

2019 GTOAA National Convention

By Chris Winslow



The GTOAA Nationals was held this year in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. This was the first year for the official judging of the 2004 GTO's, a project I had been working on for a number of years. As the GTOAA coordinator for Next Gen GTO Concours program, I decided I needed to arrive early to be there all day Tuesday and Wednesday so that when the 2004's entered in the Concours show arrived, I would be there to check them in.

I had decided to put my car in the Concours show in April for a few reasons. One of the main ones that I thought that since I was administrating the process for the new cars, it would be worthwhile to have experienced the process myself. So, starting in mid April, I took the GTO off the road and started a major cleaning exercise in the big garage. I worked evenings and each weekend on another area until by early June I had it all completed.

I did have a few parts issues to address. I had been running Optima (AGM) batteries in the GTO for a number of years because with those batteries you never have to worry about a leak damaging the car. In fact, I had just installed a new one in March. But, for a Concours stock car, the judging standards were clear, a GM replacement was needed, so off to the Chevy dealer I went to get an appropriate AC Delco battery. (Fortunately, the Corvette still used essentially the same battery until 2014, so they had them in stock. From GTOG8TA.com I ordered a factory correct battery insulator pad as the original had disintegrated years ago. I had already replaced the factory Pontiac emblems on the front and back with genuine Pontiac replacements (the old ones had faded from red to kind of an sad orange color). I also pulled out the only real mod I had ever done to the GTO, the dead pedal modification I made using a factory gas pedal. (I REALLY missed that on the drive to and from Indiana!)



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As we all know the weather in the Midwest has been more than a little wet all spring and into the summer. I was planning to caravan with Tom and Terrie Oxler on Monday morning (June 24th) but given how much time and effort I had put into cleaning the GTO, I was seriously thinking of leaving a day earlier to avoid the rain. In the end, the weather Sunday did not look promising either, so I decided to just stick with Monday.

Monday morning arrived. With the GTO loaded up with a bunch of cleaning supplies and all of the materials that I would need for the Concours program, I rolled out of the big garage early Monday and headed for the Oxler's. We started in Missouri with dry weather, but then came Illinois. It rained all the way across Illinois. After an hour or so, I figured all the cleaning was out the window and there is a rumor that I punched it and blew past the Oxlers when we got stuck inside a group of trucks. There may have been a Facebook post on it.....

As bad as the weather was in Illinois, it really turned loose on us in Indiana. By the time we finally rolled into the hotel (where it was still raining), I knew I had a lot of hours of work ahead only to have a car that was nowhere near as clean as it had been earlier in the day when I rolled out. I guess the one silver lining is that nobody



could accuse me of having a trailer queen!

The hotel venue for the GTOAA convention was the Doubletree hotel on the riverfront. It was a beautiful location with a really nice small town main street vibe. The plan for the car shows had the Concours show inside the hotel and the Popular Vote, Street Legends, and Original Owners show in the covered parking garage. This meant that all of

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the cars would be out of the weather. There were interesting lighting situations in both locations, but more on that later.

There were already a number of GTOAA people there as well as members of the host club, with more arriving as the afternoon progressed. We all met up for dinner at the Riverwatch restaurant, which is located on a boat out on the river.

After dinner, I found my way to a self service carwash and sprayed off as much of the dirt from the trip as possible and then returned to the hotel and worked until it got dark cleaning up the GTO the best I could. I knew that once the convention got rolling the next day, I would not have any time to deal with any cleaning.

The next morning, the GTOAA Tech Inspection area opened as scheduled. The one good thing about the rain the day before is that it had cooled off the temps and the humidity was also reasonably low. This coupled with the fact that the Tech tent was in shade from the parking garage made this one of the nicer tech areas we have had at any convention I had been to.



There was a steady stream of cars into the tech area Tuesday, but it never got too backed up. Since I had a relatively small number of cars to tech in relative to the classic GTO's, I assisted with teching classic cars where I could. At one point when Lance Hudnell popped up at the Tech tent for a few minutes, I got him to tech my car in so that I could get it inside the convention hall.

As Tuesday progressed into Wednesday, the Gateway GTO gang began to arrive. As always, we had a great turnout from the club. Those that attended included the Oxlers, the Mays, the Bowers', the Chapmans, the Hedricks', the Duryea's, John Johnson, the Jacksons, the Mortons, the Kries', the Rays, the Maczuras, the Mayweathers, the Schotts, Harry Timmerman, Tom Fox and Laura Kiefer, the Huesgens, the Wildebrandts, the Finkenbinders, Mark Melrose, Scott Hudler, and the Vies. Paula, who did not have enough vacation time to spend the whole week, flew in on Thursday for the rest of the week.

By Wednesday evening all of the 2004's registered for the Concours judging had been through tech and were in place on the show field along with the rest of the Concours cars. 3 were indoors and one was out in the parking garage at the request of the owner. We had the standard meetings with the owners and the judges as usual that afternoon. For my Next Gen Team, I had several judges that had judged last year and two new judges who had volunteered to work the event. All of us attended the judges meeting following the owners meeting and



most of us also stayed for the training session afterwards to get a refresher on the finer points of judging and interacting with the owners.

While I was busy working on the Concours judging, the Gateway members were participating in a number of activities. One of them was a cruise to the relatively nearby Neon Museum organized and led by the Schotts. Unfortunately, Gail's recently completed beautiful 1970 GTO convertible had a bit of mechanical issue along the way. Perhaps Terry will give us a write-up on the details once he gets to the bottom of it. In addition to this trip, there was also a cruise to Quaker Steak and Lube that several members attended.

While all this was going on I was focused on the Concours show. As I mentioned earlier, there was an interesting light situation at both the indoor and outdoor venues. Inside the convention center, the lighting was very bright LED light-

ing. As anyone that is familiar with LED lights probably knows, they are REALLY good at showing every minute imperfection in the finish of a car. These LED lights were no exception and in fact they seemed to be better at exposing defects than any LEDs I had ever encountered. There was lots of talk about that all over the showfield. It made me really appreciate just how perfect the finish is on some of the cars that show up for these GTOAA events. Conversely, the lighting out in the parking garage was not at all good. Fortunately we had flashlights for our judging, because otherwise it would have been really difficult to do our work.

With the judging of the Concours show completed (although still lots of work to go to put together the awards and awards program), it was time for some other GTOAA activities. That evening (Thursday) most of the Gateway gang at the convention attended the Chapter night. During the awards section of the event, Gateway was recognized for 100% GTOAA membership, website, newsletter, and social media activities. The big event of the evening, however, was the announcement that Gateway GTO had been named Chapter of the Year!

There were two big events on the agenda for Friday. The first was the Popular Vote car show. Paula and I grabbed our ballot and our clipboard Friday morning and headed out to the show field. As noted earlier, the lighting in the parking garage made this a bit of a challenge,



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particularly on the darker cars. As always on the Popular vote, the event was as much about talking to the owners as it was about looking at the cars.

Later on Friday was the Parking Lot Party. The event was staged at a small park a few blocks from the hotel. The music was provided by the Rusty Baden Band. The band was really good and the spot most of the Gateway gang chose had an ice cream shop on the corner. What more could we ask for? There was apparently some “rolling on the river” on the park lawn that happened towards the end of the evening. Many of us unfortunately missed that!

Saturday arrived and it was time for the Awards Banquet. The dinner itself was a buffet, but it was by far the best buffet I have ever seen at a GTOAA event. There were multiple meat and vegetable choices along with salads and a number of other dishes. The hotel had also done a great job setting the banquet room for the event.



With the dinner over, it was time for the awards. Gateway had two of the biggest of the night. First, was the awarding of the actual plaque for the Chapter of the Year award. Terry accepted the award on behalf of the club.

The next award was a real surprise to all of us. It was no secret within Gateway that the club had nominated Tom Oxler. In fact, Tom himself, as a board member for GTOAA,



was aware of the nomination and had told current GTOAA president Vic Shrek that he did not think it was appropriate for a GTOAA board member to receive the award. Vic, however, had other ideas. So, without Tom's knowledge, Vic proceeded with the Tom Foster award for Tom anyway. This was a very closely guarded secret known to only a small handful of people in advance. So, when Vic announced Tom as the winner of the Tom Foster award, it came as a surprise. Tom was so surprised, that when I talked to him about it later he had not realized that he received a standing ovation when his name

was announced. When Terry first suggested that Gateway put Tom up for the award, we all agreed that there was nobody more deserving in all of the GTOAA. Terry and Gail put together a great nomination package, but given all that Tom has done to promote the GTO hobby in general and GTOAA specifically, they could probably have just sent in a piece of paper with nothing more than Tom's name on it and he would have won. This award is GTOAA's highest honor and there is nobody more deserving.

The rest of the evening was dedicated to the car and other event awards. Here is the listing for the Gateway award winners:

- Longest Distance Driven, New Gens – Dave Huesgen
- Street Legends "Gold Rush" Award – Rich Vie
- Street Legends "MPG Award" - Dave Kries
- Frank Chapman – 1st Place – Popular Vote
- Will Bowers – 1st Place – Popular Vote
- Don Duryea - 1st Place - Popular Vote
- Harry Timmerman – 1st Place – Popular Vote
- Steve Hedrick – 2nd Place – Popular Vote
- Brian Ray – 2nd Place – Popular Vote
- Tom Oxler – 2nd Place - Popular Vote
- Joe Mayweather – 2nd Place – Popular Vote
- Roger Maczura – Concours Gold
- Chris Winslow – Concours Gold

For me the highlight of the car awards part of the event was handing out the first official GTOAA Concours Awards for Next Gen GTO's. It was the culmination of nearly 10 years of work on the project. After the ceremony was over, I was able to gather this first official class of Next Gen GTO Concours owners together for a group photo.

The first year of judging for the new cars actually went really smoothly, largely thanks to a great team of judges. I have a few odds and ends to work on to be ready for next year based on some recommendations from that team. That work is already underway because before we know it, we will all be together again in Wichita.....



2019 GTOAA Next Gen GTO Concours Awards



2019 GTOAA Next Gen GTO Concours Judging Team