

GTO of the Month

The W40 GTO

By Chris Winslow



With 2024 being the 60th anniversary of the 1964 GTO, 50th anniversary of the 1974 GTO, and the 20th anniversary of the 2004 GTO, I wanted to put together an article that tied the two events together. In looking for a way to do that, I ended up looking back to the launch of the 2004 GTO.

On January 3, 2003, Pontiac unveiled the rebirth of the GTO in Los Angeles. The official press release read in part:

***LOS ANGELES --** Giving the public its first look at the rebirth of a legend, Pontiac, General Motors' "excitement division," introduced show car versions of the 2004 GTO to audiences at the Los Angeles Auto Show and the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. The production version of the GTO will be available in Pontiac showrooms in late 2003.*

"The public's interest in the GTO has been everything we hoped it would be, and more," said Bob Lutz, GM vice chairman of product development. "This car is a strong statement from both Pontiac and GM that we are determined to re-energize the car market with vehicles that command attention and excite the customer's senses."





GTO of the Month



Pontiac plays an especially large role in this strategy in the 2004 model year with three new product launches. The new Grand Prix debuts in the spring and the V-8-powered Bonneville GXP will bow in early 2004.

“The GTO is really the ‘exclamation point’ on the new Pontiac line for the 21st century,” said Lynn Myers, Pontiac-GMC general manager. “Together with the Grand Prix and the Bonneville GXP, the GTO will help define the evolution of Pontiac with fresh, contemporary styling, high-performance excitement and exceptional driving characteristics.”

Of course, little did anyone at that event realize that in a little over 7 years, (2858 days to be exact) Pontiac would cease to exist. This made the unveiling of the new GTO one of the last new product introductions (or re-introductions) in the division’s history.

As most people know, the 2004 GTO was based on the Monaro Coupe, an excellent vehicle developed by GM’s Holden Division in Australia. GM’s newly minted Vice President of Product Development, Bob Lutz, was already aware of the vehicle when he assumed his new position at GM in September of 2001. It was, however, during a trip to Holden in February of 2002, when he finally had the opportunity to drive one of these vehicles. Based on that experience, he returned to the States and proposed to then Pontiac-GMC General Manager, Lynn Myers, that the Monaro would make the perfect donor vehicle for a rebirth of the GTO. His reasoning on this point was clear. Holden already had an excellent rear drive chassis (something Pontiac did not have at the time) and an engine compartment that could accept a sizable V8 engine. This was the same basic formula that the legendary John DeLorean had used in 1963

to create the 1964 GTO when he stuffed a 389 V8 engine in the relatively small (for its time) Tempest.

As we now know, Meyers green lighted the project and the GTO team was born. The team, made up of members from both North America and Australia, was given an incredibly short 18 month time frame to bring the new GTO to the US. As was noted in the press release, this tight deadline was necessary as Lutz and Meyers were planning the GTO and the new V8 powered (although still front wheel drive) Bonneville GXP to be the Pontiac Halo cars intended to signal to the world that Pontiac was back in the performance business.

Fortunately, Holden had a left hand drive configuration of the Monaro because they were already selling versions of the car in countries in the middle east, so that part of the job would not be difficult. What would turn out to be more of an issue was adapting the car to the harsh North America winters and meeting US safety standards as well as GM corporate standards for North America. As all of us who own these cars know, the biggest sacrifice made to the latter was the relocation of the gas tank into the trunk behind the rear seat. This can make it a challenge for those of us who drive these cars to GTOAA conventions because it is tough to get all the luggage and car show supplies needed for week long events loaded in the remaining space!

The GM Chief Engineer for this project was Bob Reuter. Bob took his role very seriously and spent a significant amount of time researching the history of the GTO to make sure that this latest incarnation was worthy of the GTO nameplate. Bob discussed this with Mr. Gary Witzenburg for an interview in the book *The Legend Returns*, when he stated:

“One of the first things we did was have the Pontiac Historians come in and we looked at the old Pontiac ads





GTO of the Month



to make sure we understood the heritage, and we got a '64 GTO and spent the day driving it. And we clearly understood there were going to be issues if we didn't do a retro style, didn't do a hood scoop, didn't split the exhaust on different sides in the rear, didn't put a tachometer on the hood.

But when we looked at what was most important, it all came back to power train performance, so that's where we put all of our eggs. We said we'll do whatever it takes to get that right – get the exhaust note, the launch feel and the power levels where they needed to be to make it a legitimate GTO. The focus for the program was straight line performance and that's where we ended up. Some of those other things we're evolving into a 40th year concept.”¹

Bob went on to say, when talking about the LS1 engine and the overall driving experience:

“What did we do to get this engine up to 350 horsepower? First and foremost we made it breathe better. On the inlet side, we've got a much freer-running intake than we had on the Monaro. On the exhaust side, we've got true dual exhausts, separate mufflers and catalyts and resonators all the way to the back of the car. And we put in a higher-lift cam to provide more torque.

We decided that it needed more torque, and one way to achieve that is to change the cam. But, there was resistance to that at Holden because it degraded the idle quality. It was a trade off. Same thing with the exhaust note. They said, “You don't want the exhaust that loud.” We said volume is good, as long as the note is correct. It took them a while to understand that this was important for a GTO.

We created a driving experience for this car very much in line with the original GTOs. What's really impressive is not so much the 350 hp and the 365 lb-ft of torque, but that you've got that torque under your foot all the time, over 300 lb-ft of torque everywhere past 1200 rpm.”¹

There are a number of interesting things to take away from these comments. First, for those of us who were fortunate enough to hear John Sawruck talk about the new GTO before his untimely passing on November 12, 2008 know, he was one of the historians about which Bob was speaking. John discussed these sessions more than once during talks at GTOAA events. Second, the engineer tasked with bringing the new GTO to life was well aware, even in those early days, that there would be a lot of critics of the styling because it was not a retro car but instead a modern interpretation of the original GTO formula. Third, he dispels the myth that the GTO team just took the LS1 engine and shoehorned it into the car without considering the importance of the way the engine performed and the way the engine sounded. They were in fact very concerned with the heritage and making sure that engine was right for the car. Dropping in a higher lift cam was certainly a risky proposition from the point of view of Bob's buttoned down bosses back in Detroit, but his team knew it needed to be done and they did it.

There is one other very interesting comment that Bob makes in these quotes for *The Legend Returns*. That is the sentence where he states in relation to things such as retro styling, hood scoops, and the hood tach: *“Some of those other things we're evolving into a 40th year concept.”*

The implication of this statement is clear. Since 2004 was the 40th anniversary of the release of the original 1964 GTO, there was a plan in the works for a special 40th anniversary edition 2004 GTO to commemorate the 1964. Unfortunately, that statement also leaves open to interpretation what that special edition GTO would include. Certainly it





GTO of the Month



sounds like many of the things that ultimately wound up on the 2005-2006 GTO's such as split exhaust and hood scoops were under consideration, but was he also saying that other things such as a hood tack and a more retro looking fascia were also part of the mix?

As we now know, Bob Reuter and his team pulled off something of a minor miracle and were able to meet the 18 month deadline imposed on them by Lutz and Meyers. The 2004 GTO was available in 7 exterior colors with gauge cluster faces color keyed to the exterior color and in one or two interior colors also keyed to the exterior. Below is the original customer brochure showing the available combinations.

ONE WITH EVERYTHING - TO GO

Ordering your GTO is easy. Choose your exterior color and your interior color. Decide whether you want automatic or the available 6-speed manual. Drive out at posted speeds.

	EXTERIOR	INSTRUMENTS	INTERIOR	INTERIOR
QUICKSILVER METALLIC				
PHANTOM BLACK METALLIC				
TORRID RED				
IMPULSE BLUE METALLIC				
BARBADOS BLUE METALLIC				One interior available with Barbados Blue Metallic
YELLOW JACKET				One interior available with Yellow Jacket
COSMOS PURPLE METALLIC				One interior available with Cosmos Purple Metallic



GTO of the Month



What those of you familiar with my GTO will note, is that the color combination of my 2004 is not shown in that brochure. That is because my GTO is actually part of a group of the last 794 GTO's that was produced in the 2004 model run. Officially, at least as far as the window sticker is concerned, this color was part of a \$295 option called Limited Edition Pulse Red. This package included:

- Pulse Red Exterior Paint
- Silver Gauge Cluster Face
- Red Stitched Seat GTO Seat Emblem
- Interior-Anthracite, Leather Trim
- Silver Stitching on the Steering Wheel and Brake Lever (Not listed)



2004 GTO COUPE

Standard Equipment

Items Featured Below are included at NO EXTRA CHARGE in the Standard Vehicle Price Shown at Right

MECHANICAL:
 5.7L 350 HP LSI V-8, RWD
 4 SPEED AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION
 4 WHEEL INDEPENDENT SUSPENSION
 POWER FRONT/REAR DISC BRAKES
 TRACTION CONTROL SYSTEM
 POWER ASSISTED VARIABLE RATIO
 RACK & PINION STEERING
 LIMITED SLIP REAR DIFF. 3.46:1
 17" X 8" 5 SPOKE ALLOY WHEELS
 P245/45 ZR17 W-RATED TIRES
S A F E T Y & S E C U R I T Y:
 DRIVER/PASS. FRONT AIR BAGS
 4 CHANNEL 4 WHEEL ABS BRAKES
 3 POINT FRONT/REAR SEAT BELTS
 THEFT DETERRENT SYSTEM
 REAR SEAT CHILD ANCHOR POINTS
 EMERGENCY MODE SYSTEM
 DAYTIME RUNNING LAMPS
 PROGRAMMABLE KEYLESS REMOTE ENTRY

I N T E R I O R:
 2+2 LEATHER SPORT BUCKET SEATS
 8 WAY POWER FRONT BUCKET SEATS
 200-WATT 10 SPKR AUDIO SYSTEM
 6-DISC IN-DASH CD CHANGER
 TILT & TELESCOPE STEERING WHEEL
 STEERING WHEEL RADIO CONTROLS
 POWER DOOR LOCK & WINDOWS
 DRIVER INFORMATION CENTER
 AIR CONDITIONING/CRUISE CONTROL
E X T E R I O R:
 AUTO/PROGRAMMABLE HEADLAMPS
 DUAL EXHAUST WITH CHROME TIPS
 FRONT FOG LAMPS
 REAR SPOILER

Options & Pricing

MANUFACTURER'S SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE

STANDARD VEHICLE PRICE	\$31,795.00
Options installed by the Manufacturer (may replace standard equipment shown at left)	
TRANSMISSION, 6-SPEED MANUAL	695.00
LIMITED EDITION PULSE RED	295.00
•PULSE RED EXTERIOR PAINT	
•SILVER GAUGE CLUSTER FACE	
•RED STITCHED GTO SEAT EMBLEM	
•EXTERIOR-PULSE RED	INC.
•INTERIOR-ANTHRACITE,LEATHER TRIM COMB	INC.
TOTAL OPTIONS	\$990.00

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CITY MPG

17

HIGHWAY MPG

29

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 FUEL INJECTION, MANUAL
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ESTIMATED ANNUAL FUEL COST: \$1,142

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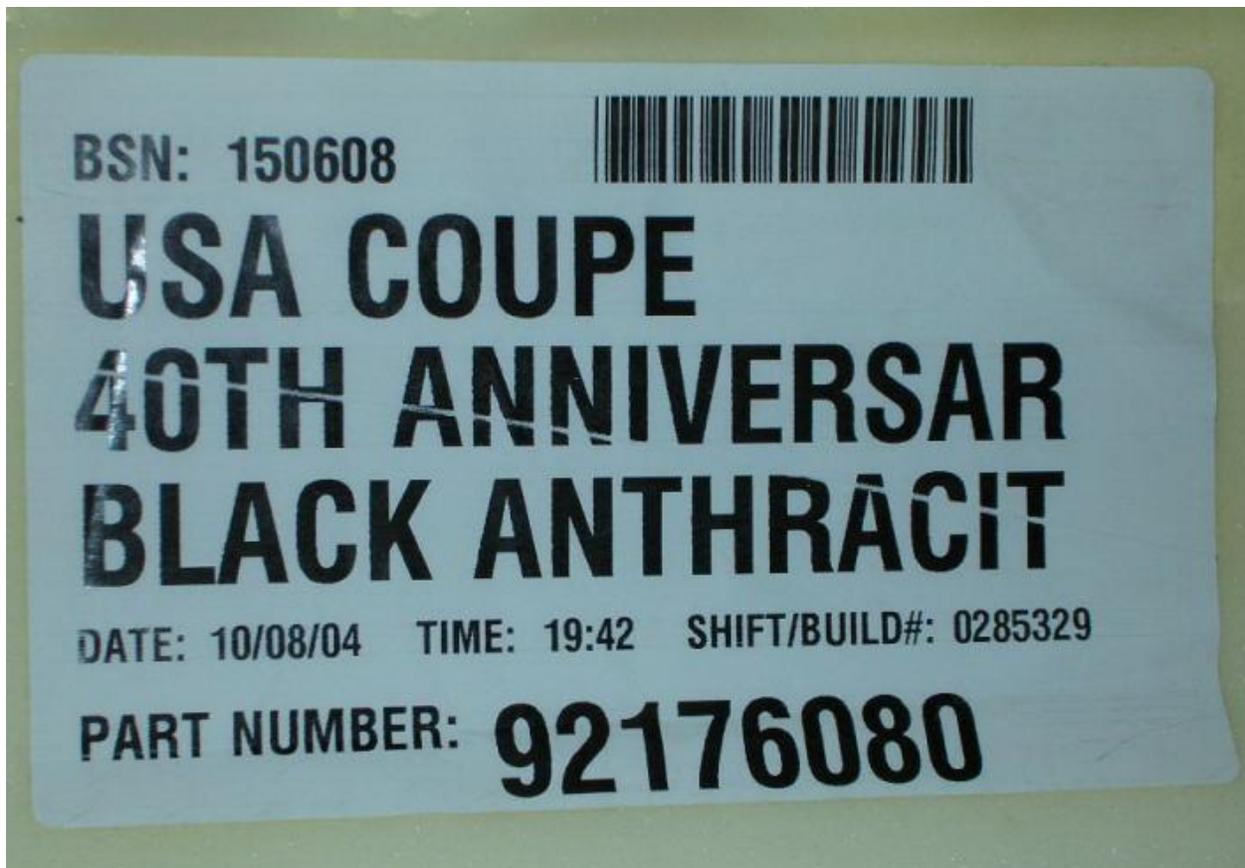


GTO of the Month



So, that Pontiac decided to create a special edition for the 2004 GTO at the end of the model year is clear. The question is what was Pontiac's original plan for these cars? Was this what remained of a 40th Anniversary Edition package that was never officially marketed as such? A silver faced gage cluster could certainly suggest a tie in with a 40th anniversary edition. But the rest of the items listed on the sticker as part of the package do not necessarily shout 40th anniversary. So how is it that many of us have come to believe that these 794 Pulse Red cars represent a planned 40th anniversary edition?

For the answer to that we need to turn to some of the owners of these cars themselves. These owners, like the owners of all GTO's that came before them, are always working on their cars to enhance their performance and appearance. While in the process of doing this, some of the owners of the Pulse Red cars have found some interesting labels. For example, here is a photo of a label that one owner found underneath their rear seat bottom.





GTO of the Month



Or the label another owner found on the back of one of those Silver Face gage clusters:



These two labels suggest that in fact Pontiac did originally intend for the Pulse cars to be a 40th Anniversary Edition. The internal designation for this package appears to have been W40. This was discussed in the Book *GTO- Pontiac's Great One* where the author, Darwin Holmstrom wrote of the 2004 GTO:

*“Late in the model year Pontiac introduced the W40 package to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the original GTO. The W40 consisted of an exclusive paint color called Pulse Red, red GTO embroidery on the seats, and a gray gauge cluster. The last 800 2004 GTO’s build featured the W40 package.”*²

This was reinforced when I obtained a copy of the original invoice for my GTO. I have included part of that invoice below. Note that the invoice refers to the package as the W40 package.

2004 GTO COUPE		PONTIAC/GMC DIVISION
79U PULSE RED	/V8G	GENERAL MOTORS CORPORATION
812 ANTHRACITE, LEATHER TRIM COMB		100 RENAISSANCE CENTER
ORDER NO. HJJXGZ/TRE	STOCK NO.	DETROIT MI 48243-1114
		VEHICLE INVOICE 2AD49268939
		*****16*19139S
MODEL & FACTORY OPTIONS	MSRP	INV AMT
2VX37 GTO COUPE	31795.00	29410.38
FE9 50 STATE EMISSIONS	N/C	N/C
LS1 ENGINE, 8CYL 5.7L SFI	0.00	0.00
MN6 TRANSMISSION, 6-SPEED MANUAL	695.00	618.55
R6J CUSTOMER DIALOG NETWORK	0.00	16.50
W40 LIMITED EDITION PULSE RED	295.00	262.55
*PULSE RED EXTERIOR PAINT		WFP-F QTR OPT-1
*SILVER GAUGE CLUSTER FACE		BANK: GMAC - 008
*RED STITCHED GTO SEAT EMBLEM		CHG-TO 19-139
		SHIP WT: 3270
		HP: 48.7
		GMS: 30099.43
		SUPPLR: 31450.53
		MRM: 33485.00
		MEMO 1564.25

GTO of the Month

It is interesting to note that Mr. Holmstrom's description of the package varies slightly from Pontiac's in that Pontiac calls the gauge color silver and Mr. Holmstrom calls them gray. As you can see from the actual photos of the cluster and stitching from my GTO, one can make the case for calling them either color.





GTO of the Month



During my research and preparation for writing this article, I reached out to GTOAA's former webmaster, Jon Schwenn to see if any of his old contacts might be able to shed more light on the W40 package. Jon put me in contact with Mr. Jay Fitzsimmons, the Engineering Program Coordinator for the Pontiac GTO project. Jay enthusiastically agreed to contact some of the old 04 GTO team to see what they might remember. Here is what Jay sent back to me a few days later:

Unfortunately, after speaking with engineers and designers who were there on the 2004 GTO Team with me at Holden, none of us remembered a W40 edition or option code! I remember that we studied alternative paint colors, lights, grilles, spoilers, engine covers and badges, but none of it added up to enough content to justify what would have been an expensive 40th Anniversary option.

All the major enhancements that would have made a great 40th Anniversary option package for 2004 had already been approved for the 2005 GTO: 6.0 LS-2 engine with electronic throttle, new induction, new exhaust, new rear fascia, ABS 8.0 with bigger brakes, new GM LAN electrical architecture, bigger wheels, stronger transmission, stronger driveline and of course: hood scoops. Our schedule was so tight that we were working on the '05 GTO in parallel with the '04.

Jay then went on to add a final comment that I think really does a great job of tying together the classic and new age GTO's and the concept of a 40th anniversary edition:

Looking back today, perhaps the 40th Anniversary of the GTO was the 2004 Pontiac GTO itself, returning to showrooms after a 30 year vacation. In remarkable similarity with the 1964 GTO program, the 2004 GTO was a secret, back-room, after-hours project, developed in direct opposition to conservative GM culture and led by Bob Lutz himself. At the time, our global GTO Team was keenly aware of the large shoes that the 2004 GTO was expected to fill after 40 years of GTO legend, but as my dear friend Jim Wangers implored: our highest priority was to Get iT Over to Pontiac -!

References:

1. Zazarine, Paul and Witzenburg, Gary. The Legend Returns. Automotive Quarterly Publications, 2004
2. Holmstrom, Darwin. GTO—Pontiac's Great One, MBI Publishing, 2009

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Mr. Jay Fitzsimmons for his enthusiastic response to my request for help on this article and taking the time to provide me with his outstanding inputs.





Celebrate Bob Lutz Event



Celebrate Bob Lutz Event By Chris Winslow

Early last spring, the organizers of an event to celebrate the life and achievements of iconic car guy Bob Lutz reached out to GTOAA's Tom Szymczyk looking for some help locating a 2004 GTO. The reason they needed a New Gen Goat was that they were planning a vehicle display at this event with at least one copy of every car that Mt. Lutz had developed during his amazing career in the automotive industry. The 2004 GTO was one of the cars on that list.

Tom put the event organizers in touch with me and I then reached out to some people with really good copies of the 2004 GTO to see where there would be some interest in attending. In the end, it was my own Pulse Red GTO that got the organizers attention and was ultimately selected for the display. (And in fact, as it turned out, was the only New Gen GTO at the event)

When the organizers called me to ask me to bring the car to the event in April of 2023, I enthusiastically agreed. This event was going to be held at an aircraft hangar near Ann Arbor Michigan. The organizers asked me if I would be trailering the car up to the event, I told them that I always drive my GTO to events and it had always been very reliable over the years. That turned out to be mistake number 1! After having that conversation, I headed out to the garage to pull the cover off of the GTO to evaluate what it would take to get it cleaned up and ready for such a big show. What I found was that, after 19 years of nearly flawless service, that there was a big puddle of coolant under the car. The radiator had sprung a leak!

As many of you who know me are aware, I have been squirreling away spare parts for years, so I actually had a brand new AC-Delco radiator on the shelf in my inventory. I also had new GM factory hoses, so it was time to pull all of those off the shelf and get them in the car. In addition, given the show I was going to, I decided to also replace the coolant reservoir tank and the power steering tank as both had yellowed over the years. I was going for looking as close to brand new as possible.

With all of the new parts in hand, I went to work replacing the radiator hoses, radiator, and the coolant and power steering fluid tank. Once that was done, and after a thorough detailing of the engine compartment, everything was looking factory fresh.

The shakedown cruise for all of these repairs was our upcoming Gateway GTO cruise to Hannibal. All of the new parts performed perfectly on that cruise. Unfortunately, a new problem came up. When preparing to drive home from the hotel on Sunday morning, I jumped in the GTO and the clutch pedal went straight to the floor! I had been through that before with my '98 Trans Am a few years earlier. It was the dreaded failure of the slave cylinder. Fortunately, the drive home was mostly highway, so I was able to limp the car home.

10 years ago, I would probably have tried to change that myself. But these days I really don't like getting under a car up on jack stands and work was crazy, so finding time to get it done in time for the trip to Michigan was questionable. Fortunately, there is a really great auto shop literally 2 blocks from my house. So, I arranged to have them make the repair. It took me a few weeks to get all of the parts together since I wanted to replace everything while they had it apart.

The shop had the car for a few days over the 4th of July holiday. Once I got the GTO back, I only had time for a quick drive around town to make sure it was good to go. The shakedown cruise was going to be the drive to Michigan.

Celebrate Bob Lutz Event

So, with the GTO loaded up for the Michigan run, Paula and I headed out after work on the Thursday before the event. The GTO drove perfectly. We did have a relay stick on the way, but I had a spare with me and swapped it out during a gas stop.

The Celebrate Bob Lutz event was scheduled for July 29th. The morning of the event, unfortunately, it was raining. So we drove from the hotel to the airfield, pretty much ruining all of the detailing I had done in the parking lot of the hotel the night before. But, as we say all of the time, when you schedule these things months in advance the weather is what it is.



The display area for the cars that Bob had worked to develop over his career was just outside the hanger doors. As the morning progressed, the rain stopped, so we all were able to get the display cars dried off. It was a really great mix of cars covering over 40 years of Mr.



Celebrate Bob Lutz Event

Lutz's career. I wound up between a 1995 Viper GTS and a 1997 Plymouth Prowler. In addition to those of us that were in the official display, there were a number of other cars parked out on the tarmac. It was a truly impressive display of automotive history.

Inside, there were even more cars to see. Both GM and Chrysler had brought out concept cars to the event. These included the 2003 Cadillac 16 concept and the 1995 Chrysler Atlantic Concept Car.





The event itself was really a combination of birthday party and lifetime achievement recognition event for Mt. Lutz. There was a luncheon followed by a number of speakers from all corners of the automotive world. The MC for the event was none other than Csaba Csere, former Editor-In-Chief of Car and Driver from 1993 to 2008. The speakers included Franciscus van Meel, the CEO of BMW's M Division, Mark Trostle, VP of Ram and MoPar design at Stellantis (Chrysler) and Wayne Cherry, retired VP of design for GM..

By far, the highlight of the event, however, was when Mr. Lutz himself took the stage. At the time of this event, Mr. Lutz had celebrated his 91st birthday a few months earlier in February. There was no doubt, however, once he started talking that he was every bit as sharp and in tune with the automotive business as he has always been. He discussed a number of topics in the automotive industry in the somewhat blunt while at the same time humorous manner he was known for in both his public speaking and also his books.

I have always been a fan of Maximum Bob Lutz since I first became aware of him during his



Celebrate Bob Lutz Event

time at Chrysler. I believe to this day that the greatest blunder made by any of the Big 3 was when Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca retired in 1992 and appointed Robert Eaton as his successor instead of Bob Lutz. One can only imagine where Chrysler would be today had Mr. Lutz taken the helm through the 1990s.

These days, Mr. Lutz is mostly retired, although I would not be surprised if he was still consulting from time to time. During his speech, Mr. Lutz told the audience that he had finally given up motorcycle riding (I believe he said when he turned 88!). Now what he does in his spare time is make car and aircraft models. He does not, however, buy model kits to make them. Instead he actually makes them from paper and cardboard by hand. They actually had some of these at the event and auctioned them off for charity.



I enjoyed this event immensely. It was an opportunity to travel to the heart of the US automotive industry and see and hear some of the most famous people in the automotive business past and present in person. Mr. Lutz is a living legend. His book *Car Guys VS Bean Counters* is still one of my favorite books. Getting the opportunity to see him in person was something that I will never forget.

Celebrate Bob Lutz Event



Celebrate Bob Lutz Event

