



# THE PONTIAC SAFARI

*"A bargeload of lush, functional and fast," says Tom of this smart wagon.*

By Tom McCahill



TOM and herd of prize Labrador retrievers. He liked comfortable, six-passenger rig.

### Mail for McCahill

Uncle Tom's very popular question-and-answer column begins on page 176. Don't miss it!

**T**HE word "Safari" may make you think of Gregory Peck, Ernest Hemingway or even, as my paper-bound dictionary says, "a caravan with camels." Believe me, the Pontiac Safari station wagon is in no way associated with the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company but is the hottest drag wagon made in America today.

To me a safari has always meant lush

comfort on a hunt for dangerous game and the Pontiac wagon with the name "Safari" is equal to the lushest night of pleasure around the campfire with the bugs on vacation, dozens of spear-carrying natives to answer your beck and call and a brave white hunter to mix martinis while Ava Gardner only has eyes for you. That's *my* idea of a safari. Who wants an elephant anyhow? Besides, he won't fit in your deep freeze.

We tested the sound barrier-tickling Pontiac economy sedan a few months ago but this wagon is only distantly related to that car. My original '57 test Pontiac—which still holds most of MI's acceleration records (all but the 0-30 mph mark) and walked away with the biggest piece of the cake at the Daytona Beach Speed Trials—was the Broom Peddler's Special model. It was the Super Chief, the most hairy-chested low-priced sedan of the year, extremely long on performance but a little short in comfort. The seats were not of Sultan grade, the trunk room was stingy and the ride not too exceptional. In spite of this, its outstanding performance made it a terrific buy, far over-shadowing its minor drawbacks.

There are, however, a large number of buyers in this country, including many of our readers, who rate comfort as high, if not higher than performance. In this large group there is a tremendous station wagon class who couldn't be less interested in an out-and-out sedan. As this may be the last '57 car we will test this year (the '58s are already making

SAFARI handles nicely and is no slouch in speed department—it does a hot 110-plus.



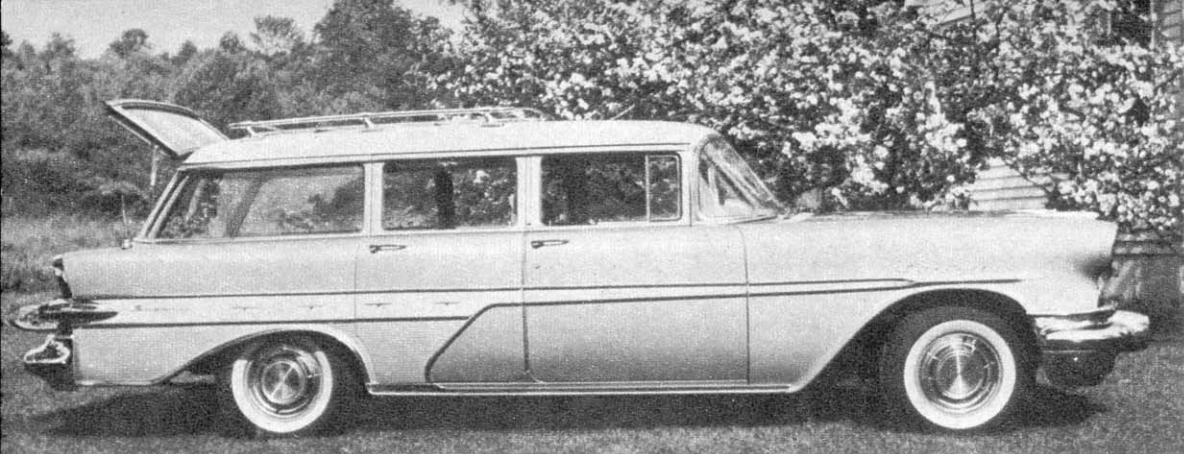
CHROME-LINED taillights and exhaust are becoming distinctive mark of the Pontiac.



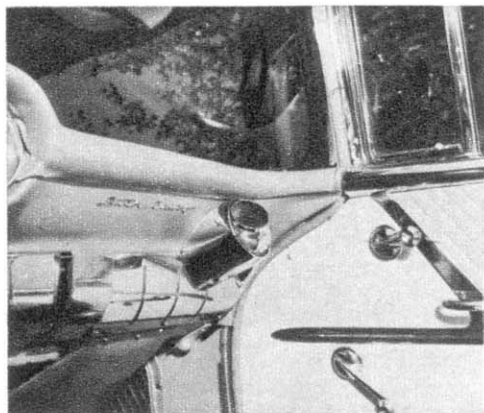
FIELD TRIAL champ Boji luxuriates in roomy cargo space. Note spare tire in the floor.

BARBER CHAIR headrest crowns front passenger seat. Upholstery is plush leather.





**SWASHBUCKLE** wagon is equally at home at country club as on business or camping trip.



**HAPPILY CHILLED** Tom liked two movable ducts on dash that air-conditioned car.

## SPECIFICATIONS

### MODEL TESTED:

1957 Pontiac 4-door Star Chief Safari

### ENGINE:

V8 cylinder, OHV; bore 3.94 inches, stroke 3.56 inches; maximum torque 359 foot pounds @ 2800 rpm; brake horsepower 270 @ 4800 rpm; compression ratio 10 to 1

### DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase 122 inches; overall length 206.8 inches; tread 59 inches front, 59.4 rear; width 75.2 inches; height 59.3 inches; weight 3,955 pounds; standard tire size 8:50x14; gas tank 17 gals

### PERFORMANCE:

0 to 30 mph, 3.6 seconds  
0 to 50 mph, 6.8 seconds  
0 to 60 mph, 8.9 seconds  
0 to 70 mph, 11.7 seconds  
Top speed, 110-plus mph

### SPEEDOMETER ERROR:

At 60 mph on speedometer, actual speed 58.8 mph

rumbles in some camps), a conference was in order.

MI Editor Bill Parker and I decided that since Pontiac had proven to be GM's outstanding surprise of the year, a deluxe version might have a lot of interest. And our station wagon set might also want to know what a wagon version of this year's bomb is like. So the choice was rather simple. The deluxe Pontiac Star Chief Safari, loaded like a Kodiak bear that has just been blasted by a cannon-full of buckshot, including air conditioning, was nominated our test car.

Unlike many of the stylized station wagons of the year, the Safari still offers ample inside roof clearance, width and folded-down floor length to make it as functional as any wagon built in the last few years. It is a comfortable six-passenger rig that doesn't feature orphan asylum advantages the way some other wagons do. The Safari is not advertised or promoted as a reform school bus for 19 sub-juvenile delinquents. I have gone on the theory for some time that a guy who had that many kids in the first place couldn't afford to pay the fuel bill for a one-cylinder Brush. This is a quality wagon for adults with a sane amount of kids; foes of Margaret Sanger can buy themselves a bus.

Let's discuss the seats first:

The leather seats on the Safari are extremely lush, quite different from our earlier '57 Pontiac test sedan's, with loads of tail support and a reclining front passenger seat with a barber chair headrest. Oddly enough, though these seats are as [Continued on page 180]

# The Pontiac Safari

[Continued from page 90]

fine as any in the industry, they also constituted my first beef against the car. Our test wagon did not have the six-way electric seat but the quaint back-and-forth-on-rails type which is operated by your leg muscles while pushing on the release button. I found that this seat pushed all the way back didn't provide enough leg room for a bow-legged jockey, a common Michigan fault of recent years. It would appear that the Detroit design boys never read the Wheatie commercials which prove that Americans are growing taller, not more compressed.

This leg room was much too short for me and in order to bring you a fair test of the car, McCahill Associates yanked out the front seat, put the rear seat in full floor position, and found the rails could be moved back a full inch and a half, even with the rear seat fully down. Some fast drilling and the front seat was re-installed. This operation took less than an hour and made all the difference in the world for any driver six feet tall or more.

**Seat comfort is one of the major safety factors** in any automobile making trips of several hundred miles or more. Unless the driver is comfortable, he will tire much more quickly and this fatigue brought on by a poor seat can possibly turn a good driver into a road menace after a number of hours at the wheel. Race car builders have known this for years and even on Indianapolis cars you'll find some of the finest examples of upholstered comfort seats imaginable.

When Briggs Cunningham was building cars for the LeMans race a few years ago, the seats in his cars averaged \$600 a pair and were worth every penny of it. I was in Cunningham's pit at LeMans when he got out of his car after 19½ hours of straight high speed running. If he had been uncomfortable due to either cramped leg room or a poorly designed seat, such a feat would have been impossible.

**With the seat re-positioned**, the Safari (even for 6' 4" McMichael) proved as comfortable on long test trips as spending two weeks in a French featherbed. While still on the comfort kick, let me state for all you guys and gals who think you have it made with inner springs and foam rub-

ber—a good French featherbed makes sleeping on these New World innovations seem like tossing on a board floor.

When we started our test of the Safari (which lasted for over 2,000 miles) the weather was hot and humid. This job had air conditioning that emerged from two movable chrome ducts that you could direct at your feet, middle, up your nose or over your head. The blast is cold enough to firm up a dripping Popsicle and when set to full bore and aimed at your face, has enough force to flatten your eyebrows so they look as if they had a crew cut. On one hot weekend I took the Safari to a low marsh where field trials were taking place. The temperature was over 90°. The air conditioner not only kept me cool as the outside of a frosted julep glass but kept my dogs as full of pep as an economy-sized tin of nitro. This was really living it up. No king or sultan ever had it better—or even as good.

**One great thing about air conditioning** that those who've never had it in a car may not realize is the mental comfort it gives. Guys like me, who have to travel over much of the country regardless of the weather, including some of the hottest spots on earth, get almost as much comfort out of their air conditioning even when it's switched off. The fact that you know it's there, and no matter what happens in the line of heat waves all you have to do is turn a switch, is a comfort in itself when you start out for the hotlands in mid-summer.

For me, the big gizmo with the Safari is that this car, not the most expensive station wagon on the market by a long shot, has more to offer for more people. For example, let's say that you, the Old Man of the family, need a car for business trips and, in addition, to serve as a fun car for hunting or fishing jaunts. You could pack guns, rifles and enough camp equipment in this job for a Teddy Roosevelt outing. On the deluxe baggage racks on top you can haul food, huge tents and any prize elephant hides you might collect.

**The Safari wagon will also look just as normal** when you drive to the plant for a board meeting and may give you just a dash of swashbuckle you'd fail to get from



a sedan. Your wife will get all the luxury from this beautifully appointed rig that she would from the most expensive sedan of the line—and she'll find it perfect for hauling home antiques Uncle Josh just whipped up in his workshop.

Junior can also get a lot of shirt button-popping out of this bucket—unknown to you, of course. With the Safari's fire-eating engine that sent the competition running for the storm cellars at Daytona, none of the local boys are going to embarrass Junior when he turns up at the drag strip instead of at the church formal where you thought he was heading. As a matter of fact, unless your swashbuckle has been completely corroded, it won't do your ego one whit of harm to be able to dig away from all the competition when the light turns green on your way to the office.

Here is a car loaded with luxuries, as versatile as money, that doesn't have to give way in any department. It has more than 110 mph top speed, it can do 0-60 in under *nine* seconds and it's big enough to carry you and three or four pals on a hunting trip to the Canadian wilds or the jungles of southern Mexico. Here is a vehicle equipped to take on jungle heat as well as Canada's wintry blasts. The steering is not the best power steering in existence and the cornering, though good, is not outstanding. But the Safari is fast enough, fully loaded with moonshine, to outrun the revenooers and it's comfortable enough, providing you installed plumbing, to move into permanently.

In summing up, when I predicted several years ago that more station wagons than sedans would be sold by 1960, it was this type of all-around station wagon I had in mind. Here is one that's functional, fast and with a bargeload of lush. The only thing it lacks is a glove compartment loaded with \$1,000 bills. •

## Test The Simca

[Continued from page 94]

four-speed gearbox. I was completely flipped by the torque in all gears of this little engine which displaces only 79 cubic inches. Its fourth speed pull, even at low speeds, is almost American and makes this an extremely pleasant car for a lazy driver to handle. Though it might be frowned on by the double-breasted vest set, on

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