

"WHO SAID PONTIAC'S DEAD?"

ANOTHER HYPE...

THE LEGEND LIVES ON IN THE JIM WANGERS SIGNATURE GTO

STORY BY BILL SEINSOTH / PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID NEHWARDT

IMAGINE YOURSELF STANDING ON THE SIDEWALK, STARING THROUGH THE SHOWROOM WINDOW OF A PONTIAC DEALERSHIP BACK IN 1969 — EYEING A CAR VIVID ORANGE IN COLOR, WITH AN OUTRAGEOUS (FOR THE TIME) STAND UP REAR SPOILER AND POP ART STRIPING WITH A STYLIZED LOGO.

Certainly many had to ask, "What was Pontiac thinking?" Enthusiasts would soon discover that lurking beneath the flamboyant styling was the power to set the record straight, "Don't laugh at me, or I will blow your doors off!" This newly styled GTO was a new performance option named "The Judge" and the color was Carousel Red. (I do remember as a kid seeing that orange color on a carousel horse at the local amusement park. Maybe that is where they got the name.)

In 1968, GTO sales were slipping, Plymouth introduced the Road Runner and John DeLorean instinctively knew that the staying power of the GTO was being threatened. Originally created as a "hype" on the new Tempest in 1964, the GTO by 1968 needed an injection of

something new, a refocus on that which had made it the segment leader.

DeLorean created the "ad hoc" committee comprised of engineers, stylists and marketing professionals to focus on the marketplace and pump new blood into the GTO. Not to dwell on the well-documented efforts of the "ad hoc" members, the result was the biggest hype ever seen. The "hype of all hypes" was the introduction of the 1969 GTO Judge, a special great one from Pontiac. With its pop art striping and "in your face" Carousel Red paint, the Judge ignited a new period of excitement for the GTO.

When asked to name his favorite GTO, Jim Wangers, one of the survivors of that original ad hoc committee,

is quick to respond, "The '69 Judge in Carousel Red." So, when approached in early 2008 by Big 3 Performance (of Green Bay, Wisconsin) about immortalizing a special Pontiac, Wangers was quick to point at his favorite, the '69 Judge, as the perfect inspiration. Ironically, Big 3 Performance was first thinking of building a 1969 Trans Am tribute. Early in the first conversation between Wangers and one of the principals of Big 3, Anthony Stephenson, Stephenson quickly recognized that with Wangers being affectionately termed the "Godfather of the GTO," any signature edition car needed to be a GTO. Forty years after the "ad hoc" committee created the Judge, Wangers and Big 3 Performance reincarnated the 1969 GTO for the 21st century with the Jim Wangers Signature Edition GTO.

ENGINE: Wangers was insistent that any GTO bearing his name be powered by a traditional Pontiac powerplant. A Butler Performance 505ci V-8 with Fast xFI injection is standard. The jeweled 680hp mill is cradled nicely in the "frenched" and smoothed engine compartment. Aluminum hood hinges support the new, carbon-fiber Ram Air hood.

In the making for more than a year, the car made several appearances, in various stages of completion, at Pontiac events last summer. Finally, in its full

