



From the rear, the Firebird differed from the Camaro in the taillamp, bumper and fuel door designs, the model and automaker ID, and the louvers on the rear quarter panels. The H.O. received the side stripe, and the Rally II wheels were optional.

upholstery for its Special Interior Group as compared to its base interior and included additional smaller items, but the Firebird didn't.

These were still the days of divisional autonomy regarding engines, so to further differentiate it from the Camaro, the Firebird was marketed as having five individual identities based on its engines. Pontiac's "Magnificent Five" consisted of the 230-cu.in. OHC-6 "Firebird," OHC-6 "Firebird Sprint," "Firebird 326," "Firebird H.O." (with a 326), and the "Firebird 400" with a choice of a 400 or 400 Ram Air V-8.

Compared to the Camaro engines, the base Pontiac 230-cu.in. OHC-6 one-barrel's 165-hp rating bested the Chevrolet

pushrod 230's 140 hp and optional 250's 155 hp. The four-barrel 230 OHC-6 Sprint engine, at 215 hp, had no direct Bowtie competition, just as the 290-hp 302 Z/28 engine and 295-hp 350 SS engine had none from Pontiac.

Chevrolet's 327 two-barrel spotted 40 hp to Pontiac's 250-hp 326 two-barrel, but the 285-hp 326 H.O. was aptly aligned with the 275-hp 327—both four-barrel engines. Rated at 325 hp were Pontiac's 400 and Chev's 396, but the same 325-hp rating for the Ram Air 400 paled in comparison to the 375-hp 396. Part of the reason is the fact that all Firebird 400 engines had a limiter on the Quadrajet carburetor linkage to inhibit realizing full throttle at the sec-

ondaries, which reduced engine output to keep the ratings within corporate mandated power-to-weight ratios.

The Ram Air 400 featured a functional air induction system, higher performance cam and heavy-duty valve springs, free-flowing exhaust manifolds, and revised carburetor and ignition tuning, among other small items. A close-ratio four-speed manual transmission or Turbo Hydra-Matic 400 automatic and 3.90 rear gears with Safe-T-Track were mandatory. Just 65 Ram Air Firebird 400s were built for 1967. All 400s had chrome rocker covers (and air cleaner on non-Ram Air) and heavy-duty suspension.

A 10-inch clutch backed the OHC-6 and a 10.4-inch clutch was used behind the V-8s. Transmissions were mostly shared between the Camaro and Firebird, with column-shift three-speed manual standard in the base, 326, and H.O. Firebirds, and a floor-shifted heavy-duty three-speed standard in the Sprint and 400s. A four-speed manual (wide or close-ratio) was optional. The two-speed Super Turbine 300 automatic was optional on all but the Firebird 400, which instead had the extra-cost three-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic 400. Transmission and rear-gear restrictions varied with engine choice.

The BOP 8.2-inch 10-bolt rear end was employed, and gear ratios ranged from 2.56:1 to 4.33:1. Safe-T-Track was optional but mandatory with 3.90-4.33 gears.

Pontiac was already known for offering an extensive list of options to further personalize each of its models. A few highlights that haven't already been mentioned include, a fold-down rear seat that added usable storage area (as did the standard



This original, low-mileage 326 H.O. engine features a Carter AFB carburetor, standard log manifolds, and dual exhaust with a crossflow muffler.

Space Saver spare tire), a Custom Sports simulated-wood steering wheel, a walnut shift knob, exhaust splitters, A/C, myriad radios, and an 8-track tape deck.

Though "Banshee" was strongly considered for Pontiac's F-body, and other monikers were in contention, it was ultimately named after the GM experimental gas turbine cars developed years before. The Firebird was introduced in February of 1967—five months after the Camaro and Cougar. It cost \$2,666 for the base six coupe and \$2,761 for the base V-8 coupe, which was more than the Camaro (\$2,466 and \$2,572), yet less than the Cougar coupe at \$2,851 with its base V-8.

Since the Cougar was the intended sales target for the Firebird, it's important to note how its base model and upscale XR-7 compared to it. Featuring more formal body contours than the Mustang and Firebird, the Cougar was longer than both at 190.3 inches, but was 1.4 inches narrower than the F-body at 71.2 inches. Coincidentally, it also had split grilles, and a raised-center hood treatment. Unique exterior features included concealed headlamps and sequential blinkers in the taillamps, like the Thunderbird.

The Cougar incorporated more traditional unitized construction as opposed to the F-body's hybrid subframe/unitized layout. It rode on a 3-inch-longer 111-inch wheelbase, with a narrower 58.1-inch front and rear track and used an articulated/strut coil spring front suspension and a leaf-sprung rear.

Standard inside was a walnut-grained steering wheel, floor-shift, full carpeting, and all-vinyl bucket seats with Comfort-weave (breathable vinyl) upholstery optional. A bench seat was also extra-cost. The XR-7 added leather and vinyl upholstery, simulated walnut on the instrument panel, and competition gauges.

The 200-hp 289 two-barrel was the base engine and the 225-hp 289 four-barrel was optional. A three-speed manual transmission was standard, and a four-speed manual and three-speed automatic were extra-cost. Various rear-gear ratios were offered, as was the Power Transfer Axle (limited-slip).

On par with the Firebird 400's equipment, the extra-cost GT Performance Group for the Cougar delivered the 320-hp four-barrel 390 engine with dual exhaust, heavy-duty suspension, 14 x 6 wheels, Wide Oval tires, power front disc brakes, and GT badges.

Many road testers' first ride in a Firebird was in the more expensive convertible, as Pontiac was likely exploiting the fact that the Cougar wasn't available in that body style. From a performance standpoint, however, the convertible was much heavier than the coupe and wasn't as structurally rigid.



Though much of the interior was essentially unchanged from the Camaro, the seat upholstery pattern, steering wheel, woodgrain center panel, and passenger-assist grip were Pontiac specific. The extra-cost Custom trim is shown, as is an optional clock. (The T-handle shifter isn't stock.)

Motor Trend tested multiple versions of the Firebird and Cougar with various drivetrains. The Firebird was lauded for having the most power, with the 400s over the 390 and the 326 H.O. over the 289s, and the Cougar was said to have the better combination of ride and handling, yet the Firebird had the best handling near the limit. Body flexing in the Firebird convertibles tested was duly noted, as was the limited flexibility of the optional two-speed automatic with the 326, when compared to the three-speed auto that was available with the Cougar's 289. There were no major differences noted in braking, but the Cougar excelled in front-seat comfort. The Mercury was ultimately named *Motor Trend's* Car of the Year.

When comparing the sales figures of the 1967 Firebird with the other pony cars, it must be remembered that it arrived much later and it was purposely more generously equipped and priced higher than the Camaro and Mustang, so its volume would be generally lower. Nevertheless, the Firebird's breadth of offerings ensured that it competed with more pony cars than just the Cougar. Pontiac built 82,560 1967 Firebirds, and Chevrolet manufactured more than 220,900 Camaros. More than 472,100 Mustangs were produced, and Mercury sold 150,893 Cougars. Plymouth made 62,534 Barracudas.

The Firebird, and later the Trans Am, advanced Pontiac's performance image and enjoyed sales increases during its second generation, which culminated in a record in 1979. Production spanned four



Pontiac's innovative optional tachometer was on the hood, whereas the Camaro's optional tach was placed in the right-hand gauge bezel.

generations and included various special editions and pace cars, and ended with the 2002 models.

Cougars moved more toward the luxury market through the 1970s, and were produced until 1997. The nameplate returned briefly on a small sporty model from 1999 through 2002.

Coincidentally, the fates of the Firebird and Cougar aligned, with both nameplates retiring after 2002, and both the Mercury division of Ford and the Pontiac division of General Motors being phased out in 2010.

Like other pony cars of the era, Firebirds achieved legendary status and are highly collectable today. Though production ended many years ago, they still live in the hearts, minds, and garages of an adoring legion of fans worldwide. 🐉