



TRANS AM 303

Down the summer dark Ohio Turnpike comes the screaming Indian that runs like jagged lightning across super car land. It's a Pontiac, white eyes.

Somewhere near Fostoria, Ohio, there is a kid with a 396 Camaro who is still wondering how it was done. He was driving down the Ohio Turnpike with his girl and saw this white Trans Am Firebird ahead, a car with two big blue stripes, some scoops, a deck-lid air-foil and Michigan plates. A car that is considered by the hot set to be a stone. And as he was about to vacuum the stone's doors off in a little top end shot, the stone faded faster than anything he had ever seen before. Then he tried it again only this time the stone shifted into fourth at around a 110 with an appropriate belch of flame from the exhaust that looked like lightning in the summer night before it vanished.

We could tell you about a hemi GTX or a batch of Sting Rays but you will never know what it was really like driving the first 303 Trans Am Firebird on the street. There can be only one first time you go into a sweeper at an even 100 and come out at 120 and the 'Vette behind is now much further behind. It's as stable at two miles a minute as most cars are at one, yet it does not ride rough-as-a-cob, jarring eye teeth at low speeds. This car has no right to do what it does, or go like it goes except for the persistence of one man, Pontiac staff engineer Herb Adams.

Adams' job was to take the standard Trans Am and build some kind of marketable version to realistically compete with Chevrolet's Z-28—hopefully in sufficient numbers to qualify it for SCCA's Group II Sedan category. We all know it didn't make it. For a lot of reasons like soaring limited production

costs, changes in command, and inability of SCCA to decide just exactly what it did want. It is totally ironic and a little sad that the SCCA had more than a little to do with almost killing what could be one of the sportiest cars ever built.

The 4.12 x 2.87-inch bore/stroke, 303-cubic-inch engine is a Xerox of the short-deck one we told you about in the June issue, except that it has just one Holley four-barrel carburetor for the street. It has the same rumpity-rump-rump idle as the 400 Ram-Air IV mill, but where the bigger job gives up at 6000, the 303 winds on like a demented banshee to 7000. Or 8000, with good valve springs and solid lifters. "The 6000 rpm redline on the tach is incorrect," Pontiac's Tom Goad had said when we picked up the car, and he was right. At 140 indicated, the engine was still pulling and looking at the test figures, 7000 rpm potential equals about 150. Because of the cam and gear, from a stop light the 303 is a little "soft," a situation that could be remedied as Chevy is amending the Z-28, with a high stall speed Turbo Hydra-Matic.

We personally don't care, because once you get rolling the Trans Am is a pure delight. The car has high-effort power steering, water-cooled power steering, if you please, and so they can get away with a comfortably small, padded steering wheel that looks maybe like it belonged in an M8B McLaren. Steering is light and quick and has more feeling than you have the right to expect in an American car. It is a machine that every driver, especially high-way safety people, ought to take a crack

at since it is so stable and predictable.

To accomplish the 303 Trans Am's marvelous ride and handling characteristics nothing was done to the 400 Trans Am suspensions that uses the Y-96 heavy-duty package. Because of the shorter deck height and turned port heads, the 303 is about 40 pounds lighter than the 400 but this is negligible in a 3500-pound car. "Some people have been disappointed by the 400 Trans Am," allowed Herb Adams, who is also mainly responsible for the noticeably better '70 GTO. "But we think they're a bit deceived when the car takes a familiar corner faster and doesn't feel it. Sure the car understeers a bit but it doesn't do it until it's going at least ten percent faster than an HO Firebird. A true race car is designed to oversteer, but you couldn't live with it on the street."

Pontiac's new General Manager, Jim McDonald, declared publicly that the division was going ahead with 303 Trans Am production despite the setbacks the project has encountered. We hope for their sake, all our sakes, that they do. Their first customer will be in Fostoria, Ohio. /MT

TRANS AM 303 PERFORMANCE

mph	seconds	
0-15	2.7	} @ 6300
0-30	4.61	
0-45	6.45	
0-60	8.83	
0-75	11.43	
0-100	18.22	

Standing 1/4-mile: 16.37 secs. @ 93.5 mph

Speed in gears: 54, 1st; 73, 2nd; 95, 3rd.

Top Speed: 135 mph @ 6300 rpm

Gear Ratio: 3.90:1

Weight: 3980-pounds with two passengers and test equipment.