

Model Master Interview: Diz Dean



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Luxury and Performance

1963 421 HO Four-Speed Grand Prix



\$9.99 U.S. • \$11.99 Canada

**Best
Medicine**
500-Horsepower
'67 GTO Resto-Mod



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Maryland-based Pontiac racer Jeff Raff has been running his bright yellow, wheelstanding, 455-powered 1964 GTO for decades and it just keeps getting quicker. Tony Websters' "Norwalk Notable" profile of Jeff starts on page 20.

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The 1970 model year represented the first time that an engine larger than a 350 could be installed in a non-GTO Pontiac A-body. Diego Rosenberg's story about this relatively rare engine option and photos from GM Media Archive can be found on page 16.

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After the rigors of med school and interning at hospitals, Richard Sorcinelli longed for another GTO to put in his garage. After being diagnosed with cancer, he found the therapeutic benefits of Pontiac power, with the help of Darrin Magro and Nightmare Performance. Jason Scott's story and photos begin on page 34.

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On the Cover: George Knevelbaard's obsession with Pontiacs dates back to his teen years, hanging out at the legendary Mickey Thompson's shop in Long Beach, California. His '63 421 HO Grand Prix has been built to perfectly suit his vision of the ultimate GP. Dave Bonaskiewich's story and photos start on page 24.

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After a hiatus in 2020, the Cruisin' Tigers Pontiac Club held their annual "Indian Uprising All-Pontiac Weekend" at a new venue and entered a new chapter in the event's three-decade history. Over 450 cars showed up this past August 7-8 at the Holiday Inn Crystal Lake for a weekend to remember. Don Keefe's story and photos start on page 42.

The Poncho



There's Nothing Like a 500 Horsepower 1967 GTO to Cure What Ails You...

Back in the 1960s, Richard Sorcinelli was just your average young guy growing up in the musclecar era in southern Connecticut. While not quite a street racing mecca like not-too-far-away New York City, Richard's area had more than its share of hot Detroit iron. And like many red-blooded Americans of the time, Richard soon found himself owning

cars like a small-block powered '66 Mustang which was eventually replaced by a small-block '68 Camaro, which, itself, was replaced by a 400/four-speed Limelight Green '69 GTO.

As the gas-crisis of the '70s set in, though, the old Goat wasn't exactly the most practical mode of transportation, especially given that Richard had enrolled in med-

ical school, which is infamous for years of challenging studies followed by several more years of a meager subsistence as a medical intern and resident physician. So, Richard did the responsible thing and sold-off the GTO for a more practical ride that better fit his extremely modest economic means at the time. But as he watched the new owner drive off in his GTO, he

Prescription



Story and Photography by Jason Scott

felt as if a piece of him had gone with it.

A few years later, around 1981, after completing what he described as a “rigorous and exhausting medical internship,” Richard found himself feeling a bit worn down from all the long hours and stressful work. Plus, he still had that feeling that a part of him was missing. The GTO part. So, Richard began look-

ing for a cure for that inner ache he’d been feeling ever since his GTO motored away: Another GTO.

Fortunately for Richard, at the dawn of the ‘80s, old GTOs were largely considered just old gas guzzlers to most folks. And with gas prices on an ever-upward trend, downsized front-wheel drive models powered by economical, fuel-injected four-bangers were looking

like the future of transportation, which resulted in an abundance of decade-and-a-half-old muscle cars that could be picked up for a song.

Not long into his search, Richard stumbled across a triple-black ‘67 GTO that he said could only charitably be described as a “basket case.” The New England-native car—it had been manufactured in GM’s Framingham, Massachusetts



This is the fourth engine that's been in Richard's GTO, since he's owned it. This one's a Nitemare Performance crate motor that puts out 500 horsepower! A Tremec five-speed and 3.90:1 Safe-T-Track transmit the power to the pavement.

plant, just an hour or so away—had definitely seen better days. Its original 400-cube engine had been pulled from between the fenders at some point, and was replaced by an anemic 350, but the car ran and drove, which allowed Richard to enjoy the car in-between tinkering with repairs and upgrades as time and finances allowed. Over time, he scrounged up a mild 389 to replace the 350, installed a number of new interior panels and a headliner, and eventually bolted in a 3.90:1 Safe-T-Track rearend in place of the one-legged the car had limped along with at least as long as he'd owned the car. The upgrades made his old

Goat immensely more fun to drive ...but about this time, Richard's family life kicked into high gear, as did his medical practice, and before he realized it, the GTO hadn't moved from its spot in the garage in two decades!

But that all changed shortly after a relative gifted him an old come-along. As he pondered what good the tool would be to him, Richard realized that with it he could remove his GTO's body from its frame to undertake a body-off restoration that would bring the car back to life. And since the GTO didn't have a matching number on it, he decided he'd build the car just how he

would have ordered it, had he bought it new.

After tearing the car apart, Rich hauled the frame off to be media blasted and powder coated, then fitted it with all new suspension components and front disc brakes to replace its original, underwhelming drums. Instead of the 389, Richard found a 455 on eBay then had it rebuilt with forged pistons and other internal upgrades. And out went the Turbo 400 in favor of a Muncie M21 four-speed and all the requisite shifter and clutch accoutrements. As Richard neared completion of his GTO—which by now had received all manner of up-

grades, including a Tri-Power setup, a hood tach, open Ram Air scoops, Rally gauges, and numerous luxury items like tinted glass and a power antenna—he at last reached the milestone day of firing it up for the first time. Richard dutifully prepped the engine for its maiden starting – fresh oil and coolant, fresh fuel, re-checked all the fasteners, etc.—and then he spotted it: coolant steadily dripping from somewhere at the back of the engine. As he mopped up the coolant, Richard was beside himself, but undeterred. In no time, the engine was back out, and this time, Richard asked around to find a qualified shop to diagnose its troubles and fix them. Everyone that he asked came back with one name: Darrin Magro at Nitemare Performance, in nearby North Haven.

Richard contacted Magro and made an appointment to drop off the engine for a physical. Unfortunately, Magro's diagnosis was terminal: the 455 had been improperly—and irreparably—machined. The 455 block was junk. It was a costly lesson. But, again, Richard was undaunted: after consulting with Magro about his options, he commissioned the assembly of one of Nitemare's 500-horsepower 462-inch crate motors to replace the deceased 455.

While Magro was putting the engine together, Richard received some devastating personal news—he was diagnosed with a rare form of skin cancer and required immediate treatment. Faced with the potential that his time on Earth might well be considerably shorter than



Nitemare modified the stock Pontiac hood tach – which are notorious for being slow and inaccurate – to house a fuel pressure gauge, so Richard can keep tabs on the Holley electric pump's output.

he had envisioned, Richard's thoughts again turned toward getting his GTO completed...but this time, by a professional to avoid any

further delays. After a brief discussion between he and his wife, Richard called Magro and made arrangements to transport the rest





of the GTO to the Nitemare Performance shop to re-do the frame-off restoration properly.

Within days of the car's arrival, Magro had the car blown apart again. While the body panels were being massaged and repainted to perfection in the correct-for-'67 Tyrol Blue hue by Nitemare's body man, Mirek Poliwoda, Magro began reassembly of the chassis: the previously powder-coated frame was deemed fit-for-duty, but this time,

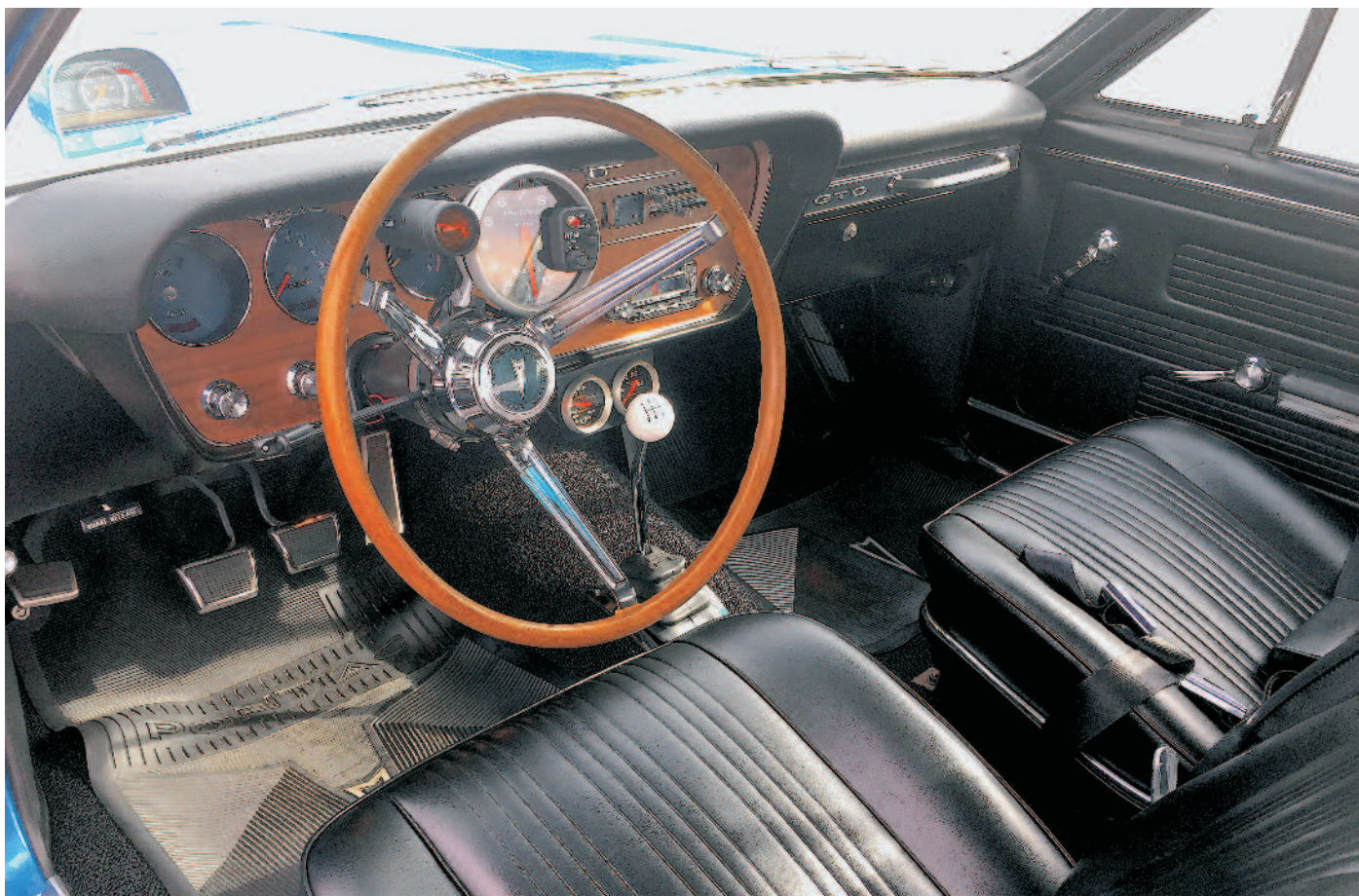
with 500 horses of Nitemare motivation bolted to it, Richard and Darrin decided the car would better live up to Richard's expectations if it had a few additional upgrades. In place of the close-ratio Muncie gearbox, Magro installed a Tremec TKO 600 five-speed that would pair with the 3.90:1 rear gears to provide both outstanding off-the-line acceleration as well as easy highway cruising, courtesy of the Tremec's overdrive top gear. To im-

prove handling, Magro bolted on Hotchkis front and sway bars to complement Nitemare's custom-spec'd front and rear coil springs and Koni shocks. Coated Doug's Headers and Nitemare's custom three-inch stainless exhaust both looked great and would ensure the engine could breathe easily, while ½-inch braided stainless fuel lines were run to feed the engine with fuel from a stock-type tank that Nitemare modified with a custom sump to improve fuel pick-up. A line-lock was plumbed into the front brakes to make for easy, controlled "warming" of the rear Hoosier Pro Street tires worn by the 15-inch American Racing Torque Thrust wheels. A slightly narrower pair of Torque Thrusts and Hoosiers were fitted to the front hubs.

After the floorpan was modified to clear the oversized Tremec tranny, Magro re-married the body to the chassis, installed new wiring harnesses to address what had been nagging electrical issues, then re-fitted the interior, relocated the battery to the trunk, and addressed a myriad of niggling details to get



Richard began restoring the GTO himself in the early 2000s after being given a come-along tool that he reasoned would work great for removing the body from the frame. Several years, various snags, and a cancer diagnosis later, he brought the car to Nitemare Performance for a thorough bumper-to-bumper rebuild that resulted in the magnificent Tyrol Blue beauty that Richard enjoys now, every chance he gets.



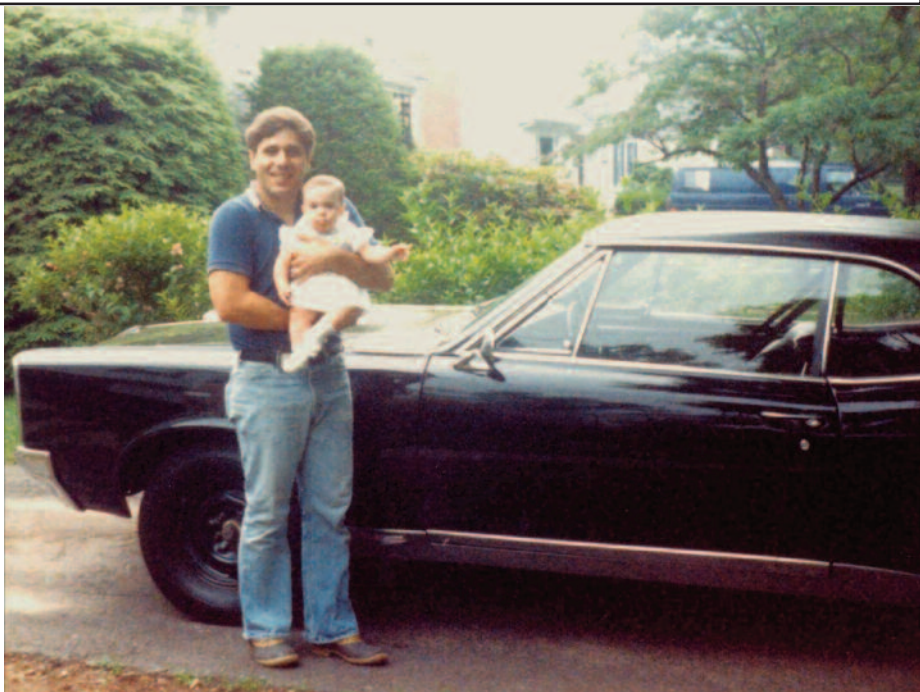
The interior of Richard's '67 is largely restored with a few modifications—namely a monster tach (with shift light) connected to the steering column. And while the Hurst shifter looks reasonably “correct,” the shift pattern in the white plastic ball indicates it’s connected to a five-speed—a Tremec TKO 600—to make the car more comfortable for cruising to shows.

the car to function flawlessly.

After 16 months in Nitemare’s operating room, Richard’s GTO debuted at the Eastern Regional Pontiac Celebration event back in the Fall of 2014, where it took runner-up in class.

In the years since the car’s “completion,” Richard beat his cancer, only to have it return. And while he’s undergone treatment again, the best medicine that he’s found to feel better—both physically and especially mentally—is climbing behind the wheel of his GTO, stomping on the accelerator, lighting up the tires, and going through the gears! It’s the perfect Pontiac prescription.

PP



Not long after Richard got the GTO, around 1981, his family life started to take precedence and the GTO got parked for what would become a two-decade hibernation.



Don Keefe's
**PONCHO
PERFECTION**

