



TOP: Featuring heated and air conditioned leather Recaro seats, the custom interior also includes an all-new molded dash filled with Autometer gauges, the sound/navigation head unit, as well as the A/C controls and vents. The door panels have body color matched piping, while the floor mats feature Jim Wangers' signature in the same color. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The 335 tread on the 20 by 12 inch rear wheels matched to the 19 by 10 inch front wheels gives the Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTO a mighty big footprint — and one that will pull down 1.1g on the skidpad. Match that to the exhaust note delivered through the custom stainless steel tips — and the car becomes even more intimidating. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTO features exquisite billet Rally II wheels with Wangers' signature etched into a spoke.

driven, and even after a 100-mile stint in the driver's seat, we found ourselves grinning and eager to keep going.

We were further privileged to be on hand at the Los Angeles Motor Press Guild's 2009 Track Day at California Speedway. AMCI (a marketing and testing company founded by Wangers) test driver, Gary Thomason, put the Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTO through its paces on the road course at California Speedway over a two day period. Other cars being tested at the MPG event included an AMG Mercedes, a couple of SRT8 Challengers, a few BMW M-Class models, a Camaro SS, several Audis, Acuras and a Ford Taurus SHO.

The appearance of the Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTO had been publicized and, as it was rolled from the trailer, quite a crowd had gathered. Certainly none of the media on site believed this old piece of iron was capable enough for the planned exhibition. At the engine's first firing, the roar drew more observers. Wangers and his team moved into action answering questions about every detail of this reincarnated American icon. Observers were impressed to learn that the only thing 1969 about the Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTO is the sheet metal.

This, too, was Thomason's first experience with the car and after a safety check, he was off to circle the course. The first lap was an easy one to get acquainted with the car. Now, somewhat familiar with its characteristics, Thoma-

son began to push the car, testing its ability. One thing that was certain — no other car on the track carried an exhaust note close to the roar of this GTO.

Thomason is an experienced test driver and a multi-time U.S. autocross champion. He was very pleased with the car's overall balance. It tracked very flat with great turn in on the corners and it was evident that the RS Performance chassis was well-designed. Stopping was capable, though he later told us he would have liked a bit more assist from the hidden booster. Thomason's only real complaint was the mirrors. Running on a road course, one needs rear visibility and the bullet mirrors from a late '70s Trans Am just did not provide the visibility he would have liked. He was particularly impressed with the lack of tire scrub/wear. "The tire wear is negligible for what we are doing. The camber of the suspension is dead on. In my Corvette, I would have worn out a set of tires testing like we have done," Thomason said at the end of the two-day track event.

As this was the first testing of the Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTO, and it was on its way to the SEMA Show in Las Vegas, Big 3 Performance was not about to let just anybody abuse the car on the track. It was Thomason's job to scare the devil out of the press with members riding "shotgun" for a couple of laps at a time. Mark Maynard, Wheels Editor of the *San Diego Union Tribune* was one writer taken for a ride. Upon his return, Maynard was heard to ask for a cigarette. He

said, "The ride was better than sex."

Having put some miles on the car ourselves, we were anxious for track rides. With a good feel for the car's manners, Thomason took us on an "E-ticket" ride like we have never experienced. The Recaro seats and only a lap belt hold you tight. On the back stretch, Thomason shifted into 5th gear and from the passenger seat, it was easy to see the gauge sweeping through 110 mph. The ride was thrilling — and we have to say, the car truly needs a grab bar!

Big 3 Performance has two additional Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTOs under construction. Car number 2 is a rag-top and car number 3 is a track car that will be seen match-racing against the GeeTO Tiger in the 2010 show season. With bodies sourced, Big 3 Performance plans to build 20 of these testaments to a man and his car. For those looking to convert their own 1968-72 Pontiac A-body, the newly designed hood, chin spoiler, bumper cover, dash board, duck tail spoiler and Signature Edition Rally Wheels will also be available as a "knock down" kit or sold individually.

Pontiac may be gone as a manufacturer, but thankfully the "new" Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTO offers Pontiac enthusiasts a reason to celebrate. The Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTO is, indeed, a hype on the original car that is so closely associated with Wangers — the Judge. And it's certainly worthy of carrying his name. Thanks to Big 3 Performance and Jim Wangers, "the GTO legend lives on!" ■