

Newest Antique 1988 Pontiac 6000 Safari station wagon

By Philip Williams

When I joined the AACA South Florida Region in January 2002, I didn't own an antique car. Not a problem, I was told. You don't have to own one to be a member; you just have to have an appreciation for great cars and good friends. Well, that's as good a reason to join any organization, right? And so I did, and soon, at the behest of the immortal Al Roscoe, I became a member of the board. I was probably the only member at the time who didn't own an antique, but I had a plan: I would either find one, or I would wait until the car I was driving became old enough to be an antique.



It looked like I had a bit of a wait. My only car then was a 1988 Pontiac 6000 LE Safari station wagon, and it was only fourteen years old. Could it last another eleven years, and even if it did, would it ever be considered an antique alongside some of the



fine examples of automotive history that graced the first show I attended that winter in Homestead? This denizen of suburbia would never fit in with the Rolls-Royces or the LaSalles or the Corvettes or Austin-Healeys. Or so I thought. But the more time I spent with my friends, the more I realized that it had less to do with the car itself and more with the sense of connection the car may have with something in our past; either a fond memory from childhood, or your first car and the thrill of being out on the open road, or an appreciation for the engineering and design that went into making a machine a work of art and something more than just a way to get from here to there. My wait came to an end on January 1, 2013, when the Pontiac reached the age of antiquity.

I bought the Pontiac from Hertz Car Sales of Traverse City, Michigan, in January 1989. My father had a business there and bought cars from them for his sales staff, and when this one came on the lot after being in the rental fleet, he told me about it. I was living in Colorado at the time, so I flew in from Denver on a Friday, picked it up that afternoon, and drove back to Colorado. It's gone over 250,000 miles, from Colorado back to Michigan for six years, New Mexico for another six, and now Florida since 2001. It's had its usual repairs and problems that come with being a daily driver, but it's held up remarkably well. It was built by GM of Canada at their plant in Oshawa, Ontario. It was destined for the U.S. market — the speedometer is in miles, not kilometers — but in homage to its native land, I got a 1988 Ontario license plate to give it a touch of authenticity.



It's a seven-passenger wagon, complete with the "way back" rear-facing back seat, which I am sure brings back a lot of memories for the boomers who spent many hours riding to vacation or school



or soccer practice while trying not to provoke a stern warning from the driver: "I will stop this car right now if you don't knock it off back there!" This was in the era before iPods, so the sound choices were AM/FM or cassette, so everyone listened to Lover boy or nothing at all. This was also before Smartphones, so if you wanted a cell phone in the car, you got a Uniden bag phone that mounted on the transmission hump and plugged in the exterior antenna. I had one for my job in northern Michigan, and I used it a lot. When I moved to Florida in 2001, Verizon took one look at it and said they don't do analog phones anymore. Being the pack rat that I am, I kept the phone. I found it while I was cleaning out the garage, so it's back where it belongs.

A lot of people ask me why I'm so attached to this car. After all, it's just a station wagon and there's nothing particularly collectible about it. But I'm one of the few members of the club who has owned his antique car since it was (almost) new, and other than the few months in the Hertz corral; I've been the only owner. It's also a touch of nostalgia for the days when every family I knew had a station wagon, usually with the fake wood grain sides and the big way back for dogs, peat moss bales, and hockey equipment.



I took the Pontiac to its first AACA National meet in Lakeland in February, where it received its first Driver Participation Class chip. I'd waited almost twenty-five years for that show, and I was very



happy when I received it. I love taking it to shows and seeing the smiles of people who remember their own station wagons. To me the fun is not to win trophies but to share the fun of enjoying antique cars and reminding us that even an ordinary car can be a thing of beauty and remembrance.

Note: Restoration by A Auto Tech of Coral Gables.