

1977 Pontiac Trans AM

In the summer of 2000 I was on the hunt for a 1977 or 1978 Trans AM. In July we were attending the POCI Convention in Grand Rapids, MI and during the show I spent quite a bit of time with Wayne Thompson and his 1981 TA on the show field. During one of my stops I told him that I was on the hunt for a 77 or 78. He told me that he's just reduced the price on his 77 by \$1000. I forgot that he had that one! My criteria was Special Edition, T-tops, and a Pontiac (no Olds!) motor. Wayne confirmed that his checked all those boxes. I asked him what it had for a tranny and he told me that it was a 4 speed – I was hooked! I had the following week off and Wayne, as most senior employee of the Merrimack Bud plant, had most of the summer off. I told him I'd call the following Monday and then went to NH on Wed and bought the car. It was a 77 thousand mile original paint car. It did have a replacement 455 motor, gold Cragar wheels, and dual quads which eliminated the shaker scoop. The motor was built! It was fun to do burnouts with but had so little vacuum at idle that you'd lose the power brakes.



TA as purchased in 2000 – This is in Wayne's driveway

Wayne was the 2nd owner of the TA and he purchased it from the head of the Union at the Bud Plant. Wayne gave me his number and I contacted him about some of the missing parts. I need the centers to the original wheels, the shaker scoop, and the original block. I was told that these were all long gone. A few minutes after the call, the phone rang – the original owner called back to let me know he'd found the original wheel centers in his basement. At the 2001 Tulley Show (held at the Bud plant in Merrimack!) after that he gave them to me. One detail that makes the circle tighter on this story is the TA was originally sold at Tulley Motors, the sponsor of the show. The Tulley plaque is still on the back of this one!

In 2001 I was able to locate an original paint shaker in TX which turned out to be a good match to the car's original paint. I also got a correct engine as well as a parts car with another correct coded engine. I installed a smaller cam in the 455 to tame it but with the high compression 455 this proved to develop too much cylinder pressure and I blew a head gasket. No problem I

wanted to get the correct engine rebuilt and installed anyway. Finally in 2010 I took the engine to Frank Baron to have it rebuilt. When Frank delivered the newly rebuilt engine in early 2011 I couldn't do much with it. I had fallen on a customer's steps and took the quad muscle off my knee. At that point my focus was on flying to Washington to pick up a 1979 Transtar Cabover truck and take it to the upcoming AHS Nationals in South Bend, IA.

May of 2011 I flew to Tacoma, WA to get the Transtar. I could only hope my knee was going to be up to climbing into a cabover – not to mention pushing in the clutch! Well the trip was magical – that's a whole other story....The tie in to this tale is that while on the road tucked into my tiny sleeper I was reading Smoke Signals, the national Pontiac magazine. Turned out that the POCI nationals that year were going to be in Bowling Green, KY and the replica of the Smokey & the Bandit truck would be there. I had to get the TA together and take it!



Transtar coming across country – subject of another story!

The Convention was a blast! We met Hal Needham (director of the movie). Got a pic of the TA next to Burt Reynold's 81 TA (from the second movie). The connection to this story deepens as at the AHS convention I met Chris Budke who found me the matching trailer to the Transtar and later sold me his converted camper trailer. I also wound up with a collectible Kenworth as well but those are two separate stories!



Rose & I with Hal Needham



1977 & 1981 Trans Am's with Kenworth 900A

Link to more early TA pics

http://www.badgoat.net/CRH_homepage/Pontiac_Lineup/TA_page/TA_Page.html