

# Pontiac Fiero GT

*How to succeed success?*

• It may be that nothing succeeds like success, but then success doesn't succeed as well as it used to. Take the case of the Pontiac Fiero. It was obvious from the start that the Fiero was going to be a winner. The plastic-over-steel sportster was the right car at the right time. We applauded it as one of the Ten Best Cars of 1984. As this is written, Pontiac has already built 100,000 Fieros—as many units as the factory has been able to pump out. By any measure, this car is a hit.

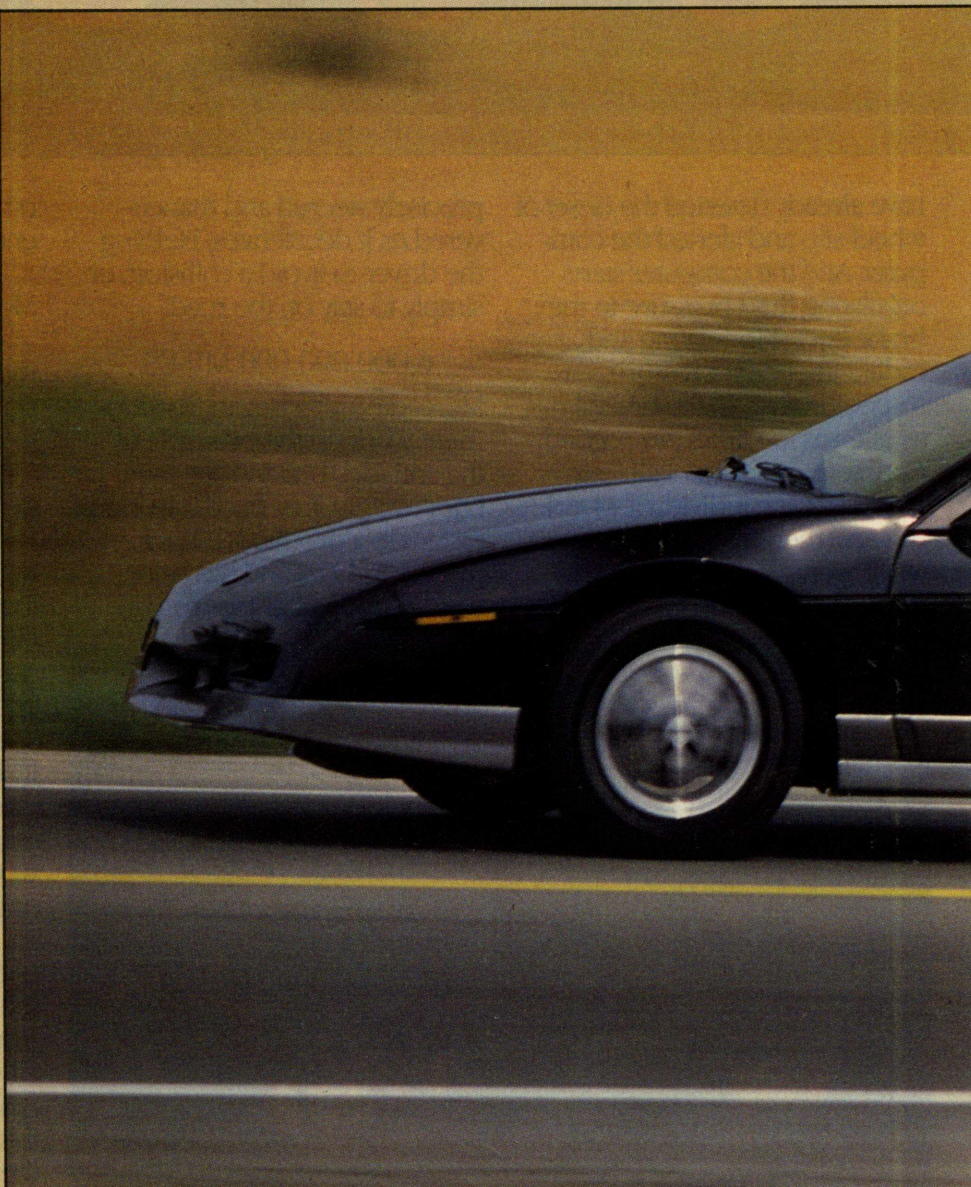
These days, though, the competition is so tough in the car business, there's no such thing as leaving well enough alone. This is especially true if you happen to be the manufacturer of popularly priced mid-engined two-seaters. Toyota will have such a car on the market by spring. Rumors abound that numerous other carmakers are on the same wavelength. In other words, it's a jungle out there.

The Fiero GT is proof that the Pontiac division understands the rules of the game. The GT, which will go on sale at the beginning of the year, is the first evolutionary step for the Fiero line. It's also a move that about halves the distance between the original Fiero 2M4 and our ideal of the true driver's car.

Clearly, help was needed. The Fiero 2M4 was plenty good for the first time out of the box, but it was a far cry from perfect. After some time in the saddle, it became apparent that, on the 1984 scale, the Fiero was an underachiever in both performance and handling.

To a certain extent, this is understandable. You may recall that the Fiero was conceived by a handful of Pontiac engineers as a low-priced commuter car that would share a host of components with other GM car lines. Its front suspension, for instance, is basically made from Chevette pieces. The standard four-cylinder engine, trans-axle, and rear suspension are front-drive X-car parts. Only toward the end of its development did the Fiero begin to evolve into a sports car. Most of the Fiero engineers are painfully aware of the original design's shortcomings, so you can expect a slew of important changes in the next few years. (See page 46.)

Think of the GT as phase one of that program. The visual giveaways to this new model's identity are as plain as the nose on your face. The GT borrows the slick bodywork from the 1984 Indy pace car: the ta-

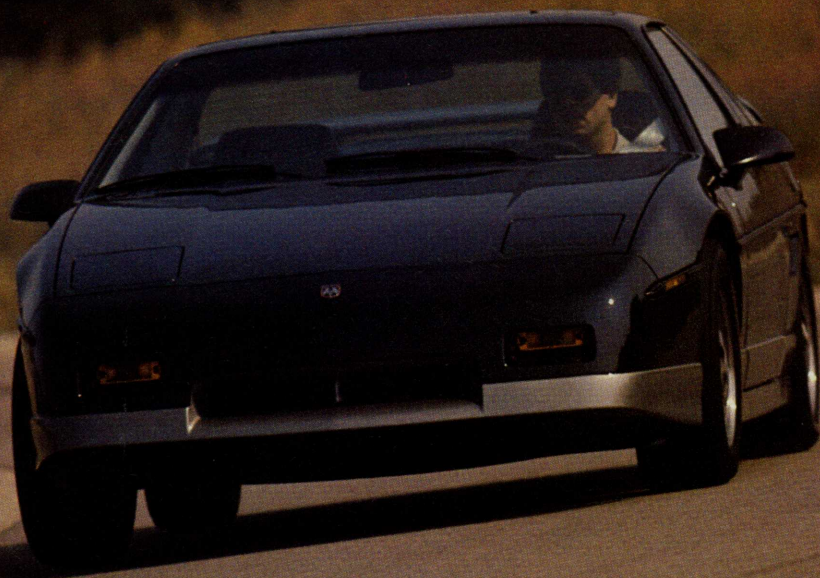


pered fighter-plane snout, the rocker-panel extensions, the rear-deck spoiler (optional), and the rear bumper reshaped to look as though it has Indy-car ground-effects tunnels. Only the GT model will have this bodywork, which reduces the drag coefficient from a lackluster 0.41 to a respectable 0.35.

Inside, there are few clues to this model's brand-newness. A beautifully crafted, three-spoked sport steering wheel (last seen on the 1984 Firebird Trans Am anniversary edition) is the most important revi-

sion. Ardent Fiero watchers may notice that the racing stripes have disappeared from the sport seats, that an oil-pressure gauge has been added, that the graphic markings on the instruments are new, that several control buttons are now soft-touch designs, that the shift lever is a tad longer, and that the radio is ever more complicated. But that's it.

The real news is what you see when you pop the deck lid: blood-red paint and gleaming polished aluminum adorning a new port-fuel-injected 2.8-liter V-6. Gone



is the feeble Iron Duke (reworked yet again this year and renamed Tech IV), which will remain the base motivator in all other Fieros. (The V-6 is also available as an option in non-GT Fieros.)

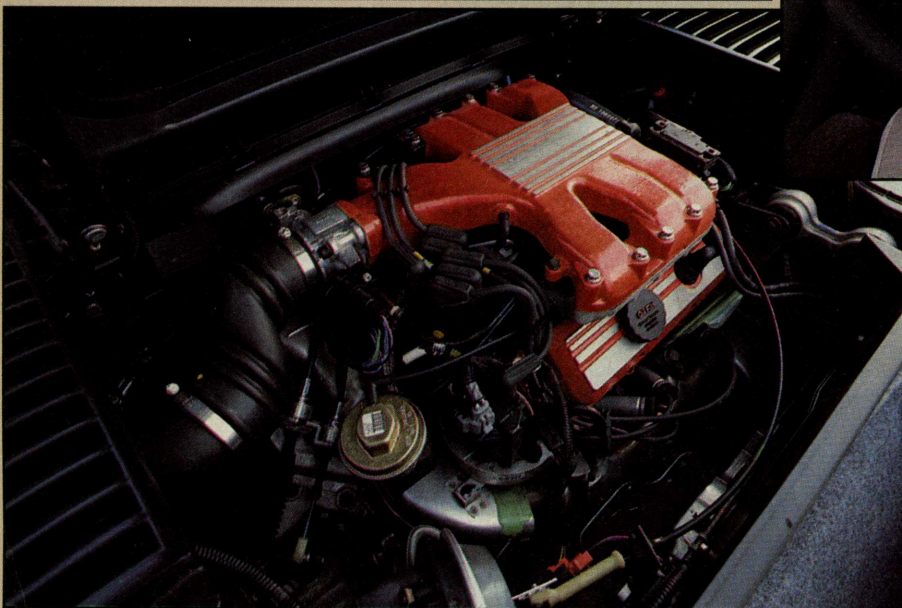
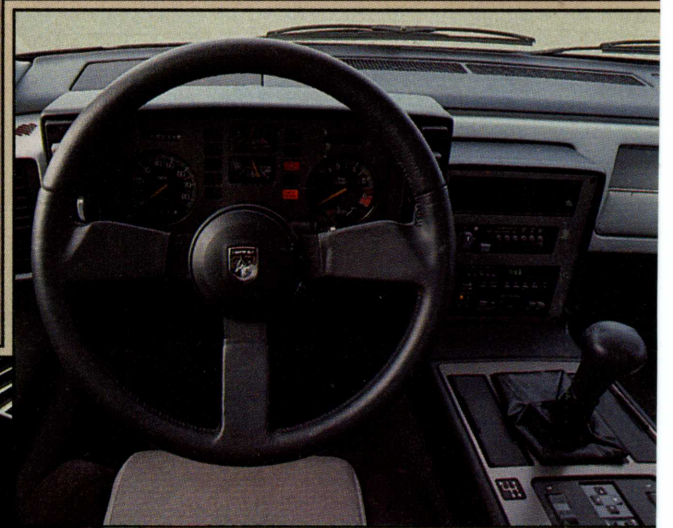
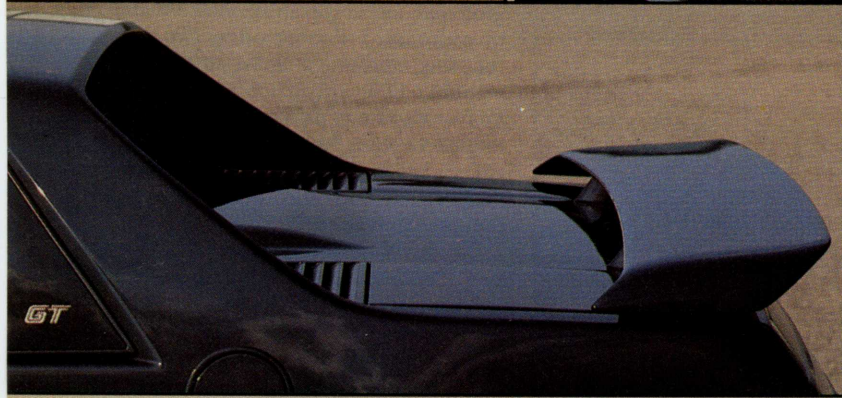
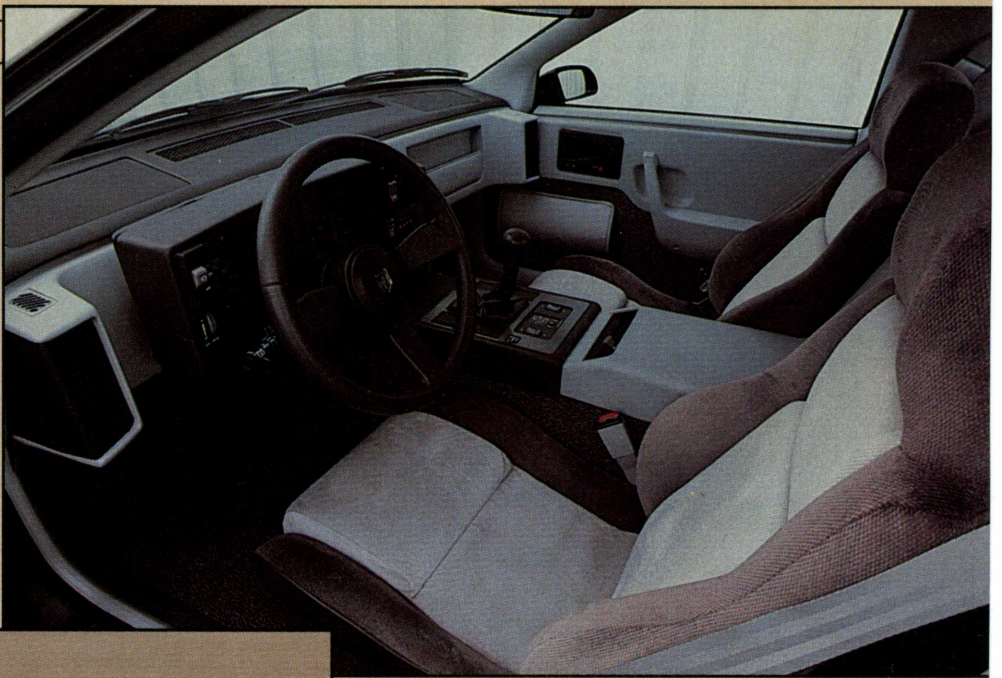
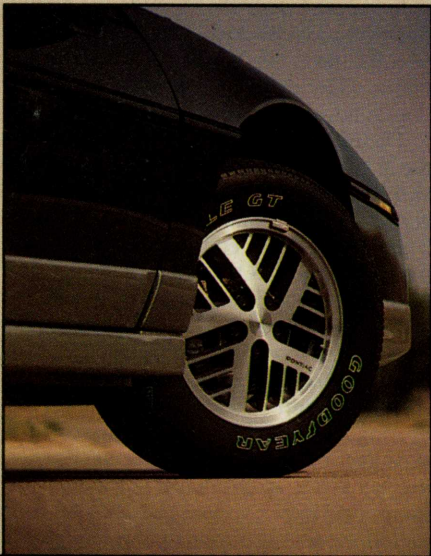
The new V-6 is actually based heavily on the 2.8-liter high-output unit we've seen and driven over the past four years in everything from Citation X-11s to 6000STEs. The new-for-1985 edition breathes freely, thanks to the H.O.'s cylinder heads and camshaft, a new ram-tuned intake manifold, and a low-restriction exhaust system. Fuel is delivered by six Bosch injectors managed by the engine-control computer. Although both Chevrolet and Buick are moving aggressively toward mass-airflow sensors for their injection systems, Pontiac has chosen a speed-density strategy: the theoretical intake-air mass is *calculated* from measurements of various parameters (engine rpm, air temperature, intake-manifold pressure, etc.). Pontiac offers two reasons for this choice: a mass-airflow meter wouldn't fit in the space available in the Fiero's engine compartment, and Pontiac engineers were far more familiar with the speed-density scheme, having used it extensively in both throttle-body and port fuel-injection systems.

To this Chevrolet-built engine (coded L44) Pontiac adds its own custom-tailored exhaust system, consisting of fabricated sheetmetal headers, carefully routed pipes, and a low-restriction muffler. The net result is 140 hp at 5200 rpm—from five to fifteen more horsepower than any other GM division is squeezing from this powerplant—and 170 pounds-feet of torque at 3600 rpm. While these figures represent only a 5-hp gain over last year's carbureted H.O. engine, there is a solid seventeen-percent jump in the torque output. This fatter torque curve backs up the rumors that the sophisticated fuel-injection system was added to the V-6 primarily to improve its fuel mileage. (The corporation's average fuel economy has been sliding badly as the public's interest has surged toward more powerful engines.)

The 2.8-liter is handicapped somewhat by having to work through the same old four-speed manual transaxle that was introduced on the X-cars nearly six years ago. Unfortunately, GM still doesn't have a five-speed gearbox stout enough to handle the torque of this V-6. Shame, shame. At least Pontiac put the Fiero's balky cable shift linkage through a thorough tuneup, something you can feel at the first throw of the elongated lever.

Everything so far qualifies as improving the breed. Unfortunately, though, this year's training program stopped short of working the suspension into shape. The low-ball commuter-car pieces will eventually be scrapped for a higher-performance design, but for now the engineers could only work with what they had—which is to say, not enough.

FIERO GT



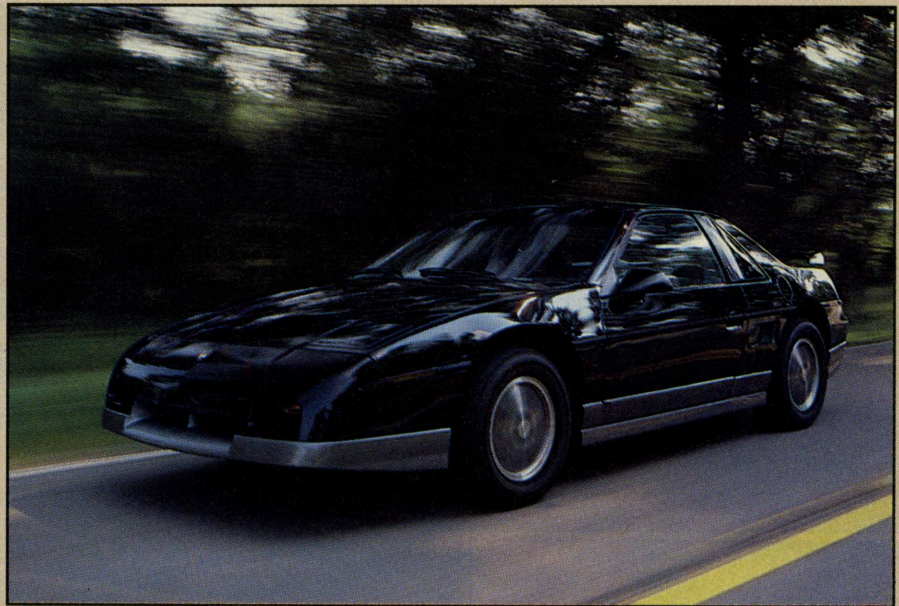
The changes to the chassis are subtle, and they apply to all Fieros—four-cylinder or six—equipped with the WS6 handling package. The front lower control arms have been revised to provide an additional half-inch of travel. At the rear, the spring rates were upped by ten percent, and the shock absorbers were revalved. There are also revisions to reduce rear-suspension steering effects created by body roll in cornering; the intention was to diminish tail

wag during emergency lane changes. In addition, we're told that the brake balance was shifted more toward the front during 1984, at least in part because of our complaints about the Fiero's tail-end jitters during hard braking.

Those are the hard facts of the case. But is there any poetry here? After putting all the pieces in motion, we have to answer with an unqualified "no." If you've ever driven a Fiero, you won't be surprised by

the GT: it feels like, well, a Fiero with a good motor.

If only the rest of the car were as good as its engine. The new exhaust note is a beautiful rasp, and the V-6 is smooth and sweet all the way to the 6000-rpm redline. The GT's 8.2-second 0-to-60 time and 119-mph top speed (Pontiac's claim) make it about three seconds quicker and fourteen miles per hour faster than the Fiero in four-cylinder trim. Those stats slot it into the same speed class as the Dodge Daytona Turbo, the BMW 325e, and the Volvo 760GLE Turbo—pretty good company—



## COUNTERPOINT

• The Fiero was born a commuter car and will carry on throughout the 1985 model year as a commuter car, V-6 or no. Last year it was a *slow* commuter car, and this year it's a much faster one (with the L44 engine), but don't expect this machine to make your heart sing: a pleasant ride to and from work is pretty much the upper limit to the joy that's available in Pontiac's two-seater.

What we have here is a sports car on the installment plan. Last year we got the looks. This year comes more power. Pontiac claims the check's in the mail for the rest of the parts we'd like to see.

But don't expect overnight delivery. Nobody within GM is hurrying, because the Fiero is Pontiac's biggest hit in some time. A review of past sales figures does indeed reveal that the legendary GTO never cracked the 100,000-cars-per-year barrier in its distinguished eleven-year run, an accomplishment the Fiero enjoyed right out of the box. So what's the rub, Pontiac asks. Their customers love the Fiero and are still bidding against one another to get one. If Confucius were here to comment, he might advise: "If the public wants commuters, give them commuters!" —Don Sherman

This car has a displacement problem, but not in cubic inches. When you're running quickly, a big bump in the middle of a corner will displace the Fiero several feet. It takes the bit in its teeth and lunges off helter-skelter. And, in the midst of wrestling grimly with the sharply kicking wheel, your elbow can strike the exposed release button on the shoulder-harness latch, whereupon the tang pops right out of the buckle. Now there's a comforting feeling.

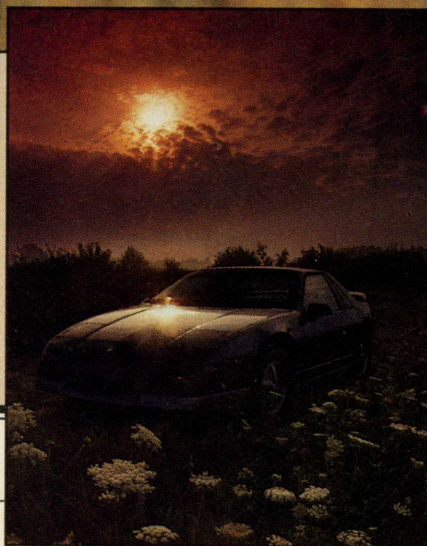
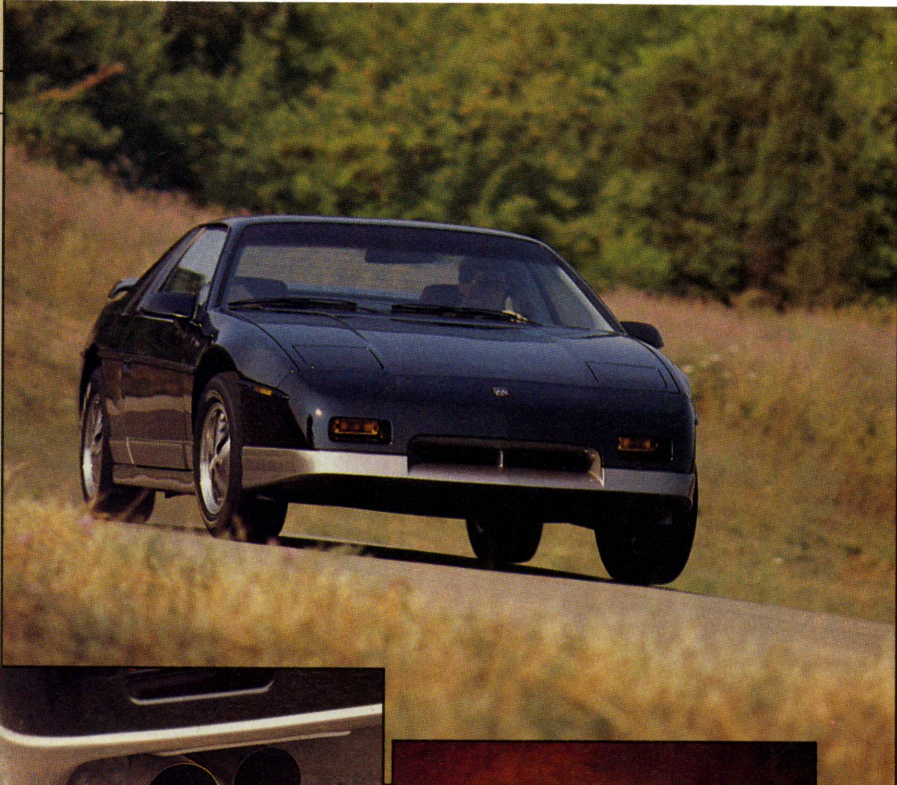
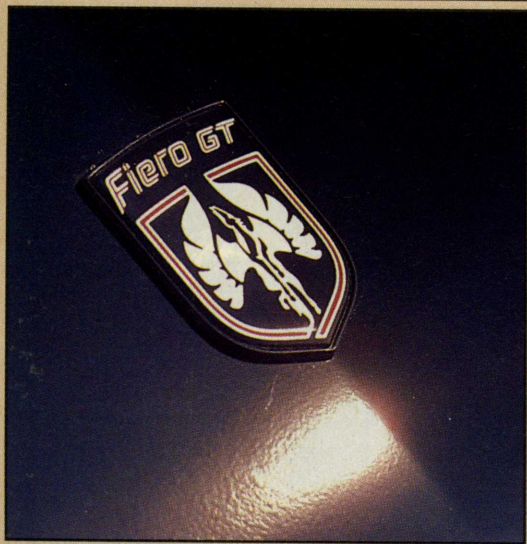
Furthermore, although anesthetics are normally administered in milligrams, that's not how it's been done by Pontiac. The Fiero's steering has been Novocained until stuporous. It feels okay heading down the smooth boulevard from the GM Proving Grounds, yet once in the real world it looms up to swaddle most of what you want to know. But worse even than the steering is that suspension. Hustle the Fiero GT, as buyers of the bigger engine surely will, and it only arrives at its suspension problems at a higher rate of speed. The car bounds and flails and does mostly what it pleases. Which ain't at all pleasing. —Larry Griffin

How embarrassing. Every time a Fiero goes by, my head goes into full swivel. Never mind its Iron Duke wheezer of a four-banger. Never mind its floaty, floppy suspension. Never mind its drugged steering and muddled shift linkage. I look every time, even when several Fieros go by within minutes of one another (a fairly common occurrence around Detroit). What a waste of good sports-car flesh.

Thankfully, Pontiac makes Fiero lust less sinful in 1985, with the addition of an optional 2.8-liter V-6 engine, an improved shifter, and sexy Indy-pace-car-type bodywork for the GT. The plastic body still squirrels around on its corners under braking, over rough road, and especially when cornering. And the three-two downshift is still a thought provoker. And there's no five-speed with the V-6. Still, the punch of the six-cylinder is enough to reduce the charge for Fiero watching from a felony to a misdemeanor. —Jean Lindamood

yet in the real world it doesn't seem really "fast." Nevertheless, the new energy level is more than enough to eliminate one of our two major complaints about the original Fiero.

Get the GT out on a stretch of meandering two-lane, however, and little is different. If your favorite run is as smooth as a satin ribbon, you'll find the GT fairly competent. The roads most of us must cope with, though, bring out the worst in this car—at least when you drive athletically.



Lumps and bumps, even when taken straight on, make it dart nervously. Creased pavement in the middle of a fast sweeper sets the GT hopping and sends shock waves back through the steering wheel. And when the suspension really gets exercised, you can even hear the plastic body panels clapping against one another.

er. Around town, the steering is heavy. This is definitely not the stuff of thoroughbred GT cars.

The upshot is that the Fiero is not yet ready to take its place among the world's better road cars. Oh, it lopes through the day-to-day routine well enough, but it's not the kind of car that begs you to take it out

## Future Fiero Tech

*The greening of Pontiac's protagonist.*

• Yes, sports-car fans, Pontiac does have a future in mind for the Fiero; one that goes far beyond this year's V-6 engine bolted to last year's chassis. It will take time to materialize—far more, in fact, than you or we might like—but at least it is Pontiac's stated intention to purge the Fiero's soul of all its commuter-car characteristics. After persistent needling, the engineering department has admitted to the following timetable:

**1986**—No major changes to the suspension, but the wheels and tires with the WS6 package will be upgraded to fifteen-inch designs. We have spotted test cars wearing Goodyear Eagle GTs in a 205/60R-15 size in front and a 215/60R-15 size in back. A Getrag-designed five-speed will be available with the V-6.

**1987**—This is the big year for a thorough overhaul of all suspension and brake equipment. The Chevette-based front axle will be trash-canned; in its place will go a clean-sheet design unique to the Fiero, which should remedy to-

day's bumpy-road handling ills in one fell swoop. There will be longer control arms for more wheel travel, increased anti-dive geometry, a shorter scrub radius, and a far tighter turning circle.

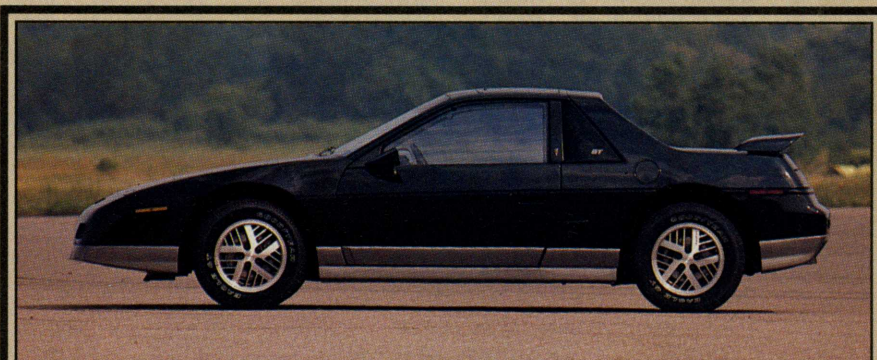
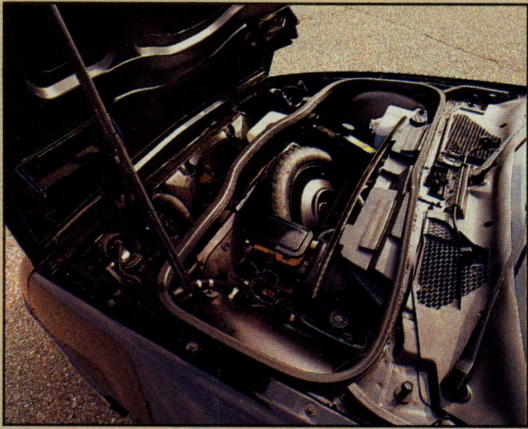
A new electrohydraulic rack-and-pinion power-steering system will provide assist below 15 mph to help ease parking effort. Hydraulic pressure will come from a pump driven by its own electric motor instead of by the engine. An electronic circuit that senses road speed will switch off the assistance above 15 mph.

The rear suspension will also be redesigned at this time. The basic X-car struts will be saved, but the new layout will have two lateral links and one trailing link per side instead of the X-car's A-shaped control arms. This change will provide more anti-squat, greatly reduced impact harshness, and better deflection-steer characteristics.

The brake hardware will be revamped along with the suspension. Today's solid rotors will be upgraded to vented de-

signs. Pontiac has experimented with anti-skid brakes in the 6000STE, but it's unclear at present whether such hardware might find its way into the Fiero.

Engine improvements are slated for not only the Pontiac-built Tech IV but also the V-6 supplied by Chevrolet: both should have new aluminum cylinder heads for the 1987 model year. Pontiac's racing department has demonstrated that its 300-horsepower, 2.7-liter, heavy-duty four-cylinder engine can be civilized for street use and still produce 190 horsepower—with pushrods. As a result, the prevailing attitudes lean more toward squeezing additional power out of existing designs than toward tooling up all-new engines. Nevertheless, Chevrolet's 2.8-liter V-6 is currently scheduled for a fairly ambitious improvement program: overhead camshafts. (By 1987, the distinction between Pontiac and Chevrolet engineering will have faded noticeably, because both divisions are now part of GM's new small-car group and all techni-



on Sunday morning for a hard run. The changes are all good as far as they go, and for that Pontiac deserves credit. But until the Fiero's chassis is up to the task, we suggest that you consider this car's call letters in a slightly different light. In this case, "GT" stands for "Good Touring," not "Grand."

—Rich Ceppos

cal resources will gradually be pooled.) In addition to more power, the Tech IV will be given balance shafts to improve idle and high-rpm shake characteristics.

**1990**—Eventually there will be an all-new Fiero. From today's vantage, the 1990 model year is the best guess as to when the new design will be unveiled. The mid-engine, two-seat configuration and the use of plastic body panels will certainly be saved, but the underlying steel structure will be reengineered to make the Fiero much lighter and a good deal less expensive to manufacture.

The aftermarket will of course fill in various voids in Pontiac's factory program. Turbo kits and T-top packages are already yours for the asking. GM's design staff is said to be cooperating with ASC on the ex-factory manufacture of a Fiero roadster. Fender kits will abound as soon as the fiberglass vendors learn how easy it is to graft parts onto Pontiac's substructure. Some firms have gone so far as to inquire about the possibility of buying the rolling chassis from Pontiac *sans skin* in the hope of adding their own bodywork. In other words, the Fiero may be the greatest boon to the kit-car industry since the VW Beetle.

—Don Sherman

**Vehicle type:** mid-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger, 2-door coupe

**Price as tested:** \$13,000 (estimated)

**Options on test car:** air conditioning, AM/FM-stereo radio/cassette, tilt steering column, intermittent wipers, sunroof, power windows, carpeted floor mats, rear spoiler.

**Sound system:** Delco AM/FM-stereo radio/cassette with graphic equalizer, 6 speakers, 7 watts per channel

**ENGINE**

Type ..... V-6, iron block and heads  
 Bore x stroke ..... 3.50 x 2.99 in, 89.0 x 76.0mm  
 Displacement ..... 171 cu in, 2837cc  
 Compression ratio ..... 8.5:1  
 Engine-control system ..... Pontiac-Delco electronic  
 Emissions controls ..... 3-way catalytic converter, feedback fuel-air-ratio control, EGR  
 Valve gear ..... pushrods, hydraulic lifters  
 Power (SAE net) ..... 140 bhp @ 5200 rpm  
 Torque (SAE net) ..... 170 lbs-ft @ 3600 rpm  
 Redline ..... 6000 rpm

**DRIVETRAIN**

Transmission ..... 4-speed  
 Final-drive ratio ..... 3.65:1  
 Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max. test speed  
 I 3.31 5.7 34 mph (6000 rpm)  
 II 1.95 10.0 60 mph (6000 rpm)  
 III 1.24 15.3 92 mph (6000 rpm)  
 IV 0.81 23.5 100 mph (4250 rpm)

**DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES**

Wheelbase ..... 93.4 in  
 Track, F/R ..... 57.8/58.7 in  
 Length ..... 165.1 in  
 Width ..... 68.9 in  
 Height ..... 46.9 in  
 Ground clearance ..... 5.4 in

Curb weight ..... 2728 lbs  
 Weight distribution, F/R ..... 43.5/56.5%  
 Fuel capacity ..... 10.0 gal  
 Oil capacity ..... 4.0 qt  
 Water capacity ..... 13.7 qt

**CHASSIS/BODY**

Type ..... unit construction with rubber-isolated powertrain cradle  
 Body material ..... fiberglass-reinforced plastic

**INTERIOR**

SAE volume, front seat ..... 51 cu ft  
 trunk space ..... 6 cu ft  
 Front seats ..... bucket  
 Recliner type ..... ratchet  
 General comfort ..... poor fair **good** excellent  
 Fore-and-aft support ..... poor fair **good** excellent  
 Lateral support ..... poor fair **good** excellent

**SUSPENSION**

F: ..... ind, unequal-length control arms, coil springs, anti-sway bar  
 R: ..... ind, MacPherson strut, coil springs

**STEERING**

Type ..... rack-and-pinion  
 Turns lock-to-lock ..... 3.0  
 Turning circle curb-to-curb ..... 39.9 ft

**BRAKES**

F: ..... 9.7 x 0.4-in disc  
 R: ..... 9.7 x 0.5-in disc  
 Power assist ..... vacuum

**WHEELS AND TIRES**

Wheel size ..... 6.0 x 14 in  
 Wheel type ..... cast aluminum  
 Tire make and size ..... Goodyear Eagle GT, P215/60R-14  
 Test inflation pressures, F/R ..... 30/30 psi

**CAR AND DRIVER TEST RESULTS**

**ACCELERATION**

Seconds  
 Zero to 30 mph ..... 2.4  
 40 mph ..... 4.0  
 50 mph ..... 5.7  
 60 mph ..... 8.2  
 70 mph ..... 11.1  
 80 mph ..... 14.7  
 90 mph ..... 19.7  
 Top-gear passing time, 30-50 mph ..... 9.6  
 50-70 mph ..... 9.9  
 Standing ¼-mile ..... 16.0 sec @ 85 mph  
 Top speed (manufacturer's rating) ..... 119 mph

**BRAKING**

70-0 mph @ impending lockup ..... 199 ft  
 Modulation ..... poor fair **good** excellent

Fade ..... none moderate heavy  
 Front-rear balance ..... poor fair **good**

**HANDLING**

Roadholding, 216-ft-dia skidpad ..... 0.81 g  
 Understeer ..... minimal moderate **excessive**

**FUEL ECONOMY**

EPA city driving ..... 22 mpg  
 EPA highway driving ..... 26 mpg

**INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL**

Idle ..... 55 dBA  
 Full-throttle acceleration ..... 84 dBA  
 70-mph cruising ..... 72 dBA  
 70-mph coasting ..... 71 dBA