

The XP-798 was an innovative four-seat sporty personal car. However, the features that made it unique, like its fiberglass body, flip-up roof panels, and extended doors with a one-off hinge system, also made it too expensive to build, and difficult for GM to justify as a Pontiac exclusive. Thus, it remained an idea car.

Visually, the wheelbase and everything except the front end and tail panel had to remain unaltered, aside from minor trim changes. To their credit, Chief Designer Jack Humbert, Assistant Chief Designer Ron Hill, and the staff did a masterful job.

Consumers were expected to pay more for a Pontiac, so they expected to get more for their money, which made aesthetic refinement a key element. Where the Camaro used a thin front bumper, the Firebird employed a loop bumper with center divider

that surrounded the signature split grilles and formed a subtle beak. The Camaro had a nearly flush grille, but the Firebird's were recessed. Camaro's flatter hood with a raised center ridge gave way to what would later become known as Pontiac's "ironing board," a raised center-section that narrowed to a point at the front while flowing into the center bumper divider. Engine displacement emblems were affixed to the hoods, and small scoops adorned the Firebird 400 hood. The parking lamp/turn

signals were set into the outer edges of the revised opening in the lower valance panel.

If you note a resemblance between the front-end styling of the 1967 Firebird and the 1968 Tempest, Le Mans, and GTO, here's why. Humbert recalled, in the book *Firebird! America's Premier Performance Car*, "It was so late, in fact, that the '68 A-cars were nearly finished. That's why there's a little similarity ... the hood scoops, the front-end theme really came off the A-car."

Simulated louvers were added to the rear quarter panels just ahead of the wheel wells, and the taillamps and rear panel were revised for a slotted appearance that was akin to the 1967 GTO and Grand Prix. The bumper was larger than the Camaro's, and it kicked up to frame the top of the license plate area. Camaros' round fuel-filler cap gave way to a squared fuel filler door and an emblem centered in the Firebird's tail panel. Firebird 400s wore another engine emblem on the right side of the decklid. All told, these revisions added more visual weight to the front and rear, which kept it in stride with upscale models of the day.

As stated in "Camaro History of Automotive Design" (HCC #155), the body shapes were more rounded than the angular restyled Mustang, so, of course, the Firebird inherited them and the "Coke bottle" sides and semi-fastback roofline. The updates, however, made the 188.8-inch Pontiac 4.1 inches longer than the Camaro.

The unique bolt-on front subframe with unitized body design was carried over for the Firebird, as were the SLA front suspension with coil springs and anti-roll bar, the steering box and linkage mounted aft of



Multiple frontal updates were explored that ranged from quite mild to extensive. Fortunately, the extensive one was used.



This OHC-6-equipped Firebird convertible is also a pre-production car. Notice the "Firebird" callout and emblem appear to be decals. The extended horizontal bright grille trim and the arrowhead emblem shown here were only used on the production Firebird 400s.

the front wheel centerline, and the mono-leaf rear suspension. Despite the sameness of the layout, Pontiac used its own spring rates and shock valving to further tailor the ride and handling. Power steering was optional, as were Koni adjustable shocks.

Ride rates at the wheel front/rear were 73/100 ppi for the standard Firebird; 85/115 ppi for the Sprint, 326, and H.O.; and 92/135 ppi for the 400. These rates were softer than the Camaro's—124/121 ppi with the six, 112/121 ppi with the 327, 112/131 ppi for the 350, and 136/131 ppi with the 396. When the optional ride and handling package was specified on the other Firebird models, the 400 spring rates were used.

Rear radius rods were added to reduce spring windup under heavy acceleration and braking. One was mounted on each side of the axle on all V-8 Firebirds and Sprint-6s with a manual transmission. The left one wasn't used with the automatic transmissions or the OHC-6 one-barrel with the manual, and no rod was used with OHC-6 engines with a rear gear ratio of 3.08:1 or numerically lower.

Though the 59-inch front track remained, the rear track grew to 60 inches from 58.9 inches, larger E70x14 Wide Oval tires were standard in place of the Camaro's 7.35-14 tires, and 14 x 6-inch wheels were used instead of 14 x 5s. Hubcaps were standard, and various wheel covers and styled steel 14 x 6 Rally I and Rally II wheels were optional, as were radial tires.

The standard 9.5-inch drum-brake system and the optional four-piston caliper front disc brakes with 11.12-inch rotors were also shared with the Camaro. Power assist was optional.

The interior remained very similar to the Camaro, with standard carpeting and a padded instrument panel featuring two large bezels with the speedometer in

the left one and warning lamps and fuel gauge in the right. Heater controls, optional radio, and the ashtray were grouped in the familiar central panel, and the glovebox remained to its right.

Unlike the Camaro, a woodgrain applique was added to the center panel, and optional Rally gauges replaced the warning lamps in the right bezel with instruments for oil pressure and temperature, and an ammeter, but it still included a fuel gauge. An optional tach could be mounted on the hood.

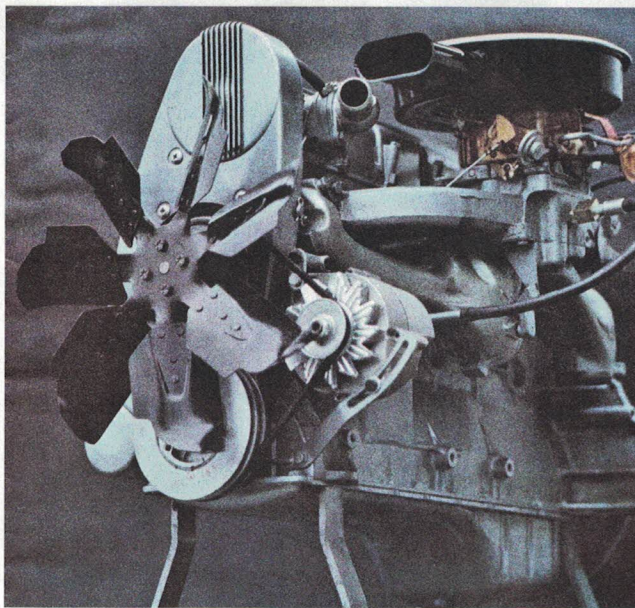
Bucket seats upholstered in expanded Morrokide vinyl were standard, but a bench seat in certain colors could be ordered for the sport coupe. Side panels in both the standard and custom interior, and the consoles were shared between the Firebird and Camaro, but the steering wheel design and seat upholstery patterns differed.

Pontiac's upscale trim was comparable with Camaro's Special Interior Group,

but its identification is somewhat more convoluted. Though Pontiac referred to code W54 Custom Trim as the "Custom Firebird Option" or "custom interior-exterior trim package," some internal departments used "Standard" and "Deluxe" to describe the base Firebird versus those with W54, and devised a numbering system to identify the different body styles and engines that featured each one. "Deluxe" and "Custom" both refer to the presence of the W54 option.

The Custom Firebird Option included bright windshield pillar and roof rail moldings and formed foam-filled vinyl-covered door panels with molded-in armrests, recessed door handles, and carpeted lower areas that were the same as the Camaro's.

Pontiac added a passenger-assist grip, its own Deluxe steering wheel, a vinyl headliner in place of cloth, Deluxe wheel covers, wheel opening moldings, and dual horns. The Camaro had upgraded the seat



Pontiac's overhead-cam-equipped 230-cu.in. six-cylinder engine offered a bit of European flair and featured a more efficient timing belt in place of a chain. This 215-hp four-barrel Sprint version, as shown in a 1967 performance brochure, has a more aggressive cam and special exhaust manifolds, as compared to the standard 165-hp one-barrel engine.