



## PONTIAC TEMPEST SPRINT

Can the wild-eyed Tiger-mongers find fun and profit with a simple 6-cylinder? Keep reading, Old Friend...

**A**LL right, you guys, is it a six-cylinder GTO, a bargain-basement 220-SE Mercedes coupe, or some kind of economy car? Pontiac's answer to such a question would probably be that the new Tempest Sprint option is all of these, and none of them. Paradox! Enigma! *Everybody* knows that six-cylinder engines in American cars mean economy—low purchase price and low operating costs—that sixes are sold primarily to those poor, underprivileged souls who can't afford to buy a V-8. Sixes are for taxicab fleets and traveling salesmen. Sixes are *not* for the performance-oriented youth market. Ask anybody in Detroit who knows anything about selling cars, and he'll reel off these axioms like a small boy reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

In Europe, it's different. The V-8 engine is an expensive rarity. The six-cylinder engine is the smooth, swift powerplant for upper-class transportation. Countless Opels, Jaguars, Aston Martins, Rolls-Royces, Bentleys and Mercedes-Benz carry the faithful in-line six, and

carry it with pride and prestige. But over here, it's safe to say that Henry Ford really screwed it up for everybody when he convinced the car-consuming public—and the rest of the automotive industry—that the V-8 was the only way to go.

When that bit of domestic automotive dogma became firmly established, the six-cylinder engine was arbitrarily relegated to second-class citizenship, and only this year has someone finally come along to challenge old Henry's premise. Chevrolet made some points for sixes when, to the amazement of everybody—particularly the Chevrolet sales department—the air-cooled, six-cylinder Corvair became more acceptable to hot rodders and sports car people than it ever was or would be with the traditional economy-car buyer. But the Corvair was a different breed altogether. Its success was regarded somewhat suspiciously as an irrational phenomenon. There were too many imponderables connected with the Corvair. Besides being a unique powerplant, it was rear-mounted. The car had swing-axles, then independent rear suspension. And finally, it was so *little!* Obviously, there were no lessons to be learned from the Corvair, because it violated the old Henry Ford dogma—it only reflected a temporary lapse in the judgment of the consumer, and the industry was willing to forgive us, provided we'd trade up to a real honest-to-goodness car with a V-8 engine when we made our next purchase.

If this demonstration of industry-apathy wasn't enough to discourage anybody from ever trying to produce a six for the performance market again, the booming success of the Mustang in all its V-8 variations should have convinced them for once and for all.

But no. Pontiac never got the message. A couple of years ago, they developed an overhead cam version of the 230 cu. in. six that was going into the Chevy II, and amazed themselves with the power that they were able to get for remarkably low cost. "Terrific! Get The Corporation on the phone! We'll stuff our lovely new overhead cam six into the Tempest and it'll be the fastest six in a domestic car and it'll sell like mad!" Forget it. Gloom descended when The Corporation said no. They told Pontiac to use the same engine that Chevrolet was using because who wants a high performance six anyway?



But sometimes the good guys win after all. Came the announcement of the 1966 Tempest line and there was the long-suppressed overhead cam six. And we're glad. The six-cylinder Tempest Sprint is a very European concept, for an American car. It offers a kind of "balanced" performance that'll make it quite unique among its Detroit contemporaries. The brakes and suspension are very evenly matched with the acceleration and top speed performance provided by the 207 bhp engine.

European cars have traditionally offered this kind of performance, that is, handling and brakes that are at least equal, and probably superior to the engine's potential. It has resulted in some cars—like the Mercedes, the Citroëns, the Rovers, and the Lancias—that are really outstanding point-to-point performers, even though they don't have the flashing acceleration or ultimate top speed of an American sedan with an optional V-8 engine. All the forces and factors are in balance, and the resulting cars are capable of high average speeds over long distances, without penalizing the driver through fatigue-producing harshness and noise, or high operating costs. This seems to be the greatest charm of the Sprint-equipped Tempest.

The Sprint is very much like the GTO that has caused so much controversy in these pages for the past year-and-a-half. In fact, it really is kind of a six-cylinder GTO—the only noticeable differences being exterior trim, acceleration, and exhaust note. It has the same tightness, and the same thumping, gutsy ride that set the GTO apart from the other cars of that type. Unlike the GTO, however, it has the smooth response and freedom from vibration that we normally associate only with very good English sixes. And, for the seasoned enthusiast, the exhaust has a lovely Jaguar-ish drone that will instantly

separate the Sprint from every one of its American contemporaries.

The Sprint concept differs from the GTO in that the package can be ordered on any Tempest from the most austere bread-and-butter car to the jazziest Le Mans, while the GTO is a separate model altogether. The basic components of the Sprint package consist of the 207 bhp version of the sohc six, stiffer shocks and springs, a three-speed all-synchro transmission with Hurst linkage, a slightly faster manual steering ratio of twenty-to-one, 7.75 x 14 tires, and special exterior trim.

We had two test cars; one, which we drove for about 2500 miles, was a '65 Le Mans hardtop coupe with all of the '66 underpinnings, and the second was a real '66 model, also a Le Mans. Both cars were loaded with luxury options, in addition to the Sprint equipment, and both had the optional four-speed, all-synchro "Muncie" transmission with Hurst linkage. The only significant difference between our two test cars—aside from the obvious body changes from the '65 to the '66—was that our long-term test car had the standard 3.23 rear axle ratio, while the second one (which we used for acceleration tests) was fitted with a 3.90. Otherwise, they were near-identical—electric windows, AM-FM radio, power brakes, four-way power seat adjustment, tinted glass...the works. We also had—for a while—a prototype set of radial-ply tires that'll soon be available as a regular option. Hooray!

For what it's worth, we much preferred the appearance of the '65 model. For 1966, the stylists have attempted to marry the crispness of last year's Tempest lines to the extravagant "coke-bottle" shape of the big Pontiacs, and it didn't take. The Tempests are beginning to look a little fat and self-conscious, and they're in some

danger of losing their hard-earned, once-distinctive identity. Fortunately, the Le Mans version is much like the GTO—that is to say cleaner and more elegant than the cheaper Tempests—so that our Sprint-equipped test car was still quite handsome. We're not real sure about the painted, Ford GT-type stripe that runs along the side to proclaim the name, but stripes continue to be very big out there in enthusiast-land and the customers will probably like it just fine.

The Tempest's seats have been re-designed for 1966, and they're greatly improved. The bucket seats in our test car were lighter and less bulky, and they seemed to fit much better than before. The passenger's seat can now be ordered with a recliner, for which we are duly thankful, and both seats can be fitted with optional headrests. The range of adjustment is very good, and the driving position is as good as any American sedan we know. The rear seat is not the sort of place where you'd want to spend a week, but it's fine for children, and they seem to be the ones who do most of the riding back there.

As much as we love the GTO, and all the noise we've made about it notwithstanding, we really feel that the Sprint-equipped Le Mans will be a more useful car for most people than its more exciting older brother. The more restrained performance of the Sprint set-up can be called up any time the driver sees fit, while the GTO driver will only be able to use the awesome potential of his machine about once a month.

Another important benefit that accrues to the Sprint driver is fuel economy. On a 688-mile run from Detroit to New York City, we averaged slightly more than sixty miles per hour on the turnpikes and our fuel consumption was 23 miles per gallon—which ain't bad by any standard of measurement. And don't get us wrong with all this

talk about sensible performance and good fuel economy, the Tempest Sprint is really a very brisk performer. It'll do an honest ten-second zero to sixty and it'll run forever at well over a hundred mph.

The sohc six-cylinder engine, with substantially less weight than Pontiac's V-8 engines, also contributes to markedly improved handling. The car is better balanced and it can be driven around corners at moderately high speeds with a good deal more accuracy and less excitement than most cars of the GTO/4-4-2 genre. A funny thing that crops up here, though, is a change in steering behavior between the six-cylinder Sprint and the GTO with its massive V-8. The twenty-to-one manual steering ratio is quite fast enough for most occasions in the GTO, but it simply doesn't get the job done in the Sprint. We were constantly surprising ourselves around the city when we'd suddenly find that we just couldn't seem to bend on enough steering lock to negotiate a given corner at a given speed. Our experience with this manual steering unit leads us to strongly recommend that anybody who buys a Sprint-type Tempest should definitely specify the optional power steering with its faster seventeen-to-one ratio. Evidently, we never realized how much we relied on the throttle to swish the GTO around corners, because we were utterly amazed at the slow steering in the Sprint, where no such help from the throttle is forthcoming.

The Sprint suspension is just like the GTO, to all intents and purposes, and it works very well, with only a tendency to bottom the rear suspension under full-load conditions marring an otherwise good performance. It's stable and responsible and seems to be happiest when it's being driven fast and hard. The only major flaw in its overall performance is one that has turned out to be common, in varying degrees, to all of the cars in the Tempest line-up—it's called axle hop, and it happens whenever you really tramp down on the old brake pedal. It can be controlled, a little, by lifting your foot when you begin to sense that the rear suspension is shaking the car violently, but the minute you come down hard on the brakes again...it happens again. It won't occur in any "normal" driving situations, but a real Omigawd—we're-gonna-run-into-that-idiot kind of a stop will bring it on every time. It's disconcerting, that's what. All we can suggest is that you try to avoid panic stops.

Somebody at Pontiac likened the Sprint concept to a low-priced Mercedes 220-SE, and he wasn't too far wrong. It's faster than most European cars, as well as most standard American V-8s, and it's smooth and economical to a fare-thee-well. The engine will wind to 6500 without a trace of effort, and it makes a sound that'll bring tears to the eyes of anyone who ever wanted to own an SS-100 Jag.

Pontiac feels that there's a good market for a six-cylinder performance car, provided the price is right. Well, this Pontiac's price is right. One of the low-line Tempests, with the full Sprint package, could be driven home by Joe Keen-type for substantially less than \$2500—after the usual round of haggling. Although we're really turned on by the explosive nature of the GTO, we must honestly admit that a fully-equipped Le Mans with the Sprint stuff on it would be a more sensible and useful car—ego problems and fighter-pilot fantasies be damned.

This is a car that should change a lot of "expert" minds about six-cylinder engines. It might even start another generation of imitators—try to imagine half-a-dozen different makes that went fast enough, handled well enough, didn't cost very much to buy, and got twenty miles to the gallon. One is tempted to snort and say, "It couldn't happen here!" But then, who'd have expected Pontiac to get worked up about a six anyway?

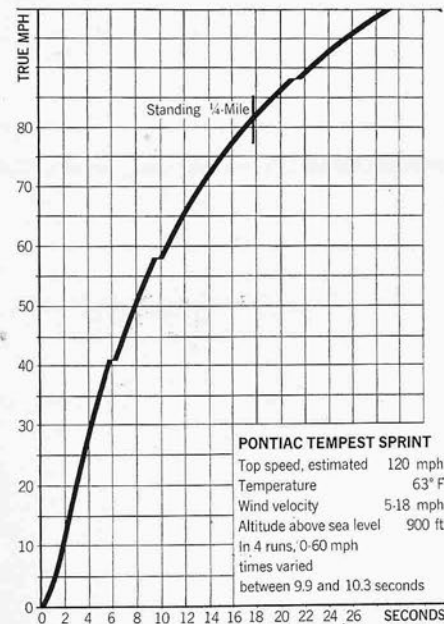
## PONTIAC TEMPEST SPRINT

Manufacturer: Pontiac Motor Division  
General Motors Corp.  
Pontiac, Mich.

Price as tested: \$ N.A.

### ACCELERATION

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	4.2
40 mph	5.7
50 mph	7.8
60 mph	10.3
70 mph	13.3
80 mph	17.0
90 mph	22.5
100 mph	29.3
Standing 1/4-mile	82 mph in 17.8



### ENGINE

Water-cooled 6-in-line, cast iron block, 7 main bearings  
 Bore x stroke 3.875 x 3.25 in, 98.4 x 82.6 mm  
 Displacement 230 cu. in, 3769 cc  
 Compression ratio 10.5-to-one  
 Carburetion Single downdraft 4-barrel  
 Valve gear Belt-driven ohc, hydraulic lifters  
 Power (SAE) 207 bhp @ 5200 rpm  
 Torque 228 lbs-ft @ 3800 rpm  
 Specific power output 81 bhp per cu. in, 55 bhp per liter  
 Usable range of engine speeds 1500-6500 rpm  
 Electrical system 12-volt, 54 amp-hr battery, 450W generator  
 Fuel recommended Premium  
 Mileage 16-24 mpg  
 Range on 21.5-gallon tank 344-476 miles

### DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch 10.4-inch single dry plate  
 Transmission 4-speed, all-synchromesh  

Gear	Ratio	Overall	rpm	mph
Rev	3.11	12.12	-6.37	-41
1st	3.11	12.12	6.37	41
2nd	2.20	8.58	8.98	58
3rd	1.47	5.73	13.48	88
4th	1.00	3.90	19.80	120

 Final drive ratio 3.90 to one

### CHASSIS

Wheelbase 115.0 in  
 Track F 58.0, R 59.0 in  
 Length 206.4 in  
 Width 74.4 in  
 Height 54.0 in  
 Ground Clearance 6.0 in  
 Curb Weight 3235 lbs  
 Test Weight 3700 lbs  
 Weight distribution front/rear 55/45%  
 Pounds per bhp (test weight) 17.9  
 Suspension F: Unequal-length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar  
 R: Solid axle, upper & lower control arms, coil springs  
 Brakes 9.5 in drums F&R, 269.2 sq in swept area  
 Steering recirculating ball  
 Turns, lock to lock 5.0  
 Turning circle 41 ft.  
 Tires and wheels 7.75 x 14.5 in rim

### CHECK LIST

#### ENGINE

Starting Good  
 Response Good  
 Noise Good  
 Vibration Excellent

#### DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch action Good  
 Transmission linkage Excellent  
 Synchromesh action Good  
 Power-to-ground transmission Good

#### BRAKES

Response Fair  
 Pedal pressure Good  
 Fade resistance Fair  
 Smoothness Good  
 Directional stability Poor

#### STEERING

Response Poor  
 Accuracy Good  
 Feedback Fair  
 Road feel Fair

#### SUSPENSION

Harshness control Fair  
 Roll stiffness Good  
 Tracking Good  
 Pitch control Good  
 Shock damping Good

#### CONTROLS

Location Good  
 Relationship Good  
 Small controls Good

#### INTERIOR

Visibility Excellent  
 Instrumentation Good  
 Lighting Good  
 Entry/exit Good  
 Front seating comfort Good  
 Front seating room Good  
 Rear seating comfort Poor  
 Rear seating room Poor  
 Storage space Good  
 Wind noise Good  
 Road noise Fair

#### WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater Excellent  
 Defroster Excellent  
 Ventilation Good  
 Weather sealing Excellent  
 Windshield wiper action Good

#### QUALITY CONTROLS

Materials, exterior Good  
 Materials, interior Good  
 Exterior finish Good  
 Interior finish Fair  
 Hardware and trim Good

#### GENERAL

Service accessibility Excellent  
 Luggage space Good  
 Bumper protection Good  
 Exterior lighting Good  
 Resistance to crosswinds Good

