

How It All Began

It's Monday, January 27, 1986 in the Pontiac Memphis Zone Office break room. I was getting a cup of coffee when our Zone Consumer Advisor, Ms. Bobbie Lundgren, asked me how I liked my new purchase – a 1967 Pontiac Tempest. I told her I really liked it, but was curious about the supposedly “factory” equipment on the car, musing that I wish that I had a copy of the factory invoice to verify the car's options. She casually replied, “No problem, I'll get that for you”. Really??

To my amazement, four days later, she walked into my office and handed me a note from Ken Morowski of Records Retention that had two copies of the Billing History Card for my car! Wow! I had never seen a document like this before, and had no idea how to decode it, so I called my friend at Central Office Car Distribution, Bill Cumberworth, and asked for his help. Again, no problem! In a few minutes, Bill had faxed me a copy of the 1967 Pontiac Tempest car order form so that I could decode it myself.

The car I bought – along with all options – matched the billing history exactly. I thought that was pretty cool. I knew this was an unusual car, but had no idea how few were actually built in 1967. That would have to wait for another 14 months until I was promoted and transferred to Central Office. The first person I sought out – after meeting my new boss – was Ken Morowski. He graciously showed me where the production records (microfilm) were kept, showed me how to work the microfilm reader, and gave me the combination to the door lock so that I could enter the room at any time!

Thus began a decades-long search for Pontiac production data. A few weeks later, another friend, Steve Newman of Shows and Exhibits, dropped by to say “Hi”, and during the course of the conversation, I told him about my Tempest and how I got the microfilm record for it. Steve wondered if I could get him similar information. I said “sure – I just need the VIN”. The next day, he called me with the VIN, I printed the invoice for his 1969 Grand Prix, and he immediately came by to get it.

Not long after, I received a phone call from Allan Gartzman of Chicago. He introduced himself as having been called by Steve, and wondered if he could get information on his 1962 Grand Prix that he had recently purchased. He thought that it might be a 421 Super Duty, but had never heard that an SD engine had ever been installed in a Grand Prix, and wanted to verify it. I obliged him, and sent him the Shipping Manifest for his car. Allan was elated that his car had the Super Duty engine! His next question was. “How many were built?” At the time, I had no idea, but told him I would search the records to see if I could find out.

Over the course of the next few weeks and months, I became a home-grown history detective, pouring over roll after roll of microfilm records, not only finding out how many 421 SD Grand Prix's were built, but also capturing the VINS of all 16! I shared this with Allan, who promptly contacted Pete McCarthy, a noted Pontiac drag racer and author about high performance Pontiacs. Pete then called me, gave me a short list of known 1962 and 1963 SD cars and asked if I could locate the manifests for these rare cars. As I searched the microfilm, I not only captured the manifests for the cars that Pete had wanted, but I accidentally found SD cars that were not on Pete's list and furnished that information to him also.

Pete and I talked frequently about the treasure trove of Pontiac documentation that I had access to, and I agreed that this information needed to be shared with the Pontiac hobby. While I was still gathering data on Overhead Cammers, I began a more thorough search for the early SD cars, and started with VIN #1 in 1962 and 1963 and looked at over 273,000 shipping manifests before I got them all documented. I entered the data into Database Manager (early Excel??) and provided my final list of all 1962 and 1963 Super Duty Pontiacs to Pete, Allan, John Sawruk, Dwight Crawford, George Knevelbard, Milt Schnornack, and Bill Blair on February 3, 1989. It took almost two years to complete! Of course, during this time, word had gotten out that I had access to these types of records, and I was frequently contacted by Pontiac owners for info on their Firebirds, GTOs, etc.

One such owner was none other than Jim Mattison, who was later to form Pontiac Historic Services. He called me with the VIN of a 1967 Firebird 400 and I retrieved the data. He wanted to meet me and obtain the billing history for his car. That same day, he showed up at my office, we chatted for quite some time, and then went to lunch (Jim bought!). Thus, a 35+ year friendship began which continues to this day.

During 1989, Customer Relations was getting an increasingly large number of requests for invoices from our owners, and it was more that they could easily manage. I was asked to help and I agreed to do whatever I could. There was an "in box" set up in Customer Relations for me so that I could pick up the requests, print the invoice / manifest / billing history and return it to Customer Relations to send to the owner. This system worked quite well, until December, 1989, when I was transferred to the Orlando Zone as Assistant Zone manager. There went my access to the microfilm! Worse yet, customers were clamoring for this data which led to a July, 1990 letter from Ed Lechtzin, Pontiac's PR Director, informing Pontiac enthusiasts that Pontiac was working on a solution to this dilemma.

Meanwhile, Jim Mattison knew that I had left Central Office and recognized an opportunity to assist enthusiasts. His proposal to form Pontiac Historic Services was accepted by Pontiac and a letter was sent to Pontiac enthusiasts on November 6, 1990. As they say, the rest is history! PHS has been performing this invaluable service for Pontiac owners for nearly 33 years – a service that no other American manufacturer has provided. While I had provided just the invoice and a copy of the car order form, PHS assembles a comprehensive package of information and a PR photo (when available) with every package they send out electronically.

I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to kick start this process, and even more pleased to have become life-long friends with so many great Pontiac owners. And it all started over a cup of coffee....

Fred H. Simmonds
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