM and independent component manufacturers, and members of the press.

The traditional plaque with its inscription stating the purpose of the award was mounted on the back of the sculpture. Pontiac, in displaying Don Conard's *ACTION* art, may choose to de-emphasize the plaque in displaying it simply as a handsome piece of sculpture. ▶

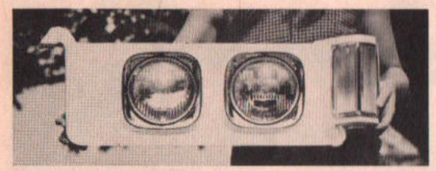
COLOR PHOTO BY SCOTT MALCOLM

MOBILE SCULPTOR Don Conard of San Francisco was commissioned to create an Engineering Excellence Award to reflect both the design elements of the Pontiac Grand Prix and CAR LIFE—the Automotive *Action* Magazine. The result is a 30-in. tall sculpture (fixed base, moving elements) of stainless steel wires on a solid, polished aluminum base. The antenna wires inside the Grand Prix's front windshield and the optional heating wires inside the rear windshield had inspired it. The wires in the sculpture, of course, aren't quite as thin as the wires embedded between two layers of glass within the windshields. Rhythms set up by breezes or passing observers, and its reflective, silvery finish, cause the sculpture to change character as often as an observer looks at it. Sculptor Conard, 38, is a recent convert from architecture and has a studio in Ghirardelli Square overlooking San Francisco Bay.

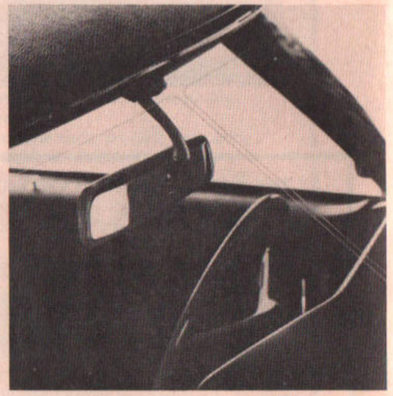


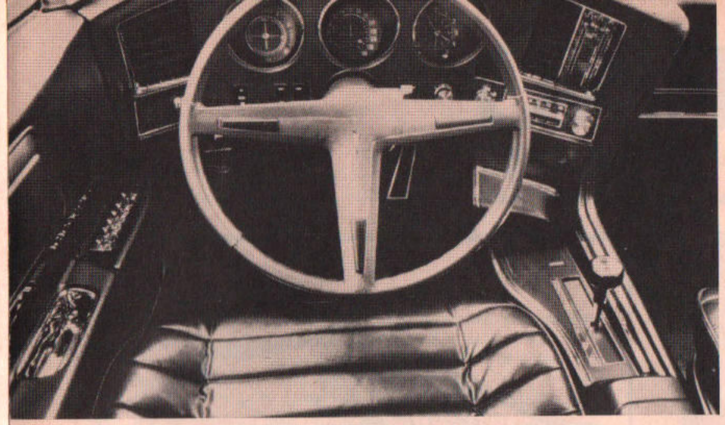
ENGINEERING FOR EXCELLENCE

NO INDIVIDUAL component, by itself, earned the engineering award for the Grand Prix. Rather, the designers did a brilliant job of setting specific luxury/sporting goals and bringing off an entire package with more-or-less existing components. There's nothing radical, for instance, these days in using fiberglass-reinforced plastic for miscellaneous panels. The Grand Prix has them in its headlight housing and in its dash panel (they're lighter, cheaper, and very durable).

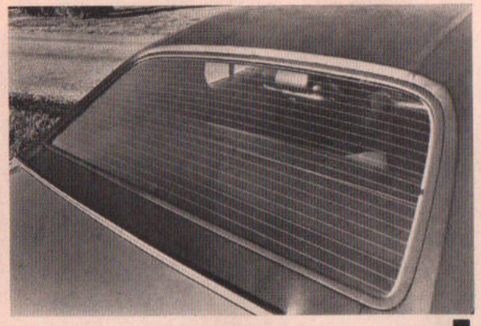


PONTIAC MOTOR Div. has long been a leader among the automotive innovators. Such things as the collapsible spare, hidden windshield wipers and Endura bumpers have kept Pontiac's competitors off guard. This year they've done it with wire, and most spectacularly in the front windshield. The hidden antenna consists of 0.005 in. diameter wires embedded between the two layers of glass. They're not invisible, but they do eliminate the far more conspicuous fender-mount antenna. It should represent a sizable saving over the years to owners—just in damage from vandals and car washes.





MOST RATIONAL instrument panel to come along in recent memory, the Grand Prix cockpit approach makes infinite sense—to driver. After all, he's responsible for the vehicle, and must be in control at all times. Devices that may be shared by front seat passengers are placed within reach (note radio, and temperature controls on driver's right). Instruments needed in driving are not treated like a family TV, typically placed as much for the enjoyment of the passengers as information devices for the driver. With SJ option, a "rally gauge cluster" is included to keep enthusiast aware of condition of engine. Tachometer option can replace clock at right.



ANOTHER use of wire that obviously will spread as widely as hidden wiper blades will be the rear window defogger. Pontiac's glass suppliers embed thin heating wires between the glass layers and at a touch of a switch, they begin to warm the glass. System is optional (front window antenna comes on all Grands Prix), but not exclusive.

CAR LIFE'S 1969 ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE AWARD

SUBSTITUTE for front wing windows gives occupants control over much of the air movement inside car. Called Bi-Level internal vent system, air enters through dash and can be directed to face, or heated or cooled for quiet circulation before being exhausted via pressure relief valves concealed in the door sills.

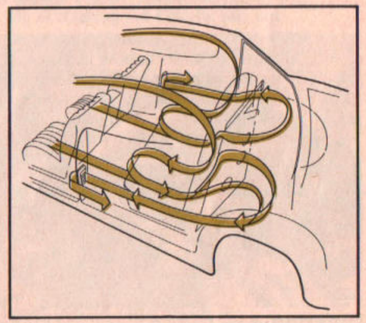


PHOTO BY STEVE SKIRTSKI

ENGINEERING FOR EXCELLENCE

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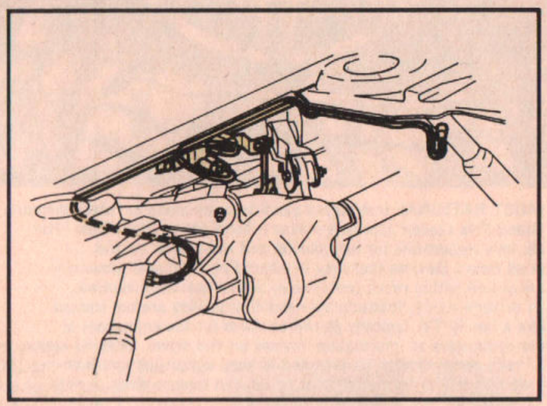
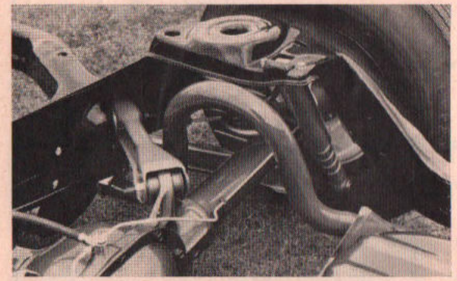
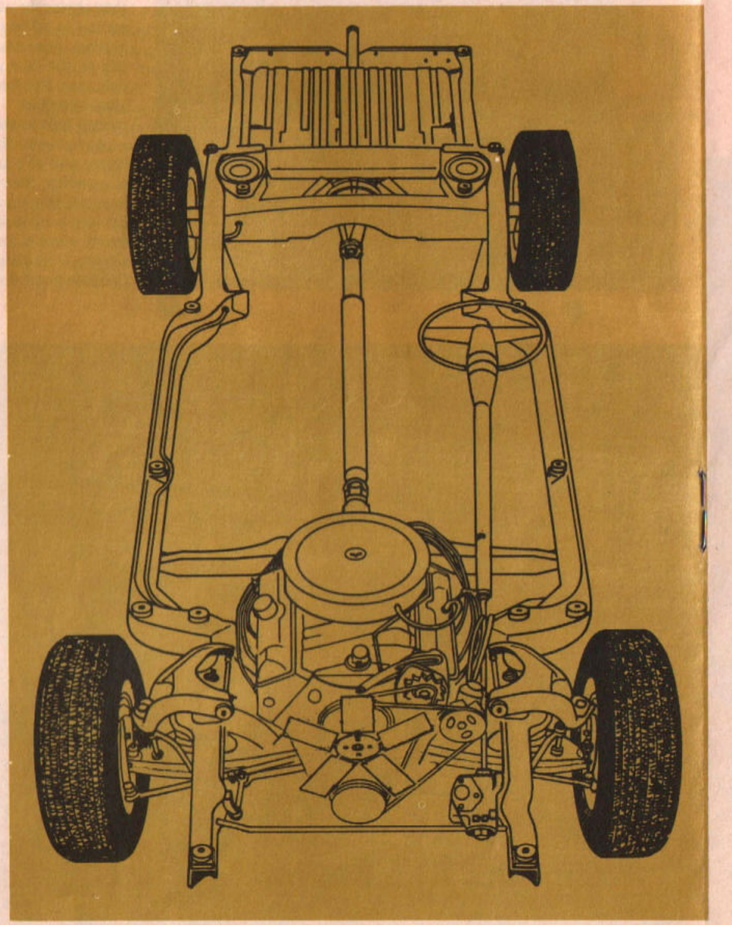


LOAD-LEVELLER is part of the SJ package, or can be ordered as a separate option with the J model. Air bags and special shock absorbers lift and stiffen the rear springs to compensate for extra weight. The linkage (color) activates the leveller, by telling an engine-driven compressor to inflate the bags when the rear of the body is lowered to a pre-determined point. There is a service valve on the compressor, for inflating the spare tire.

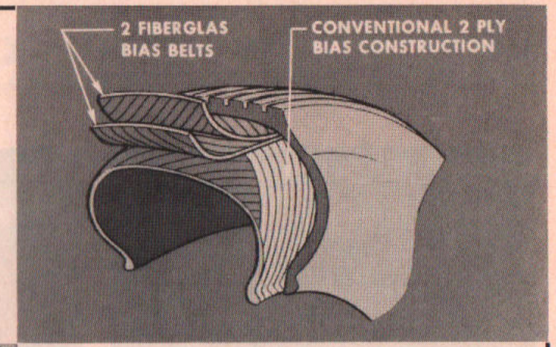


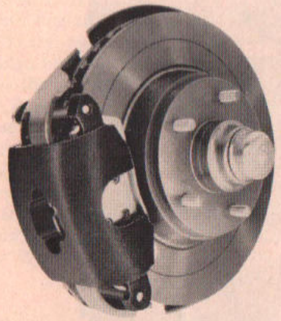
LOCATION of the Grand Prix rear axle has been carefully controlled. The coil springs carry weight, but do nothing else. The axle is kept in place by two sets of control arms, upper and lower. The upper arms are angled in 40° from the centerline, so the body can't sway from side to side. The lower arms (the right arm is barely visible behind the axle housing and tailpipe) are angled about 15° out from the car's centerline. They prevent wheel hop and judder under heavy power or braking. Lack of development time required the Grand Prix designers to utilize components from existing Pontiacs, and the rear suspension parts and design is identical to the GTO. Spring rates and shock absorber valving are different, though, both from the GTO and between the Grands Prix with standard suspension or the optional handling package.



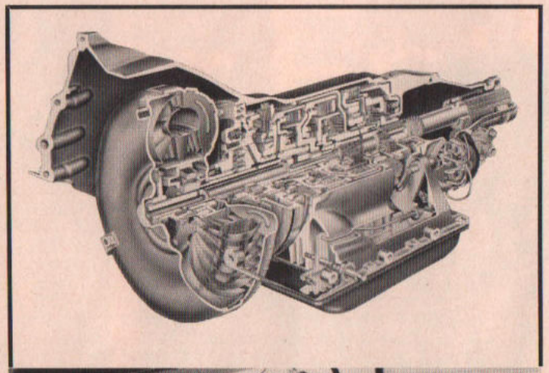
ASSEMBLED CHASSIS of the Grand Prix is a new blend of existing parts. The frame is basically Tempest, with six additional inches spliced in just behind the front suspension. The added length provides a better ride, and adding the length behind the suspension allowed the engine to be located aft of the wheels, which makes for better weight distribution. The front suspension has some Tempest components, but the tread has been increased by one inch, and steering linkage, shock absorbers and springs are all new for the Grand Prix.

WIDE WHEELS, below, right, have 7-in. rims, and come as part of the high-performance package. The centers do vary: The buyer can order styled steel wheels, as shown, or regular centers with special covers. Belted, Goodyear Polyglas tires, right, are currently an option, but will be standard wear for all Grands Prix in May.

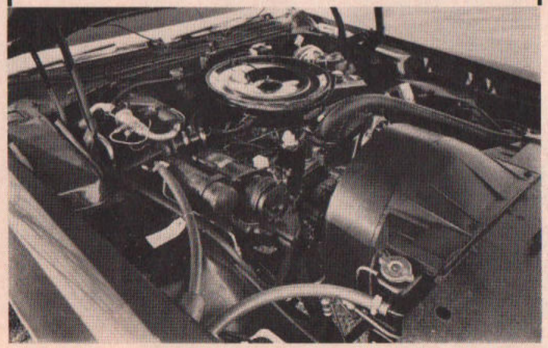




DISC BRAKES, the single-piston type rapidly becoming an industry standard, are a Grand Prix delete option, that is, all Grands Prix are built with them unless the buyer orders front drums. The GP tested had brakes that did an acceptable job of stopping the 4200-lb. car, but other cars, with as much weight and similar brakes, have done better. It's one of the few areas where the GP didn't shine.



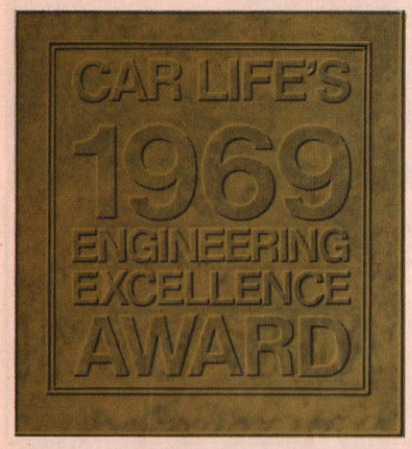
TURBO HYDRA-MATIC, which Pontiac shares with GM's other divisions, is a refined three-speed, beautifully suited to the Grand Prix. Shifts are quick and sharp under full power, and barely noticed when the car is being eased around town. Console mounted gearshift is standard, has detents to prevent missed shifts.



THUNDERING PERFORMANCE accompanied the 428-cid engine, rated at 390 horsepower in our test car. The 390 has a special camshaft and functional cold air scoops. Next in line is the 370/428 engine supplied with the SJ model, and same basic engine in 350-bhp tune comes with the J. For reasons of their own, Pontiac planners also list the 400-cid, regular fuel V-8, built for their family cars, as a Grand Prix option. Seems like a strange way to save money.

GRAND PRIX

Pontiac Builds a Luxury Car



PHOTOS BY STEVE SKRITSKI

PONTIAC has just built the least compromised car in America. The engineers have neither compromised handling for comfort, acceleration for luxury, nor size for nimbleness.

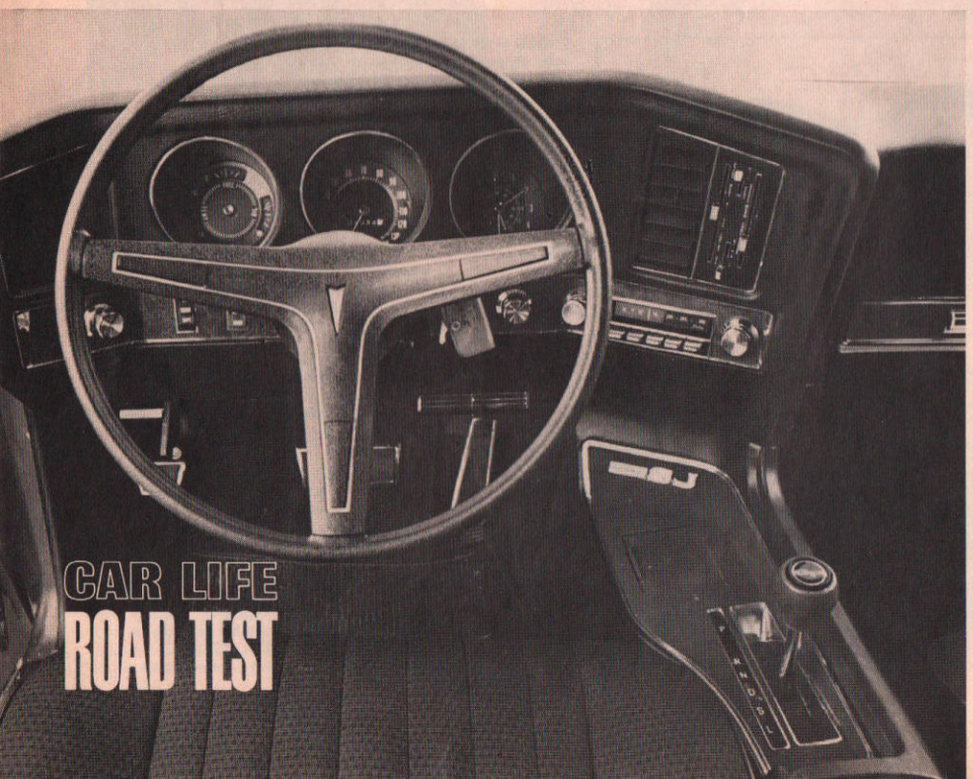
The 1969 Grand Prix is this generation's first true luxury enthusiast's car.

Years ago, Duesenberg produced fabled luxury automobiles—perhaps it was the zenith of automobile building in America because they were also that generation's performance cars. Therefore was it pretentious of Pontiac to tag its Grands Prix with Duesenberg's J designation for the lower priced, tamer model and SJ (Duesenberg's code for supercharged model J) for the performance model? No matter how pretentious it may *sound*, they live up to their heritage. Our test car, an SJ (plus two other Js we arranged to drive before making our Engineering Excellence Award), lived up to the name—both with luxury and exciting performance.

The crew at Pontiac must have been thinking: "What are we going to sell to the young guy who bought the GTO in '64? He's older now, making more money, a little settled down now that he's married, and on his way in a good career. Things are good, and he's ready to be spoiled. But he doesn't want to sacrifice the thrill of driving. What is being built that combines GTO-style performance with luxury?"

Enter the grandest of the Grands Prix, the luxury enthusiast's car.

Our test SJ wasn't the standard one. The basic SJ package includes a 370-bhp/428-cid engine, power disc brakes, performance rear axle ratio, automatic leveling rear airbag/shocks (they stiffen the suspension as well as keep the chassis level when loaded). But wait. Also on the option list—the business end—is a 390-bhp H.O. engine, a handling package, a 3.55:1 axle ratio, and four-speed and Turbo Hydra-Matic transmissions. In other words, all sorts of things not found in the option lists for other luxury cars. Ours was loaded—all the good factory stuff including the Turbo Hydra-Matic. We had hoped to disguise an enthusiast's toy in a luxury package. ▶





SURPRISING CORNERING flatness and predictability made GP a sleeper in the handling department, yet ride was pleasant.

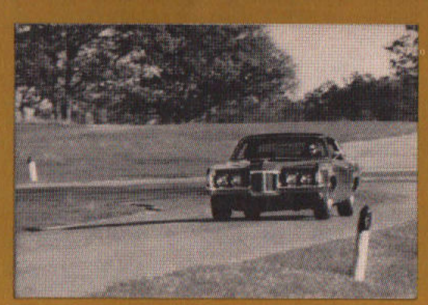
GRAND PRIX

continued

Little did we realize how well we'd succeed.

We took delivery of the test car unceremoniously in the middle of a rain storm. And, just as unceremoniously, we sloshed out to our test road, all the while growing attached to some of the car's luxury touches—the rear window defogger, the automatic temperature control, FM stereo. It was still raining as we arrived at our deserted stretch of winding test road . . . but we started exploring its road manners in curves and on ridges anyway. The Grand Prix devoured the slick turns, and the suspension responded brilliantly with both tremendous feel and feedback from the roadway.

It was not until the following day when it became necessary to wring the car out around brutal curves all over again for the photographer that we took note also of our own nonchalance in driving the car so vigorously. We are used to doing this sort of thing with Supercars and Ponycars. We expect the better ones to handle with just as much predictability and finesse. At a break in the shooting session, though, we climbed out of the car, looked back at it, and did a double-take. For two days we'd driven the car as though it were an enthusiast's workhorse, not one of the most luxurious cars produced in America. But luxury certainly was parked at the side of the road. It was as though cars had been switched when our back was turned. Such disparity in looks and action demands respect.


It could be driven comfortably near the limit of adhesion with precision. Neutral steering and good power added to controllability.

But the Grand Prix first had to earn ours. We'd driven too many 4200-lb. cars on long wheelbases (118 in. in this case) to believe such a package would perform and handle sportingly —especially if it had to retain a luxury ride. Our test car had the extra help it takes, in the form of stiffer springs, sway bar and improved shock valving. Granted, that sounds as though we were trying to take the GP right out of the luxury class and turn it into a Supercar. Instead, we believe the options enhanced the overall stability and ride. Instead of the heavy, pitchy, mushy feel one associates with the personal/luxury cars, the Grand Prix SJ felt well attached to its suspended members, and they to the road. All without discernible ride harshness. Instead of *detachment*, we got *intimacy*. And while its soft ride suggested it shouldn't corner fast, it simply did.

The car's cornering attitude is fantastically flat, not unlike that of a genuine race car (we race a lot). That, combined with its near-neutral handling and responsive steering, ranked it among the most predictable American cars we've tested.

We had driven a J earlier in the season (a factory-prepared one), and we wanted another ride to see what a typical buyer gets from a dealer. We borrowed one from Roy Carver Pontiac in Costa Mesa, Calif., for a morning's drive. A few leisurely laps around the block and a couple of brisk freeway on-ramps convinced us that the standard package isn't bad either. Although there is more understeer, the more softly sprung J still ranks above any other luxury/personal car we've tested. But the options on our test SJ ▶

1969 GRAND PRIX

PONTIAC SJ

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	118
Track, f/r, in.	62/60
Overall length, in.	210
width	76
height	52
Front seat hip room, in.	25.x 2
shoulder room	58
head room	38
pedal-seatback, max.	43
Rear seat hip room, in.	53
shoulder room	57
leg room	32
head room	36
Door opening width, in.	47
Trunk liftover height, in.	30

PRICES

List, FOB factory	$4093
Equipped as tested	$6095

Options included: SJ package; power disc brakes; auto level control; belted bias tires. 428 H.O. engine, handling pkg, Turbo Hydra-Matic; power steering; performance axle w/H.D. Positraction; AM/FM radio, air conditioning.

CAPACITIES

No. of passengers	5
Luggage space, cu. ft.	n.a.
Fuel tank, gal.	21.5
Crankcase, qt.	5
Transmission/dif., pt.	19/3
Radiator coolant, qt.	20

CHASSIS/SUSPENSION

Frame type: Separate perimeter.
Front suspension type: S.L.A. independent with coil spring and sway bar.
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. 91
antiroll bar dia., in. 1.03
Rear suspension type: Solid axle with four control arms, coil springs.
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. 1.39
Steering system: Saginaw variable ratio, power assisted.
overall ratio 13:1
turns, lock to lock 2.9
turning circle, ft. curb-curb 39.3
Curb weight, lb. 4180
Test weight 4370
Distribution (driver), % f/r 56/44

BRAKES

Type: Power, vented disc front, drum rear.
Front rotor, dia. x width, in. 10.94 x 1
Rear drum, dia. x width 9.5 x 2
total swept area, sq. in. 351
Power assist: Integral vacuum type. line psi at 100 lb. pedal 800

WHEELS/TIRES

Wheel rim size 14 x 7JJ
optional size none
bolt no./circle dia. in. 5/4.75
Tires: UniRoyal belted-bias. size G78-14
normal inflation, psi f/r 24/28

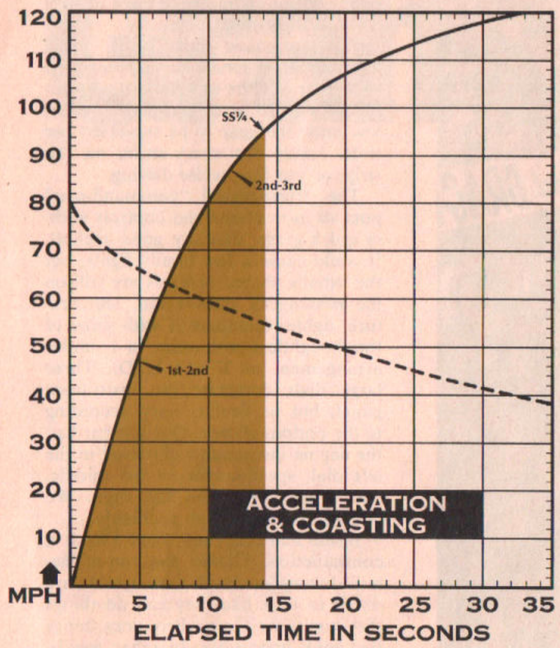
ENGINE

Type, no. of cyl. ohv V-8
Bore x stroke, in. 4.12 x 3.75
Displacement, cu. in. 428
Compression ratio 10.75:1
Fuel required premium
Rated bhp @ rpm 390 @ 5200
equivalent mph 117
Rated torque @ rpm 465 @ 3400
equivalent mph 77
Carburetion: Rochester Quadrajet 1x4.
throttle dia., pri./sec. 1.38/2.25
Valve train: Hydraulic lifters, push-rods, overhead rocker arms.
cam timing
deg., int./exh. 23-70/78-31
duration, int./exh. 273/289
Exhaust system: Dual, reverse-flow mufflers.
pipe dia., exh./tail 2.25/2.25
Normal oil press. @ rpm 60 2600
Electrical supply, V./amp. 12/37
Battery, plates/amp. hr. 66/61

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission type: Turbo Hydra-Matic with torque converter.
Gear ratio 3rd (1.00:1) overall 3.55:1
2nd (1.48:1) 5.25:1
1st (2.48:1) 8.80:1
1st x t. c. stall (2.3:1) 20.23:1
Shift lever location: Floor console.
Differential type: Limited slip.
axle ratio 3.55:1

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test weight)	11.2
Cu. ft./ton mile	152.5
Mph/1000 rpm (high gear)	22.3
Engine revs/mile (60 mph)	2690
Piston travel, ft./mile	1850
CAR LIFE wear index	62.5
Frontal area, sq. ft.	42.2

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	28.4
40 mph	38.1
50 mph	47.7
60 mph	57.1
70 mph	66.9
80 mph	76.5
90 mph	85.1

MAINTENANCE

Engine oil, miles/days	6000/120
oil filter, miles/days	12,000/240
Chassis lubrication, miles	none
Antismog servicing, type/miles	replace PCV valve/12,000, tune-up /12,000
Air cleaner, miles	12,000
Spark plugs: AC R-44S. gap, (in.)	0.035
Basic timing, deg./rpm	9/BTDC
max. cent. adv., deg./rpm	20/4600
max. vac. adv., deg./in. Hg	20/16
Ignition point gap, in.	0.016
cam dwell angle, deg.	30
arm tension, oz.	20
Tappet clearance, int./exh.	n.a.
Fuel pressure at idle, psi.	6
Radiator cap relief press., psi	14-17

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (5800), mph	129
Test shift points (rpm) @ mph	
2nd to 3rd (5800)	87
1st to 2nd (5800)	47

ACCELERATION

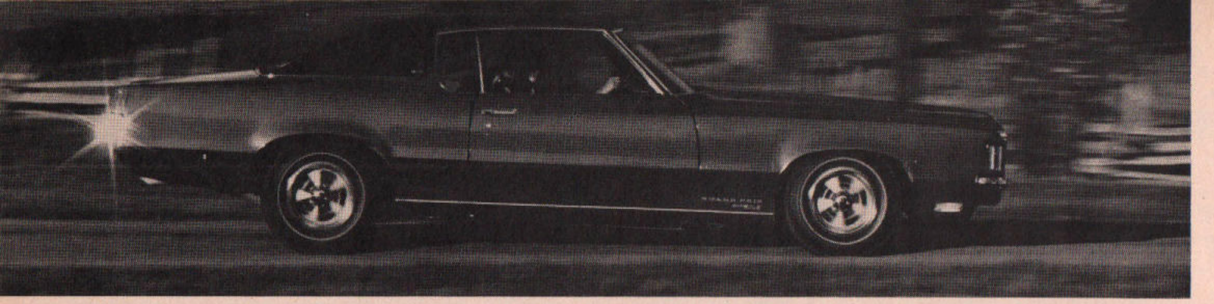
0-30 mph, sec.	2.9
0-40 mph	4.1
0-50 mph	5.3
0-60 mph	6.7
0-70 mph	8.3
0-80 mph	10.1
0-90 mph	12.5
0-100 mph	16.0
Standing ¼-mile, sec.	14.1
speed at end, mph	95.3
Passing, 30-70 mph, sec.	5.4

BRAKING

Max. deceleration rate from 80 mph ft./sec./sec. 25.0
No. of stops from 80 mph (60-sec. intervals) before 20% loss in deceleration rate 12% fade at 8 stops
Control loss? Slight.
Overall brake performance good

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Test conditions, mpg	8.6
Normal cond., mpg	10-13
Cruising range, miles	200-250



BRAKING, at a maximum rate of 25 ft./sec./sec. with little fade, was good and about average for most American disc/drum systems, but after the good things in the handling and power departments, we expected better.

GRAND PRIX

continued

had made the greatest difference. Besides the stiffer springs all around, the Super-lift rear shocks added a bit more rear roll stiffness and took out most of the understeer. An enthusiast would want all of these handling extras.

The 428-cid H.O. engine is also the enthusiast's obvious choice. No smokin' blue gumballs, but the power is there when the driver tromps down. At the test track we got quarter-mile times in the low fourteens—not exactly hanging around. We could very likely have embarrassed some so-called Supercars. Like the handling, the power easily remains in hibernation until provoked.

GM's variable-ratio power steering has gotten unanimous praise this year from CAR LIFE testers. It has even converted one staffer who has always thought power steering was part of the Communist conspiracy. Now he admits it is a fine combination of responsiveness, ease and road feel. And though it puzzled us at first, the small steering wheel blends well with the overall character of the car. It lends itself well to two-arms-straight driving that seems ideal for the steering response and handling.

The brakes were a disappointment. They weren't bad. They just weren't extraordinary. We expected greater things from them than the maximum deceleration rate of 25 ft./sec./sec. (from 80 mph). There was very little fade (minimum reading was 22 ft./sec./sec. in the eight stops). Certainly better than many performance cars, they were still a shade below those of, say, the Thunderbird.

Also, the GP's floating caliper front disc/drum rear setup exhibited the usual trait of allowing the rear wheels to lock up until they faded enough to shift more of the braking effort to the front.

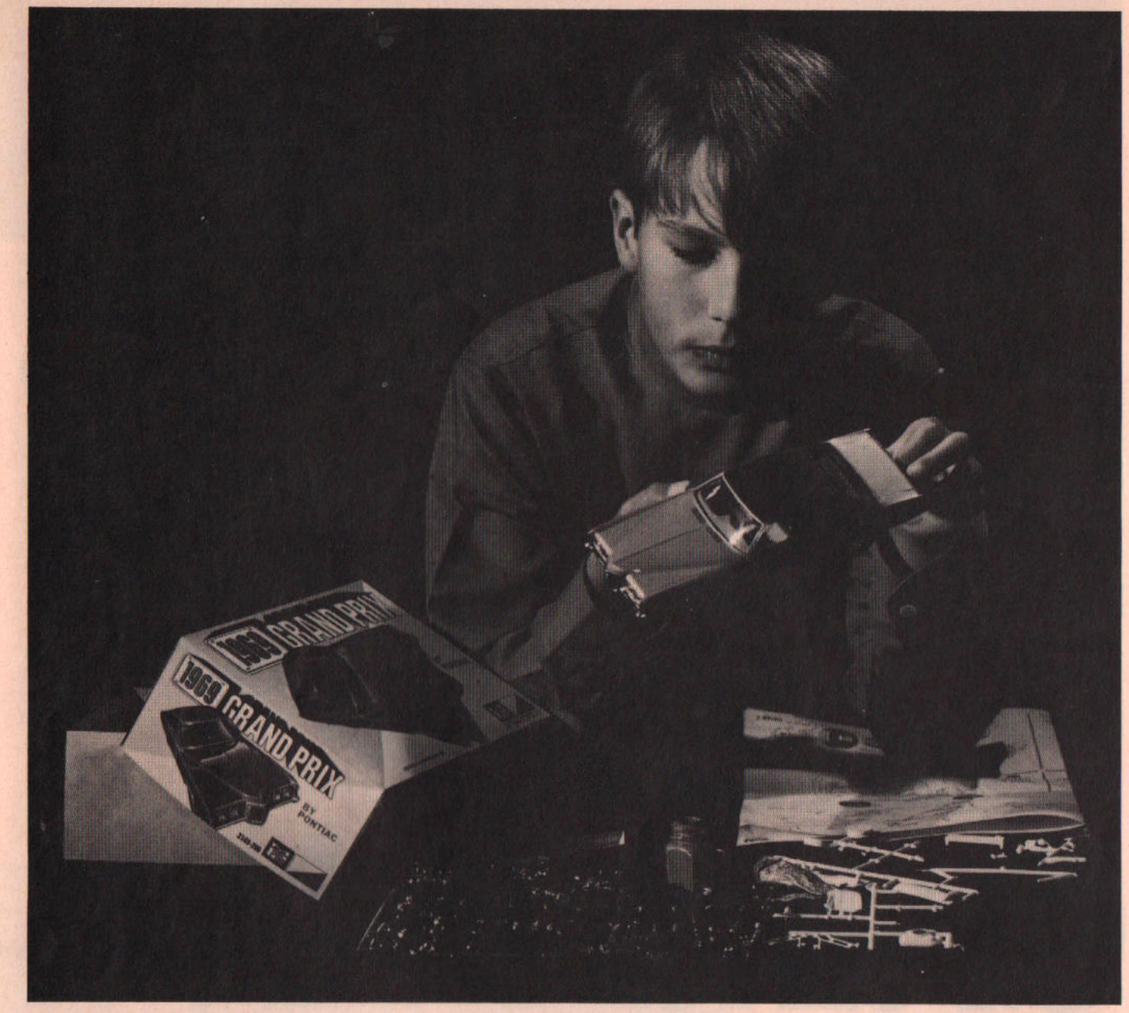
GM's now-familiar three-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic was well matched to the chassis and engine. A three-speed manual is standard, a four-speed manual is available (we'd hesitate before buying either). The torque of the H.O. engine could easily cope with any situation we encountered; and it seems out of character to have to shift a car of this caliber manually.

The automatic shift lever, even, lends an air of sportiness quite suitable to the car. It's the old Hurst dual-gate-theme which has detent stops that allow only one gear to be traversed per shift, handy for clean shifts on the strip, or just for precise driving.

The driver-biased "command-seat" puts all instruments and controls within quick grasp, like any good cockpit. It could cause a few family fights; but the usually shared controls are still on the passenger's side—radio, temperature, lighter (compare it with some of the thoughtless positioning in a similar arrangement on Ford's LTD). Three large dials dominate the instrument panel; but particulars vary according to the options chosen. Our test car had the engine instruments clustered in the left dial, speedometer in the middle, and a rally clock on the right. We could have used a tach profitably.

Inside and out, the Grand Prix is a contradiction. Unlike the run-of-the-mill luxury/personal cars which are styled to look like they can do things they can't, the Grand Prix does things that look impossible. In other words, it's a duesie! ■

TIGER IN TUXEDO is capable of breaking 14.1 sec. in the quarter-mile all day, while supplying the driver with stereo music and conditioned air. Luxury-Supercar may be bigger sleeper than the real sleeper-Supercars.



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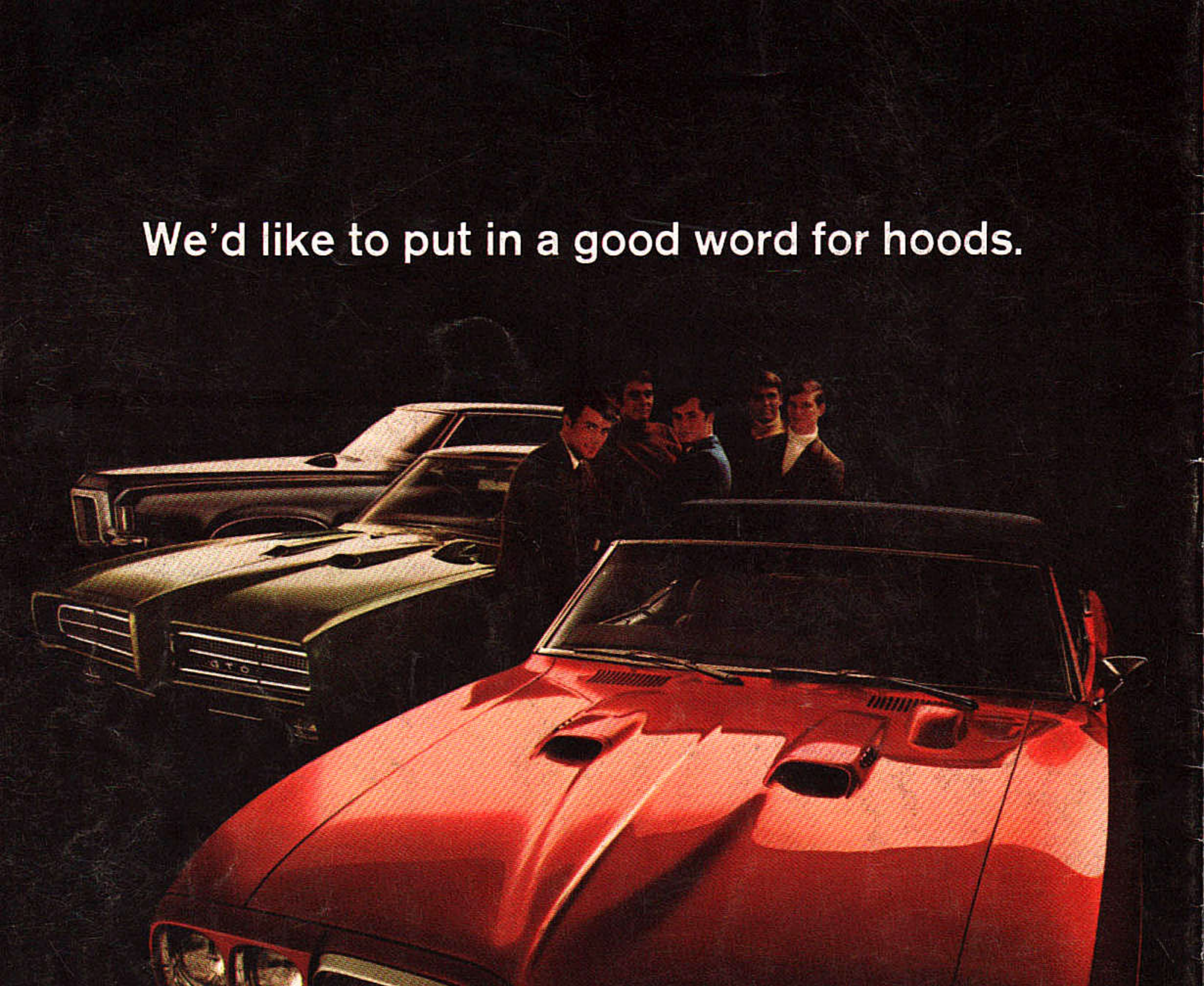
We'd like to put in a good word for hoods.



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Obviously, this is no year to go around bad-mouthing Pontiac's hoods.

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