

**Lasting Tribute:
'68 GTO Droptop**

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Lasting Tribute



**Ed Wolf's '68 GTO
convertible is a
rolling tribute to the
love of his life.**



**By Jason Scott
Photography
by the author**

Family obligations and higher priorities kept Ed Wolf waiting more than 30 years to restore the '68 GTO convertible that he got in 1977 when he traded a '69 GTO hardtop to his cousin.

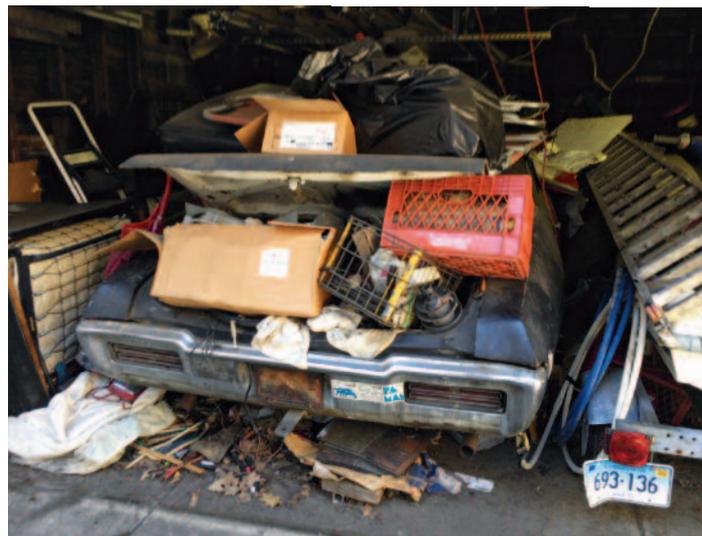
Back in 1977, Ed Wolf – like most 17-year-old boys – basically had just two things on his mind: hot cars and pretty girls.

Ed satisfied his craving for hot cars by climbing behind the wheel of his used-but-not-abused '69 GTO hardtop that he had purchased for the princely sum of \$1,375. His GTO served him well as both a daily driver and for the occasional extra-legal endeavor while out cruising around his usual stomping grounds in and around The Bronx, New York. By all measures, Ed was quite happy with his GTO ... until the day that he learned that his cousin, Richie Stevens, was planning to get rid of his '68 GTO convertible, after growing frustrated with local troublemakers who developed a habit of slicing through the car's soft top to gain easy access to whatever Richie had left inside. Being the practical-minded guy that he was, Ed got in touch with his cousin and pointed out how his own hardtop Goat was far better suited for life in Richie's neighborhood, and just like that, the two decided to straight-up swap GTO for GTO in autumn of 1977.

A few months later, in the spring of 1978, when the weather started to make itself far more compatible with the GTO's retractable top, Ed found himself working his usual shift one evening at the local McDonald's, when a young woman entered the restaurant to visit with his manager. Ed had never seen the young woman before, but he was instantly smitten. She was only there for a couple of minutes, and Ed was tied up helping customers so he missed his opportunity to introduce himself, but moments after she left, he quizzed his



This scan of an old photo gives you some idea of what the GTO looked like circa 1983, shortly after Ed and the love of his life, Barbara (pictured) were married. Unfortunately, it wasn't long after that that the engine lost oil pressure and Ed was forced to park it ... for what turned out to be a very, very long time.



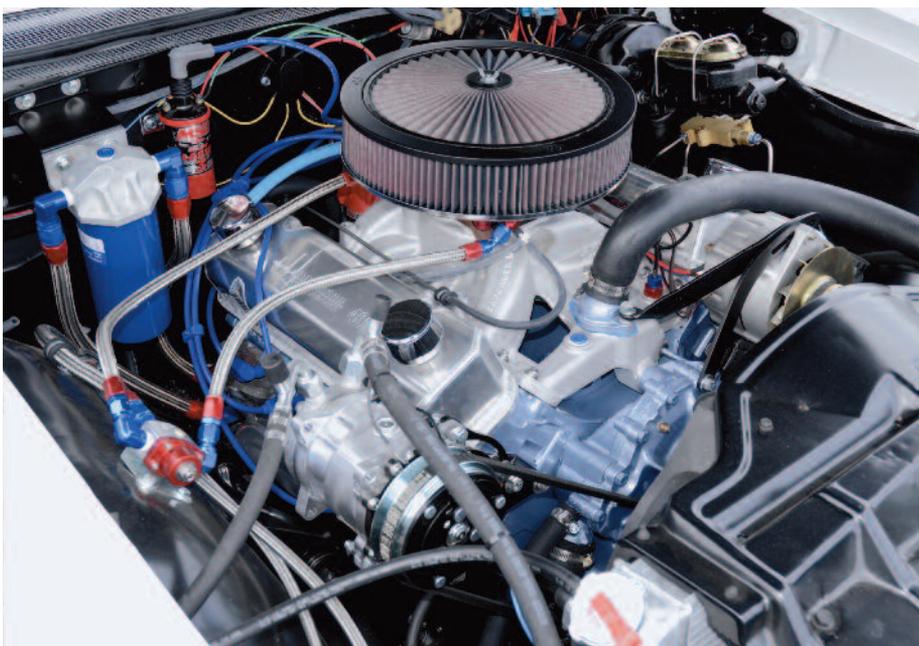
Fast forward several decades and the Wolfs' GTO was suffering a sad existence in the family garage, sporting a primer finish and heaps of who-knows-what on and in it. Ed and Barbara had always planned to restore the car, but finances and timing had never allowed.

manager to learn all about her, particularly her name – Barbara Perretti – and whether she was seeing anyone. As it turned out, she had just broken up with her boyfriend. The next time Ed saw Barbara, he didn't waste any time: he introduced himself and asked

her out. And to his relief, she accepted.

The two dated for the next several years until, in 1983, they married and shortly after bought a house. All the while, the GTO was right there with them – as Ed's daily driver, as their

designated date-night transportation, when getting married, and even when house shopping. Then, one day, in late-1983, the GTO suddenly developed a low-oil pressure condition, and Ed was forced to park it in the garage of their new home. And there it sat, with the days turning into weeks, weeks into months, months into ... well ... you get the idea. In all, three decades passed with the GTO sitting in Ed and Barbara's garage. Despite a few moments of weakness, Ed learned from the mistakes of some of his electrician co-workers in the IBEW Local Union #3 NYC who had long-ago sold vehicles that they later wished they had held onto, so Ed never let his GTO go. While he and Barbara raised three kids – Ed Junior, Christina, and Nicholas – they often spoke of restoring the GTO one day, to drive and enjoy it again. But as so often happens, time and money are often in short supply, what with college tuitions and weddings and what-not competing for their limited



While the body was essentially restored to factory shape, the drivetrain received a significant power upgrade when Magro rebuilt the car's original 400 to the specs of one of Nitemare's 425-horse pump gas crate engines. A Vintage Air AC system was added at Ed's request so he can cruise in comfort, even in the heat of New York City summers.

resources. But still they held out hope to restore the GTO ... someday.

After their son, Ed Jr., got married in 2014, it looked as though Ed and Barbara would finally get the chance to dust off the GTO and begin its restoration. They even began collecting parts and checking out restoration shops. During the summer of 2014, at the Pontiacs With A Purpose show in Rhode Island, they met Darrin Magro, of Nitemare Performance. After speaking with Darrin on the phone, the Wolfs travelled the short distance to Nitemare's southern-Connecticut shop, where they viewed some of the cars that had gone through the Nitemare restoration process. They even traveled to visit with some of Nitemare's customers, to get their impressions and see their Pontiacs. The couple quickly decided that Magro was the man that they wanted to handle reviving their GTO. The clincher for Barbara was how meticulously organized Magro kept the Nitemare shop.

So, the two were all set to pull the trigger on the restoration, when, in October of 2014, came devastating



Like the body, the interior was essentially returned to factory condition, with the addition of some aftermarket gauges to keep Ed better informed about the engine's vital signs.

news: Barbara was diagnosed with late-stage pancreatic cancer. Though she kept insisting that Ed restore the GTO, he couldn't focus on that while the love of his life was getting sicker by the day. In May of 2015 – barely six months after her diagnosis – Barbara passed away, but not before making Ed promise to have Magro restore the GTO, and getting the kids to pledge

to make sure Ed honored that promise.

Understandably, after Barbara's death, Ed wasn't terribly interested in thinking much about the GTO, but the kids kept prodding him and reminding him of the promise he'd made to Barbara, so in August, Ed delivered the car to Nitemare Performance for a full, frame-off restoration.



As with the drivetrain, the Wolfs' GTO received a few stealthy upgrades in the chassis department, the most noticeable of which are the slightly-upgraded 15-inch Rally II wheels wearing BFG Silvertown redline radials. Between the wheels are a host of Hotchkis Suspension springs, shocks, swaybars, and bushings to improve the Goat's handling.



All the bright trim like marker light bezels and the rear bumper were either restored or replaced, along with decals, emblems, and other bits to bring the body back to factory-type condition. Any of the modifications chosen – like the blacked out grilles and wheels – can be easily returned to stock, if Ed ever gets the urge in the future.



While Ed was thrilled with the restoration work that Magro performed, he couldn't get over the feeling that the completed car was missing something: a tribute to the love of his life, Barbara, who had passed away just prior to the car being restored. A local artist, Alan Pastrana, air brushed the mural that depicts Barbara set amongst some of her favorite places and things.

As the car neared completion at Nitemare Performance's shop, the GTO was shaping up to look and perform better than Ed could have ever hoped ... and yet, as nice as the car was, Ed just couldn't shake the feeling that something was missing. A few

days later, it dawned on him: he needed to find a way to make the car a rolling memorial to Barbara, who – like the GTO – had been right there with him, his entire adult life. After a few more days of thinking, an idea came to him: he'd have a mural of

Barbara and some of their favorite memories painted on the car. As luck would have it, Ed was surfing the internet a couple nights later when he stumbled across the site of local artist Alan Pastrana. When Ed contacted him the next day, Pastrana was so touched by Barbara and Ed's story that he agreed in a heartbeat to help Ed add the finishing touch to their GTO.

The resulting artwork that Pastrana created consists of a portrait of Barbara set amongst her favorite places – like Disney World and Hawaiian beaches – and a reproduction of a note that she wrote for Ed, on her final trip to the hospital.

Fittingly, the GTO was completed just in time for its grand unveiling after the restoration and with the portrait of Barbara gracing its decklid when Ed drove their daughter Christina to her wedding, on August 6th of 2016.



Restoration of the Wolfs' GTO was completed just days before their daughter, Christina, was married in the summer of 2016, and it transported the bride to the ceremony and served as a wonderful way to ensure Barbara was a part of the occasion.

The Restoration

For Ed, restoring his and Barbara's GTO was a highly emotional experience, because the car meant so much to him and Barbara for so much of their lives. The couple chose Nitemare Performance to perform the restoration, largely because they were both highly impressed with Darrin Magro's meticulous work and exhausting attention to detail after they visited not only the Nitemare shop but also inspected several cars previously restored by Magro.

Ed's directions to Magro were simple: He didn't want to lose the essence of what the car was when he and Barbara used to cruise around in it, but he'd always wanted some upgrades in the horsepower and suspension departments, too. So, Magro set about restoring the body and interior, and injecting the drivetrain and chassis with some much-deserved upgrades.

According to Ed, "the engine, transmission, rearend, doors, fenders, and hood are original but obviously rebuilt or restored." The quarter panels were replaced and the entire body was sanded to perfection before being coated in its original Cameo Ivory color though with an updated black-out treatment for the grilles, wheels, and some trim items. The interior was redone in basic black, just as it left the factory. The retractable top required extra effort: "The hydraulics for the top – I wanted those to work properly – so they're all new, too, along with the top material, of course," Ed explained.

Ed had Magro add another modern convenience that he and Barbara had yearned for: "Our GTO didn't have air conditioning," he explained, "but we saw Darrin's and it had air, so while ours was all apart, I said 'let's put in air.'"

When planning the powertrain rebuild, Magro recommended a number of upgrades to improve performance and reliability. The original engine was rebuilt to the blueprinted specs of one of Nitemare's bulletproof 425-horsepower pump-gas crate motors. The car's numbers-matching block is fitted with a factory crank, but it swings lighter, stronger aftermarket connecting rods that push and pull forged pistons, and the entire assembly is precision balanced for smooth operation. The 400-inch mill ingests fuel from the Holley electric fuel pump through a QuickFuel carb atop an Edelbrock Performer RPM intake while a custom Nitemare hydraulic camshaft controls the stainless valves in the original heads that were treated to Nitemare's Stage 1 porting treatment. An MSD ignition system with Taylor wires lights the fires using AC plugs, and Nitemare's signature oil system upgrades – a billet, collared driveshaft turning a high-volume oil pump with Nitemare's extra-thick cover plate and a custom pickup that draws oil from the Nitemare baffled road-racing oil pan – keep the engine well lubricated, while Nitemare's remote oil filter system both cleans and helps cools the oil before sending it back through the engine. Exhaust gases are handled by a set of restored factory manifolds that dump into a custom, free-flowing dual exhaust system.

Magro rebuilt the car's original Turbo Hydramatic 400 automatic to replace worn-out parts, firm-up the shifts, and improve overall durability so that it would survive behind the upgraded engine. Likewise, Magro went through the car's original Safe-T-Track limited-slip 10-bolt rear to ensure that it would withstand the engine's monster torque curve.

Everything attaches to a fully-restored frame to which Magro added upgraded suspension bits from Hotchkis – including front and rear stabilizer bars, shocks, springs, and bushings, to improve the car's handling, along with rebuilt and upgraded brakes to safely bring the fun to a stop, when the time comes. The car rolls on 15-inch Pontiac Rally IIs wrapped in red-stripe BFGoodrich Silvertown radials for a classic look but mildly-upgraded ride and handling characteristics.

The restoration was capped off with the custom mural that pays tribute to Barbara every time Ed goes cruising in their finally-restored GTO.

-JASON SCOTT **PP**





Page 06



Stewardship and mentoring young people is an often-overlooked but vital portion of the automotive hobby. "Gasser Brother" Darren Brandow has been guiding this young man on a path of automotive excellence. Meet Evan Angle, the youngest "Gasser Brother." Tim Sickle's story and Darren Brandow's photos begin on page 06.

Page 34



Over a decade of research and personal experience with the Pontiac G8 GXP has made Joe Morgan, Jr. the "go-to guy" with regard to the last Pontiac musclecar. His story, production breakdowns and photos from GM Media Archive begin on page 34.

Page 40



Little did Ed Wolf know that the 1968 GTO convertible that he traded another GTO for back in 1977, the same one that he courted his wife Barbara with, would eventually be restored by Nitemare Performance as a rolling tribute to her memory. Jason Scott's text and photos covering this poignant story start on Page 40.

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On the Cover: Father and son racing teams are certainly nothing new but for Shawn and Kienan Knisely, their Cloisonné Blue, tube-framed 1962 LeMans is a story of family bonding spanning three generations. Rocky Rotella's story and photography starts on page 24.

Page 48



Rocky Rotella checks in this month with an informative look at the reproduction Goodyear GR70-15 tires now available from Kelsey Tire and the original General Motors "coporate tire program" that the tires were originally designed under. He also goes in-depth with John Kelsey, President of Kelsey Tire. Rocky's story and photos start on page 48.