Poncho Villa

The Pontiac-Oakland Museum and Resource Center is home to all things related to GM's Excitement Division

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL MILNE

There aren't too many places where Fiero body panels are proudly displayed on the walls, but the Pontiac-Oakland Museum and Resource Center in Pontiac, Illinois, is one of them. This incredible collection illustrates how one man's obsession can grow into a significant museum. In this case, Tim Dye has been accumulating all things Pontiac-related since his teen years, and is supported in his quest by his always-patient wife, Penny.

The Pontiac, Illinois, location for the museum leads many visitors to assume the car was made here, but it was not. The Dyes were living in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, and needed more space for their rapidly growing collection. While driving south after attending a car show near Chicago, they passed through town and made a few inquiries. When Robert Russell, the mayor of Pontiac, learned of their plans, he attracted them to his charming downtown with an offer of a building to house the museum. The result is an immaculately curated collection that provides a thrill to any auto aficionado cruising along nearby Route 66.

The Oakland Motor Car Company started out in 1907 in Pontiac, Michigan, and was a subsidiary of the Pontiac Buggy Company. Dating back to those early roots, an 1890s Pontiac Buggy (one of only two that exist) is on view. After being gobbled up by General Motors, Oakland started producing Pontiac automobiles, a respected name that lived on until its sad demise in 2010. The brand that arguably launched the muscle car era with the 1964 GTO was no more, making it even more important to preserve the Pontiac legacy. A 1965 GTO in the museum recalls those heady days.

A 1964 Pontiac Parisienne Safari Station Wagon is set up in such a lifelike camping tableau — with one of those ubiquitous Scotch coolers, Coleman stove and faux fire — that you can almost smell the wieners roasting. The wagon was built in Canada, so it features a Chevrolet drivetrain and chassis. A frequent feature at the museum is a black-and-gold 1976 Pontiac Trans Am 50th Anniversary Edition. It will get the motor running of anyone who lusted after one of these bad boys when they were teenagers. The second-generation Firebird went on to cinematic fame in *Smokey and the Bandit* and *Rocky II*, creating a new generation of Trans Am fans.

Any type of Pontiac memorabilia you can think of is here, including uniforms from sports teams Pontiac sponsored, vintage advertising, dinnerware, Indian headdresses used for marketing, toy cars by year, and so much more. The collection of Pontiac logos, trim and hubcaps alone could fill a small barn.

The largest Pontiac-Oakland reference library in the world contains thousands of documents, including owner's manuals, marketing materials, service manuals, books and magazines. It was fun to leaf through the

materials and find the original owner's manual and sales brochure for my first car, a Pontiac Firebird. Tim has spread his collecting net so wide, he even has loads of material related to the Native American Chief Pontiac. Because Tim's actual collection is larger than the museum, some of the cars are rotated out frequently, creating a new visitor experience every time. A few of the models that are always on display include the 1890s Pontiac buggy, 1931 Oakland Sport Coupe (it was the last model year for Oakland) and the camping display with the 1964 station wagon.

Tim's obsession with Pontiac reminds me of a song called "Tulsa Time" that's been recorded over the years by Don Williams and Eric Clapton:

Well, I left Oklahoma
Driving in a Pontiac,
Just about to lose my mind.

Unlike the fellow in the song, this Oklahoman keeps on an even keel as he preserves the Pontiac-Oakland legacy.

The museum, which celebrates its fifth anniversary on July 23, 2016, is located at 205 N. Mill Street, Pontiac, Illinois, 61764. Pontiac is a two-hour drive southwest of Chicago along historic Route 66. Find them online at www.PontiacOaklandMuseum.org.

Michael Milne is the author of the *Roadster Guide to America's Top Car Museums.*