

Nearly every auto maker tuned in on performance cars has introduced their own version of an "economy" supercar in the past year. Some have bold identification; others merely carry a low price sticker. While the economy bit has been good for enthusiast and manufacturer alike, there's more to it than low price, from the factory's standpoint. This is the only method open for most to grab a larger share of the supercar market. Prior to this, they'd found little success in bucking head-on with the super leader, Pontiac's GTO. The GTO has led the field in sales and prestige since its introduction in '64. And if that's not enough to discourage even the best Product Planner among Pontiac's competition, here they are in '69 with

skin is might quickly be learned.

At first sight, we considered the spoiler a bit ostentatious. We changed our opinion soon afterward though. Like anything unusual, it takes getting used to. Drag racers will quickly realize a benefit from the fiberglass spoiler, as its rear placement on the car adds weight to the tail end, desirable for weight transfer on acceleration. If the car catches on as well as we think it will, Pontiac dealers had better stock their parts rooms with these spoilers. They'll fit all '68 and '69 GTO's and Tempests, and could well turn out to be the next best thing to an additive decal for street machine status.

Performance was a bit less on this GTO-derived car than we've experi-

vious tests here was that this car was kept absolutely "showroom." It's a matter of habit for quickening a car's times to increase front tire pressure, experiment with rear air settings, remove the air-cleaner element, advance timing slightly, remove accessory drive belts and loosen the alternator belt. None of these were attempted during our test. Not that we didn't have time, but this test was more to see how well a really street-comfort machine would work than to find the car's absolute capabilities. We're very familiar with a 400 cubic inch Pontiac's potential. This was the first time we'd restricted ourselves to direct off-the-street-and-onto-the-strip performance. The experience was entirely our pleasure. Without reserva-



their own idea of an economy supercar. It's a new game, fellas, with a fresh player on the field.

We first met the Judge at Ugly Dragway, a pleasant spot about 100 miles north of Detroit in the Saginaw Bay area. Besides its charm, Ugly is remote from inquisitive eyes, and since we tested the Judge prior to introduction, this helped. As were the first few thousand off the line, this one was finished in an eye-catching Dayglo red. From the front, we could tell very little difference between the Judge and a standard GTO except for the fact that the headlights were exposed, and as this is often a part of a GTO, the difference was scant. But from the backside, there's no mistaking it. A full-width rear deck spoiler is a standard item, and it's as different from current air-spoiler designs as this car—or the regular GTO—is from its marketplace rivals. The 60-inch-wide panel is horizontally placed and is supported by a pair of stands on the deck lid. The spoiler's leading edge is a distance of three-and-a-half inches off the trunk surface. Its full-width design had better be noticed by anyone resting his hand on the fender edge while the deck is lowered, or a lesson in how compressible human

HERE COME DE JUDGE

Not to be outdone, Pontiac joins the "economy" supercar battle with a machine right out of GTO territory

by Steve Kelly



enced on previous GTO tests. But we were far from disappointed with the results. Any time a supercar in ultra-stock form even breaks into the 14-second region, we're happy. And this car did more than break into it; it never was out. Our best quarter-mile clocking was a 14.41-second e.t., and top speed wound up at 99.55 mph. With two good-sized riders (driver and passenger) aboard, we pulled a 14.83 e.t. and 97.50 mph top end. It would probably take a full complement of passengers to slow the Judge down to where most supermachines run normally.

The reason we didn't equal many pre-

tion, we'd project mid-to-high-12-second clockings on a properly prepared Judge.

Worth noting in regard to our test is the fact that this particular car had power steering, front disc brakes with power assist, electric windows and a couple of other weight-adding, performance-robbing extras.

It might seem—from the foregoing text—that the Judge is a stranger to the GTO. That's hardly the situation. The Judge carries GTO nameplates and is, in essence, a little brother to the widely fabled "Tiger" from Wide-Track Boulevard. It fits into the "economy"

classification. A bench seat instead of buckets is standard, trim rings aren't included on the standard Rally wheels, and special instrumentation — a strong point on regular GTO's — isn't standard with the Judge. But on the other hand, there are a couple of exclusives on the "lightweight" which set it off from "big brother," as well as its competition. There's the rear deck spoiler for one; then the far-from-overdone side paint trim; but best of all is the standard 360-hp, 400 cubic inch Ram-Air engine. This is the first engine option for GTO's. During our test, we buzzed the engine to 6000 rpm for shifts, although we once got beyond that point without hurting anything but our elapsed time. There's no reason to go beyond six

the regular three-speed unit. Not that the three-speed is bad; it's just that there's a lot more enjoyment, flexibility and performance to be had from either of the optional transmissions.

Another cute feature on the Ram-Air engine, not exclusive to the Judge, is a dash-controlled, cable-operated flapper valve to shut off the twin hood scoop openings in poor weather. Kinda neat in snow country.

So here it is, Pontiac's method of putting the competition in deep thought. The GTO just wasn't enough; they had to "one-up" the troops in the economy bracket. As in all cars, there are a few design points that could be squared away for the benefit of all concerned. But not many. And what few there are



Sure it goes, but supercars should stop good, too. This one does. We registered successive straight-line stops from 80 and 60 mph without brake fade and virtually no lock-up on disc-braked Judge. We asked Pontiac reps a lot of questions before concluding the hardtop coupe is a big sales threat to its competitors. Bet it gives older brother GTO a good run as well. Rear spoiler is Judge's most distinctive item, but there are others. Like Ram-Air, Rally wheels, bright colors, and groovy trim. Proposed price and performance brand this one a winner for '69.

grand, since maximum horsepower on the Ram-Air engine is developed just past 5000 rpm. This engine being included with the base car is worth a couple hundred bucks by itself.

Other standard pieces on the Judge are a three-speed all-synchro floor-shifted transmission, complete with Hurst shifter and "T" handle, carpeted flooring, vinyl upholstery and wood-trimmed dash, à la GTO.

The car we tested carried a four-speed, with Hurst equipment of course. We recommend either this gearbox or the three-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic over

can be cured with a little time and a portion of corporate money. Then too, customer reaction plays a big part in planning for the future. We've no idea how long "economy" (a somewhat misleading term if it conjures up thoughts of compact car pricing) performance cars will be in. No matter how long they may stay high in buyer appeal, we've a notion that it won't take much time for the Judge to reach top rating. And if they do fade from popularity, this one'll be there till the very last. So start lining 'em up, cause . . . "Here come de Judge." ■ ■

VEHICLE

Pontiac GTO/The Judge

PRICE

As testedN.A.

ENGINE

TypeOHV V8
Cylinders8
Bore & stroke4.12 x 3.75
Displacement400
Compression ratio10.75:1
Horsepower366 @ 5100 rpm
Torque445 lbs.-ft. @ 3600 rpm
Valves: Intake2.11 in. dia.
Exhaust1.77 in. dia.
Camshaft:
Lift414 in. intake, 413 exhaust
Duration288° intake, 302° exhaust
LiftersHydraulic
Carburetion1 4-bbl Quadrajel
Exhaust systemDual w/low restriction muffler

TRANSMISSION

TypeClose ratio 4-speed w/Hurst shifter
Ratios: 1st2.20:1
2nd1.64:1
3rd1.28:1
4th1.00:1

DIFFERENTIAL

TypeLimited slip
Ring gear diameter8.125 in.
Ratio3.90:1

BRAKES

TypeFront disc/rear drum
Dimensions: Front disc11.1 in.
Rear drum9.5 in.
Swept area: Front323.6 sq. in.
Rear269.2 sq. in.

SUSPENSION

FrontHeavy-duty coil
RearHeavy-duty coil
Stabilizer1.00 in. diam.
TiresG78-14
Rims6" wide
Steering:
TypeSaginaw Power
Gear ratio17.5:1
Turning circle40.9 ft.
Turn of steering wheel lock to lock 4.2

PERFORMANCE

Standing start quarter-mile (best)14.41 sec., 99.55 mph
Stopping distances:
From 80 mph261 ft.
From 60 mph159 ft.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase112 in.
Front track60 in.
Rear track60 in.
Overall height52.3 in.
Overall width75.8 in.
Overall length201.5 in.
Shipping weight3513 lb.
Test weight (pre-production car)N.A.
Crankcase capacity5 qt.
Cooling system17.8 qt.
Fuel tank21.5 gal.