



PHOTO BY RICHARD M. BARON

*Driving Impression:*

# PONTIAC FIERO GT

*Ferrari beater or Italian poser?*

**L**AST AUGUST, WE described the previous edition of the Fiero GT as "Pontiac's version of the Dino 246 GT." For 1986, the appellation seems particularly apt—from sloping nose to flying buttress the new Pontiac 2-seater could fit into a Pininfarina styling catalog as easily as Marcello Mastroianni in a Federico Fellini film. But does it *rappresentare*—pardon, perform—like Mastroianni?

Depends on how you look at it. If you go back to our February 1974 comparison test of five high performance 2-seaters and down the columns labeled Dino 246GTS, well, Enzo may have grounds to sue for patent infringement. Note:

## COMPARISON

	1986 Pontiac Fiero GT	1974 Ferrari Dino 246 GTS
Layout	mid-engine, 2-seater	mid-engine, 2-seater
Curb weight, lb	2860	2910
Weight dist. f/r, %	43/57	43/57
Length, in.	165.4	165.1
Wheelbase	93.4	92.1
Width	68.5	68.9
Engine	transverse, 2.8-liter V-6	transverse, 2.4-liter V-6

Performance? Our 1986 Fiero GT could clip the Dino's wings to 60 mph by 0.3 seconds (7.7 to 8.0) and better it to the quarter mile by 0.5 sec (15.7 to 16.2). Only at decidedly illegal speeds in the States can the Ferrari pull away. Still,

what goes up (speed) must come down, and braking from those velocities spells another Pontiac thumbs-up. From 60 mph, the Fiero hunches to a halt in 166 ft, the Dino, 20 ft longer, stops from 80 mph double the Pontiac advantage to 40 ft (283 to 323 ft). But surely the Ferrari is the handler? Nope, through our slalom the Fiero snakes around the cones 8.5 mph quicker (54.9 versus, gads, 63.4 mph).

Then what we have here is a latter-day Dino-killer at a Pontiac price? Depends on how you look at it.

If you look under the Fiero GT's aggressive new skin, you'll find some familiar hardware—not just *déjà vu* for 1985 Fiero owners, but also for registration-holders of Chevy Chevettes and Citations. And there's the rub.

As lore has it, Pontiac originally peddled the Fiero to GM's brass as an economy commuter. Don't worry, they comforted the execs; this would be no high-ticket sports car. Suspension duties would be handled by the Chevettes' front double A-arms; the Fiero's hindquarters would be carried by X-body MacPherson struts tricked into being a rear suspension by bolting their steering rods to the chassis. GM bought the story.

And as a commuter car, we have no strong complaint. But as a sensitive sports car, we're less impressed. The original Fiero's high-school-yearbook good looks have blossomed into the stuff of *Playboy* centerfolds. Last year's abrupt ending B-

pillars now sweep gracefully to the stern. The taillight band is now wider and taller, suggesting an even more exaggerated wedge shape that began with the 1984 (original) Fiero GT's cowcatcher sloped nose. Even the tires have grown up to 15 inches (from 14s) and have differential widths, 205-mm front, 215-mm rear (previously 215s at both ends). The 1986 Fiero GT is from every angle a serious-looking sports car; and it should deliver the goods, not just the groceries.

But doesn't it outperform the legendary Dino? In cold fact, yes; in subjective subtlety, no. On a smooth skidpad, a suspension does little more than keep the tires from scuffing the wheel wells; but in the real world, potholes expose the Fiero's components for what they are. True, the GT's spring and shock rates have been massaged for their latest assignment, but you can only squeeze so much water out of a rock. Tire technology has come a long way since our 1974 Dino 246 GTS test, and the Fiero GT capitalizes on this.

Under the hood, the Fiero GT is unchanged, which is not a bad thing as the 2837-cc V-6 simultaneously delivers good power (140 bhp), better torque (170 lb-ft), a healthy guttural snarl and a reasonable 22.5 mpg under our staff's heavy right feet. Still, this is only a good sports-car engine, not a great one. While brisk off the line, the ohv V-6 goes into oxygen debt well before its 6000-rpm redline, which is just where the Dino would come alive and sing on up to 7800 rpm. The transaxle, another 1985 carryover item, remains a remote-shifting 4-speeder and pointedly out of place in any modern car, least of all one with this Pontiac's pretensions. Further, its reputation has been sullied around these halls by the lever's tendency to randomly slip into reverse instead of the desired and more socially acceptable 1st cog moving away from rest. (To be fair, our 1974 Dino test also noted "... a problem common to most mid-engine cars; less than satisfactory gear linkage... the gated shifter required quite deliberate motions..." However, we are quoting a dozen years in the past tense here.) Also carried over is the steering, which—despite skinnier front rubber that might have abated the Fiero GT's absence of power assist—remains slow, heavy, and less communicative than we'd like.

Our Fiero GT had a base price of \$12,695, up almost \$1000 over last year's GT, and was trimmed with such amenities as air conditioning (good), central door locking (useful), electric mirrors and window lifts (ditto), rear wing (silly, blocks rear outward vision), a pop-up sunroof (mandatory) and a fine sound system, all of which added \$1878 to the base figure (totaling \$14,573 less tax, prep and dealer profit). Still, not bad for a 2-seater in this class with style like this, particularly if you can overlook the shifter's antics. ☐