

1970 Pontiac GTO Judge Ram Air IV Convertible

This RA IV convertible had something few big-horsepower, low-production cars do—its original engine, solid owner history, and original documentation

by Colin Comer



Photos: Mecum Auctions

Chassis number: 242670P248954

Pontiac's 1970 Ram Air IV GTO Judge convertibles are so rare that, for any genuine Pontiac enthusiast, seeing one today is an event in itself. Only 17 were built, twelve are known to exist today, and only six were optioned with a 400 Turbo Hydra-Matic transmission. The L76 Ram Air IV engine, which became available in the GTO as a result of GM lifting its corporate ban on 400-plus cubic inch powerplants, is central to the car's pavement-ripping character. Rated at only 370 horsepower, the Ram Air IV generates almost 450 lb-ft of torque at only 3,000 rpm.

The example presented here has been completely restored to its original configuration, including the unique Atoll Blue finish and matching blue bucket seat interior, which also includes wood trim on the instrument panel and console, an engine-turned switch plate, three-spoke Formula steering wheel, and period correct dealer-supplied floor mats.

One of the rarest Pontiacs ever, this handsome, fully restored GTO Judge convertible has a matching-numbers engine and transmission, comes with a copy of the original Protect-O-Plate, and is documented by the Pontiac Historical Society.

SCM Analysis This car sold for \$371,000, including buyer's premium, at Mecum's Fall High Performance Auction in St. Charles, Illinois, on October 3, 2009.

The hell, you say, muscle car prices are in the toilet—this result must surely be a typo. And a Pontiac, of all cars. We all know they are the value-priced alternative to elephant-motored Mopars and big-block Chevys,

right? Not so fast, buckaroo.

The sale of this Ram Air IV Judge, hot on the heels of the highly publicized sale by RM Auctions of the Ray Allen 1970 Chevelle LS6 convertible for \$264,000 on September 26 (profiled in January, p. 46), offers an interesting comparison. How on earth could a GTO with no race history sell for over \$100k more than one of the most famous drag cars of all time, and one that previously sold for \$1.15m? Let's dissect it.

Production numbers: Not much to go on here. Both are incredibly low-production cars, with 17 RAIV Judge convertibles documented via factory records, and (by most experts' opinion) 16 LS6 convertibles produced.

Street cred: Both are the top engines available from their respective divisions, although the LS6 with 450 (advertised) horsepower trumped the 370 advertised hp of the round-port RAIV GTO. This carried over to the street, as the LS6 was clearly the better performer and they tended to hold their guts within the confines of their engine blocks much longer than the somewhat rpm-sensitive RAIV.

Price trends in recent years: Both LS6 and RAIV Judge convertibles are scarce enough to make tracking prices difficult at best, but, as someone who has been involved with multiple sales of both, I can offer some insight. The highest price paid for a 1970 RAIV Judge convertible was around \$500k, although two examples had much higher offers rejected by their owners. A few real LS6 convertibles have traded in the same range, roughly \$500k–\$700k, with the Ray Allen car being the record holder at \$1.15m in 2006. A very interesting comparison for the Judge was the May 2008 sale

Details

Years produced: 1969–70
 Number produced: 96 total—59 in 1969; 37 in 1970
 SCM Valuation: \$325,000–\$450,000
 Original List Price: 1969, \$3,940; 1970, \$4,054
 Tune-up cost: \$150
 Distributor cap: \$18
 Chassis #: Driver's side dash top
 Engine #: Stamped in front passenger's side of block next to timing cover
 Clubs: GTO Association of America
 PO Box 213
 Timnath, CO 80547
 More: www.gtoaa.org
 Alternatives: 1970 LS6 Chevelle convertible; 1970–71 Oldsmobile 442 W30 convertible; 1970–71 Hemi 'Cuda convertible
 SCM Investment Grade: B

Comps



1969 Pontiac GTO Judge
 Lot 379, s/n 242379B165988
 Condition 2-
 Sold at \$49,500
 Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach, FL, 4/9/2009
 SCM# 120199



1969 Pontiac GTO Ram Air IV
 Lot SP97, s/n 242679B159041
 Condition 2-
 Not sold at \$59,940
 RM, Toronto, CAN, 4/3/2009
 SCM# 119951



1969 Pontiac GTO Judge Ram Air IV
 Lot 150311069181, s/n 242379A250009
 Condition 1-
 Sold at \$115,100
 eBay 12/17/2008
 SCM# 118948



by Mecum of another 1970 RAI V Judge convertible, a restored 4-speed example in silver lacking its original engine, at \$378k, almost an identical result to this October 2009 sale.

Where the devil resides

But alas, the devil is in the details. The \$371k Mecum-sold RAI V convertible had something very few of these big-horsepower, low-production cars usually do—its original engine, solid owner history, and original documentation. Although equipped with a Turbo 400 automatic transmission rather than the more desirable (and much more valuable) M21 Muncie 4-speed, it is likely this transmission that saved the original motor—either because a more “mature” original owner bought the car to drive rather than race, or it prevented missed shifts and the resultant, and often fatal, connecting rod breakatosis that sidelined many a Ram Air Pontiac.

Other positives include the highly desirable Atoll Blue exterior, which automatically came with the wild blue-orange-pink Judge stripes. Add the blue interior and we have the second best option you can have on a muscle car: “eyeball.” Remember, the late 1960s and early 1970s were home to far too many color-challenged cars. Think green and brown, kinda like the home appliances that were so popular at the time.

Today, most collectors have refined their tastes to the

point that they want a car that looks as good as it drives, as most look at their cars far more than they drive them. Which is why, in instances such as this with miniscule production numbers, some buyers are happy to forego a 4-speed car in return for a numbers-matching automatic car they actually like to look at.

Another important difference between the Chevrolet and Pontiac camps is that of verifiable production numbers. Thanks to Jim Mattison and Pontiac Historic Services (PHS), we know exactly how many GTOs were produced in every possible combination. Armed with a serial number and \$45, one can fax PHS and within a few hours get copies of the actual factory build order for that very car to see if it is what it purports to be.

Paperwork makes the difference

This availability of factory records is perhaps the biggest reason behind today's strong Pontiac values. Compare this to 1970 LS6 Chevelle convertibles and one can see the logic. Through the process of elimination and tracking known LS6 cars, production numbers are merely estimates, deemed reliable but not guaranteed. This clearly tempers buyers' willingness to pay huge prices for a “one of 16” car that could later prove to be a “one of 40” car. Not to mention that with no factory records available, it is often impossible to verify an LS6 4-speed car wasn't born as a 327 2-barrel car with a Powerglide.

Knowing all this, I think our subject car was a solid buy. It is a known quantity, one of 17 produced, with its original Protect-O-Plate, great color combo, and its original drivetrain. Adding to this, the May 2008 sale of a similar car at the same price speaks of market stability for RAI V Judge convertibles—even in this catch-the-falling-knife market—and I call this a spot-on result for both buyer and seller. Had this car had three pedals, my hand would have been in the air. What can I say; I don't know how to drive automatics. Well done. ♦

(Introductory description courtesy of Mecum Auctions.)

