



Spring 2007  
Volume 9, Number 1

## ***They're Both Missing Tailgate Glass....***



***But Which One is Faster??***

**2007 POCI Drags**  
**TULSA RACEWAY PARK**  
**July 13<sup>th</sup>**  
**RACING ON TULSA TIME!**  
**Custom Safari Chapter**  
*Pontiac Oakland Club International*

# From the Prez's Garage

By Steve Cook

*Spring has sprung! (Editor's Note: Thanks to me being late with the newsletter, so has summer!!). I hope everyone has survived the winter in good health and spirit. Here in Missouri we had some weather events of a lifetime. I was trout fishing in March without a shirt and got sunburned, and then later, at Easter time we had an ice storm that collapsed docks and sunk or damaged millions of dollars worth of boats. (I had my shirt back on by then).*

*I hope to hear a round of applause for Robin, our treasurer, for the excellent effort she put into "encouraging" all of us to vote in the recent directors election and proclaiming the Safari Chapter as our Party affiliation. If everyone did as instructed, it should reap a cash reward for our group at Chapter nite. THANK-YOU ROBIN !!!!!*

*Since the Safari Chapter is a specialty chapter, I think all of us look forward to the national convention and gathering together to visit old friends and make new with similar interests. I hope many of you are planning to attend the convention in Tulsa this summer. Andrea and I are looking forward to attending. We are driving the '63 Grand Prix there from our home in Grover, Mo., leaving Tuesday morning at 8 or 9 AM. If your journey to Tulsa takes you thru Missouri on Interstate 44, keep an eye open for the aquamarine '63 traveling southwest.*

*While attending the convention, I hope everyone can attend the Custom Safari Chapter meeting. It will be held on Wed., July 11, from 8:30 AM-10:00 AM in "Directors Row # 3.*

*I would also like to remind everyone about the Safari Chapter mini show at the convention. We need to all gather Sat. July 14 at the Popular Vote Show for a group photo and to pick our favorite Custom Safari in attendance. It has been custom to meet at the site of the Custom Safari Class at 12 noon. The chosen winner will receive a "Best Safari 2007" award plaque and have (their) name added to the traveling trophy.*

*The traditional Safari Breakfast Cruise has been changed this year to a "dinner cruise". I hope we can get everyone in the Custom Safari Chapter to participate. Friday nite has no planned dinner so you have no excuses. The group will cruise from the convention site at 5 PM to Freddie's Steakhouse in Sapulpa, OK. This is a 15-20 minute commute, maybe a little more with rush-hour traffic. Freddie's is a unique, memorable, but casual dining experience. Prices range from \$9.89 to \$20.99 for a steak, seafood, or BAR-B-Que dinner that includes side orders of Houmas, relish dish, Tabouly, Cabbage Roll, BBQ ribs & smoked bologna, dinner salad, baked potato, and Texas Toast. What's Tabouly you ask? Come along and find out!!!! Freddie's owner will have a special area on the asphalt parking lot divided off just for the old cars, so run what ya' brung. P.S. - By the time we eat, shoot-the-bull, and cruise back, the timing will be just right for the Indian Pow-Wow Parking lot Party at 8 PM.*

*My hat is off again to Rich Pye for that last Safari Newsletter. That was awesome Rich. Keep up the good work, you are doing a fantastic job as Editor and the newsletter looks great.*

*All members please- send Rich stuff for the newsletter. Write about your car, your family, how to reattach a finger lost in the fanbelt, ANYTHING, just give him some help.*

*Thanks,*

**Steve Cook, "The Prez".**

# Behind the Wheel in the Editor's Seat

By Rich Pye

Hello Everyone,

Again I am sending out the latest belated issue of the **Safari News**. Please tell me, if you know, how do you find time to work on restoration projects, go to work, attend kids' sporting and school events, and put out a 16 page quarterly newsletter? I think I know, you wait until the last possible minute and crank it out. Hopefully, my haste won't produce waste!

So, I'm working on my '69 GTO, ever so slowly, trying to finish the bodywork and get it ready to be painted. An hour or two, maybe three a week, with a buddy, doesn't yield much progress. However, we have been able to drink enough beer and tell stories about how we have no time. Hummmm..... maybe there's a problem there! Anyhow, I get a call from a museum about needing a '57 Pontiac to show in a Class of '57 display for a year, not too awfully far from my house.

Well, I started thinking. If I could only get that '57 Safari presentable I could make room in my barn and actually get more done. So I sheepishly offer up a "back row" display car that I'm willing to redirect efforts on to get ready in a month. The guy on the other end of the phone, says to send pictures and he'll bring it up to the board of directors at the next meeting. So I rush out to the barn, (getting more excited about the space opportunity idea), snap off a few digital pictures, and email them immediately. I eagerly wait for a reply, one week goes by, two weeks go by. I follow up with a last chance email and phone call, since I still have to rub the thing out and paint the driver's side fender, etc. I'm told the board didn't have a quorum, wait until next week. Guess what, no call yet.

So the moral of the story....build a bigger barn!! I actually did get the fender sandblasted, banged out, and primed. I still have some finishing work and painting to do on the fender and wet sanding and rubbing out on the oxidized paint on the rest of the car, but there's hope and initiative now. I just can't steal too much time from the GTO. In the meantime my wife's '69 Firebird decides to blow the master cylinder the morning of its vehicle inspection, so I have to run around to find one of those, (hoping I'd find one that looked like the original one... no chance). That takes an extra week of my time, since I couldn't bleed the brakes with one foot on the pedal and one arm hanging out the window to turn the rear bleeder screw. Did I mention I don't have much help either??

Enough of my blues. So the major **Safari News** dilemma now is do we go with the larger format in black and white (like this issue) or the smaller format in color (like the last issue). That debate will be up for grabs at the CSC Annual Meeting at the 2007 POCI Convention. If you have an opinion either way and are not attending the convention, drop me an email and I'll collect the input. I have received some input that the smaller issue is hard to read. I could make adjustments there to compensate. Either way the color issues are always found on the chapter website and can be printed out at home if desired.

I have one favor to ask of people going to the convention. Please take lots of pictures and email me some for the next issue. You can also send a CD, so I get the best resolution of the images. I can't make it this year and hope that next year's will be somewhere closer to the East Coast to better fit into my busy schedule.

Enough for now. Have a great summer and keep in touch!



Pontiac's flair for years-ahead styling was never more evident than in the fabulous all-rounder Safari.

Rich



# 2007 Convention Update

## NEW FIRE EXTINGUISHER RULES.....PLEASE READ!!!!

ALL POCI Members please read this carefully..... If you are bringing a Pontiac to Tulsa for the show, the rules have changed on fire extinguisher. According to the newest 2007 Judging manual page 9, Section IX E. 1. "The minimum requirement is a U/L 10-B:C fire extinguisher. \*(This has changed since 2006 when the minimum WAS U/L 5 B:C.)\* The preferred fire extinguisher is a U/L 10-B:C or 2 1/2 lb. Dry Chemical, DOT 2-Q or Halotron replacing Halon.

Check your extinguisher. This change is NEW, this is a stiffer requirement than previously needed. I just caught this while reading the rules, and I am trying to save a lot of folks some last minute grief. Spread the word!!! Steve Cook

## 35th Annual POCI Convention

July 10-14, 2007 Tulsa, OK

**Registration Fee:** \$40.00 (Check/Money Order/Cash Only — Non-Refundable)  
(Sorry, no credit card payments accepted)

**Make Registration Check/Money Order Payable to:**  
Indian Nations POCI 2007 Convention

**Mail to:** Indian Nations POCI 2007 Convention  
Attn: Registration  
P.O. Box 33058  
Tulsa, OK 74153-1058



## New Member Safaris



***Above:** New member Doug Kline purchased this '55 Safari on eBay. I hope there's a follow up story of how that went down in the near future.*

***Below:** New member Jay Ward's '57. It's an original Limefire/ Seacrest Green car with PS, PB, and leather interior--The most difficult piece he's missing is the entire upper liftgate, almost everything else is there.*



# Persistence Pays Off

by Steve Cook

*This is the story of how Andrea and I became Safari owners. For many years, I have admired and wanted a 55-56-57 2 Dr Safari. I didn't want to spend \$20,000 for a showable car that just needed wax, nor did I want a junkyard basket case. So I kept one eye open for "the deal".*

*I chased many leads, came close on several junkyard builders, got disappointed on a nice 57 4 door Safari, (good cars, but 2 doors too many), just missed a Canadian '56 GMC sedan delivery on a mistaken lead, and finally got lucky in Aug. 2002. I found our '56 Safari in the Cars For Sale of Aug, 2002 Smoke Signals. The car looked decent and the ad read " '56 Safari, 2 door wagon, fair condition, needs resto, motor runs, must sell \$4500 obo Ken". I'm in Grover, MO., and the car was in Detroit, MI. This was great since we were headed for our vacation in MI. the following week!*

*My plan was to take the truck with trailer on vacation and bring home a souvenir Safari! I immediately started calling "Ken" at the number listed. I was given a new excuse on each of a dozen calls. "He's not here now, he's not available now, you need to talk to my Mom, you need to talk to my Dad, you need to talk to my husband, you need to talk to "Crispin" and he's at the Moose Lodge right now, call later because Crispin is sleeping. Needless to say, we went on vacation without the trailer.*

*On my 4th day of vacation, call #13, I was told, "you really need to talk to Crispin and he's at the Moose Lodge". I said fine, give me a number. She did and I reached Crispin. I told him I needed to talk to Ken. Crispin was irritated and asked, "how did you get my number, and how do you know Ken?" I told him of the ad and there was silence. Crispin solemnly said "my brother Ken died 6 weeks ago and must have placed the ad for me from his death bed. I inherited the car and will honor the ad. Now I understand why the title was signed by him, I knew nothing of the ad."*

*Long story short, we drove to across Michigan to Detroit (3 hrs), bought the car, drove back to Grover, MO.(8 hrs), picked up the trailer, drove back to Detroit (8 hrs), loaded the Safari, and returned home (8 hrs). I really feel that we EARNED this car! The car was really nice, so I gave full asking price. Crispin was so happy that he said " take any of this car cr \_p you want to haul, I need to clean out Ken's garage for his girlfriend and none of this stuff interests me". So with the deal, I also got 2 engine stands (1 was 4 wheeled fold up still new in the box), 8 Corvette Rally wheels, 4 Camaro Rally wheels, 12 rally trim rings, 12 Rally center caps, 2 sets of 56 hubcaps, 2 BOP Turbo 400 tranny's, bags (with receipts) of new clamps, bulbs, screws, etc., and enough miscellaneous hubcaps to fill the Safari cargo area. My poor 1/2 ton pickup dragged its tail all the way home!*

*A cool PS to the story is that on the road home, we passed a 1956 Cadillac (Eisenhardt & Hess) woody station wagon and stared in awe as we passed. At the next opportunity, the Caddy passed us and stared in awe at our 1956 Safari!*

*(Editor's Note: Steve has promised some pictures and a follow on story. Stay Tuned!)*



# Market Street

Eric Lawrence is the editor of the *Black Book CPI Value Guide*, an industry standard reference for the values of collectible and exotic automobiles.

**BY ERIC LAWRENCE ■ CHEVROLETS AND PONTIACS WERE COMPLETELY RESTYLED FOR 1955. THEY KEPT THE SAME BASIC SHAPE, WITH A FEW MODIFICATIONS, UNTIL 1957. AND THAT THREE-YEAR PERIOD IS VIEWED BY MANY COLLECTORS AS THE GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE DESIGN. CHEVROLET AND PONTIAC PRODUCED MANY BEAUTIFUL CARS DURING THAT TIME PERIOD, BUT TWO MODELS THAT HOLD A SPECIAL PLACE IN THE GM PANTHEON ARE THE CHEVROLET NOMAD AND PONTIAC SAFARI, BOTH HIGH-END, CUSTOM TWO-DOOR STATION WAGONS.**

Although luxury station wagons weren't unheard of at the time, luxury two-door station wagons were pretty unusual – most two-door wagons were stripped down handyman specials sold to tradesmen. Here's a quick bit of trivia for you: The Nomad and Safari were the most expensive offerings in their respective lineups from 1955-'57. Bet you thought it was the Bel Air/Star Chief convertible, didn't you?

Now let's look at what made Nomads and Safaris different from other wagons. As said, they were two-doors, but the doors were custom "hardtop/convertible" style doors that didn't have a frame around the window like other wagons did. Their "B" pillars, the vertical support just to the rear

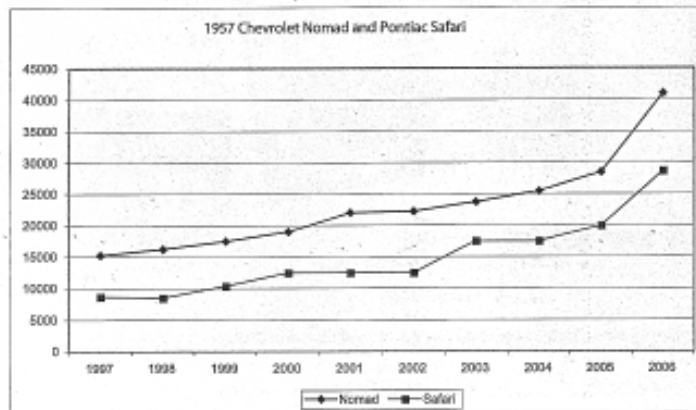
of the front window glass, were slanted forward, giving them a sporty appearance. The tailgate and rear window were also forward slanting, and the rear side glass featured a unique wraparound design. There are many other small differences, and yes, there was some variation year to year, but these are the basics.

Now for a quick year identification guide. Nomads are based on Bel Airs; 1955 model rear quarters are devoid of any chrome trim, 1956 models have a spear running down the side, and 1957 models grew fins and have a large brushed aluminum triangular trim piece on their rear quarters. Safaris, although based on Chieftain mechanicals, have top

of the line Star Chief level appointments. The 1955 models have a horizontal trim strip that runs from the rear of the car to the driver's door. The 1956 models have a trim strip running from the front of the car about halfway down the side, where it stops about eighteen inches short of a larger piece of trim coming forward from the rear. The 1957 models have a large trim "spear" running from the rear of the car up past the front wheel. Once again, these are the basics, and there are many other differences from year to year.

## The Market

With 1955-'57 Chevys and Pontiacs, there's a definite pecking order when it comes down to value. The 1957 models are worth the most, 1955s run about five to ten percent less, and 1956 models are about five to ten percent less than the '55s. All that being said, it's entirely possible that a particular 1955 model will be worth more than a 1957, and a 1956 can be worth more than a 1955 – it all comes down to exactly what the buyer is looking for. Right now, 1955 Nomads are selling for right around \$40,000 in good condition, with excellent cars bringing upwards of \$75,000. The 1956 models are around \$35,000-\$37,500 in good condition, with great ones pushing \$70,000. Look for 1957 Nomads to start at \$45,000 for a nice car, and top out around \$80,000. Cars with original high-performance engines can be worth several thousand dollars more, as can true show quality cars. Although Nomad production was roughly twice that of its Pontiac sibling, Safaris are typically valued around \$10,000 less than a comparable Nomad, in spite of their relative rarity and slightly more upscale appointments. ■



# Check out the Prices from a 1978 Issue of Safari News!! Oh Wouldn't it Be Nice if These Were..

## the parts counter

\*\* Denotes new member

FOR SALE: NOS 55-57 Pontiac Parts - 56 Front Master Grille Guard set/\$50; 55-56 LH Rear Wing Guard/\$12; 55-56 Front Master Guard cross bar/\$18; 55 or 56 Safari outside sunvisor/\$55; 55 or 56 Standard Hood Ornament/\$11; 56 "ontiac" hood script/\$8.50; 55-57 courtesy lamp package/\$15; 55-57 door edge guards/\$6.50; 57 full wheel covers (2-NOS/2-used)/\$20. All parts shipped postpaid. Joe Wheat, 64 Bradford Ave., Pittsburgh, PA. 15205

FOR SALE: NOS 55-57 Pontiac Parts & Accessories. Send list of needs, model # of your car, and parts #'s if known. SASE a must. Kurt Kelsey, RW2, Iowa Falls, Iowa 50126

FOR SALE: NOS Stars for '55 Safari, Part #518658. Shelf worn a little, but nice. Only have three - \$10. Steve Cory, 316 NW 30th Ct., Ft. Lauderdale, FL. 33311 PH: (305) 564-4137

WANTED: Any power steering equipment for '56 Safari, also front bumper & grill - NOS? Steve Dale, P.O.Box 02429, Portland, OR. 97202 PH: (503) 238-5963 \*\*

WANTED: Any literature or deluxe optional equipment for the '57 2dr Safari. Steve Serpa, 225 Center St., San Rafael, CA. 94901 PH: (415) 459-1018. \*\*

WANTED: Front Coil Springs, worm gear for steering box, ash tray for back of front seat, front seat kick panels (2 sets) for bottom outside and also wrap around panel for both front seat back corners for 57 2dr. David Clark, 1615A Kings Road, Leesville, LA. 71446 \*\*

## safari for sale

FOR SALE: '55 Safari, runs well, rust free, you finish restoration, \$1250. Dennis Tiernney, RRL, Box 34, Osage, Iowa 50461 PH: (515) 732-4469

FOR SALE: '55 Safari, unrestored Nevada car, complete with factory air, electric seats, etc. One owner car for \$1000 firm. Tom Tucker, 5516 Gipsy Ave., Las Vegas, NV. 89107 PH: (702) 870-3700

FOR SALE: '55 Safari, DS, PB, PAnt, 90% restored \$3,500. PH: (612) 445-5245 Minn.

FOR SALE: '56 Safari, beautiful black lacquer, diamond tufted interior, Chrysler wire wheels, stock running gear, Calif. car, no rust. Don Milinkovich, 6501 Green Valley Road, Anoka, MN 55303 PH: (612) 753-2715 (Ed., Don had this advertised in Hemmings, thought maybe chapter might be interested; see December 77 issue of Safari News for photo)

FOR SALE: '56 Safari, black original interior, automatic, fair condition, \$1000 or best offer. Dennis Bocek, RRL, Fulton, IL. 61252 PH: (815) 589-2647

FOR SALE: '56 Safari, rust free, all original, needs distributor, \$1200. Maurice Eddie, Rt. 1, Kallispell, MT. 59901 PH: (406) 755-6162

Len Sokol knows of a '56 Safari for sale in New Jersey; anyone interested can contact Len at 4 Russell Road, Ringwood, N.J. 07456

Another '56 Safari for sale in Traverse City, Michigan, contact Ron Pulaang, 11401 S. Depot Worth, IL 60482 (Ed., they won't let you borrow the steel truck again, huh Ron?)



you should have bought a

# Pontiac



# “Safari for a Safari”

By Ron Fulsang

(Reprinted by permission from the Illinois Chapter Newsletter, May 1978)

I had been looking for a 1955-57 Safari, but did not try too hard. I had been put back on third shift at work and this put a real crimp on going to the drag strip on Sunday morning. It was real hard to load my pickup with tools and miscellaneous items, hook up the trailer and load the race car, “Pure Pontiac”, with no sleep.

I had mentioned to my wife, Maria, that I would like to restore a Safari. Her first question was “What’s a Safari?” (Wife’s note: I have since learned). So an explanation followed. Her next answer OK, but something has to go. So, knowing that I wanted the Safari, and Maria didn’t really care for watching me race (holding her heart in her hand to keep it pumping every time I went down the strip, good ol’ “Pure Pontiac” had to go. It was fun, but expensive. (Editor’s Note: Restoring Isn’t Expensive?)

A friend of mine from Tri-Chevy, Rodney Brockman, told me about a nice Safari he had seen in Oklahoma on his way back from California. I made a few phone calls and hooked up the trailer and told my brother-in-law we were taking his tractor down to his new farm near Springfield, Missouri, on Friday. On Saturday, we located the Safari in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. The license plates were from 1968 and it really looked rough, but very restorable with many options. It sat in a field surrounded by about 50 different ’55-’57 Chevys. (Editor’s Note: Only one good car out of 51!)

My brother-in-law and I loaded it on the trailer and headed back to his farm. It took us 5 hours to go back 150 miles. The Safari alone weighed more than the pickup did and the trailer was also very heavy. It was just too much weight for the truck to pull.

Back at the farm in Missouri we unloaded the treasure and headed for home without the Safari. Two weeks later a friend and I went back down to the farm in one of those narrow-cab steel hauling trucks—the type with the racks that pass by the door and only one seat, and that’s for the driver. We took turns driving and sleeping, sometimes on each other’s shoulders. Finally we made it down to the farm.

Now came the problem. How do you make 3700 pounds of car jump four feet? It took a couple of hours, but we found a place where the road was high and the field low. We dug holes for the rear wheels to drop into to help lower the truck. It worked great. Now the Safari only had to jump one foot!

We made some ramps from 2x8’s and hooked all the load chains together. We hooked the Safari to the tractor with the chain running across the bed of the truck to the tractor out in front of it. The Safari rolled right up on the truck and we were ready to go.

On the way back near St. Louis, we needed gas and could not find any. We were almost out when we finally found an open gas station. The tank held 21 gallons and we put in 20. Well, off we went again until the fuel filter plugged up because we picked up the junk from the bottom of the tank. We finally made it back home and unloaded the car at a nearby gas station with a drive-on lift.

When I got it to its new home, all Maria said was, “You went to Oklahoma for this piece of tin?” Well, soon the “Tin Indian” will be looking as good as it did in 1956.

# Rambling Down Memory Lane.....

by Dan Dickey

My wife and I attended the "Custom Safari Meeting" at the Ontario Convention last year and joined the chapter shortly after. I have enclosed a couple of articles related to Safaris. The first article is from "Pontiac Enthusiast" magazine. I misplaced the magazine issue, but I believe it is from a 2004 copy. Pictured in the article is our '55 Safari (Ed note: along with Noel and Starr Evans' '57 and Gary Parker's '55).

The second article is from a magazine that was included in a bunch of magazines that I bought from a widow lady. Was I surprised to find a Pontiac type magazine in the middle of a bunch of Street Rod magazines. The magazine is a "Consumer Guide Auto Series" from 1983, a bimonthly guide publication titled "Super Performance Pontiac". It is such as special issue with many older Pontiac stories: Knudsen & Estes on the '57, DeLorean and the GTO, and more on Pontiac racing. The one line in the article that really caught my attention is where only 10% of the Safari's produced still exist. No, not today, the article was from 1983, twenty-four years ago.

I'll give you a little background about myself. My father was a Pontiac dealer here in a small town in Washington State. I grew up in the dealership garage. When I was nine years old, I was given a miniature '56 Pontiac Convertible, which I still have the fiberglass body for. It is 72" long by 24" wide and 15" high and was powered by a car starter motor and twelve volt car battery with a reverser control to reverse the starter motor. I still have all the controls and starter motor.

I went through the GTO days. I had a brand new '64 GTO, Tri-Power, 4-speed, when I was seventeen. What color should a GTO Tiger be? A 1956 Packard Naples "orange" with white interior. I liked it so much that I ordered a '65 exactly like it. I took a white '65 GTO off the showroom floor for a few months in the fall of '64 while we waited through the GM workers strike. The white GTO at the end of November, 1964 was the only unsold GTO of all the dealers in the "Portland Zone", which dad's dealership in Washington was a part of. Dad got a good high price for that car even though I had put 5000 miles on it in the first two months.

The orange '65 came in the first of January, 1965. I drove it for nine months and put 46,000 miles on it, (Editor's Note: Dan did you mean 4600 miles, let me know and I'll clue everyone in the next issue). 1965 was the first year that dad was recognized from GM Pontiac for selling a hundred cars that year. He said I had a contribution toward that with me driving my GTO's. I had two '68 GTO's with the Ram Air III motors, close ratio 4-speeds, and 4:33 rear-ends. I have four first place trophies in D-Stock with the second of the two. I had seven hundred miles on the first one in two weeks when dad sold it out from under me. That's what he was in the business to do. My last GTO was a 1970 with a Ram Air 455. I had it then for four years before I bought a new '74 El Camino. Dad sold his dealership in 1972.

Thank you for letting me ramble on down memory lane. I have so many good memories of growing up in the dealership. From some of the greatest people that were dad's customers, to the most unique cars that could be ordered. I got quite creative with a few order forms myself.

The Safari wagon that we have is a car that was special ordered for a customer from dad's dealership. It was special ordered for a man in Olympia. We are the fourth owners and we feel like we brought the car back home. We have had it for nine years now. It is still original with the original paint and original cloth interior, yes cloth interior. The original owner that ordered the car did not want leather. The cloth still has the plastic seat covers that were put on new.

I fell in love with the Nomads in my early twenties and told myself that I am going to find a Safari wagon in my color. I never dreamed that I would own one that originally was sold from my dad's dealership.

(Editor's Note: Dan Dickey has submitted some interesting information that I've shared in the last 2 issues. Last issue it was the "Pontiac Enthusiast" article regarding Safaris that included pictures of 3 of our chapter member cars from the Joplin Convention a couple of years ago. This issue includes the "Consumer Guide" article listed in Dan's note above. I want to thank Dan for his articles and the story above, which I'm sharing with the chapter since it's a great recollection of growing up in a Pontiac family)

# Consumer Guide Auto Series, 1983

## 1955-57 Safari: Pontiac's Hot Hauler

**W**hen it comes to high-performance cars, station wagons are non-starters. You'll never catch an enthusiast in one of *those*, unless it's a current-model econobox used for daily transportation and nothing more. Rarely do such mundane expressions of workaday life appear on showgrounds or dragstrips, with one exception: the Chevrolet Nomad and Pontiac Safari "hardtop wagons" of 1955-57.

Today you can't touch a good Nomad and precious few Safaris for much less than \$7500 unless you're prepared to do a restoration. There's a good reason: demand simply overwhelms the supply. Even in its day the Safari was uncommon, amounting to no more than two percent of Pontiac wagon production. The division built only 3760 of the 1955 models, 4042 for '56, and 1292 of the '57s (excluding the conventional four-doors and a two-door Chieftain wagon also called Safari). There can't be more than a thousand still in existence. Unique styling coupled with the high-performance goodies already described made this a very special car.

The genesis for the Safari and Nomad was a very pretty and innovative styling exercise derived from the then recently introduced Corvette. Supervised by Harley Earl, vice-president for styling, this sporty hardtop-inspired wagon was first displayed at the 1954 GM Motorama. It signalled the arrival of more stylish and luxurious production wagons to replace the utilitarian steel containers of the early postwar years.

Today's collectors are less concerned with the Safari's historical significance than with its basic appeal as an automobile. And they're hard put to find a better-looking station wagon from any era, let alone one with Motorama heritage, high roadworthiness, decent economy, great performance, a consistent increase in value, ready-made collector clubs, and an



1955 Star Chief Custom Safari hardtop wagon

improving parts situation.

The original Nomad show car was built on a 1953 Chevrolet station wagon chassis, and had Corvette front- and rear-end styling topped by a distinctively shaped greenhouse. The ensemble tastefully combined styling elements of the two body types that together accounted for a third of new-car sales in the '50s, the station wagon and the pillarless hardtop coupe. The Nomad was immediately recognizable for its hardtop-style front window frames, wide B-pillar and thin forward-sloping rear pillars, wrapped rear side glass, and fluted roof. The roof styling was mainly the work of Carl Renner, and it impressed Earl so much that at the last minute he ordered it adapted for the lower body of the all-new '55 Chevrolet. This became the production Chevy Nomad. At first, this car was to be Chevrolet's alone, but as Renner recalled: "Pontiac had a chance to have something new also . . . I remember, Chevrolet didn't like that; Chevrolet always wanted things exclusively. However, management wanted it for the Pontiac line, too, so it worked out."

Pontiac applied the Nomad treatment to its '55 styling from the cowl back, but despite appearances the Safari shared precious little sheetmetal with other body styles. Drivetrains, of course, were shared, and designers retained what stock components they could: windshield and ventwings from the hardtop and convertible, floorpans from the two-door wagon, inner door panels from the hardtops, plus minor trim, taillights, and such. Pontiac's assignment was to build a larger and heavier, more powerful, luxurious, and expensive wagon than the Nomad, even though both models would have to share the GM A-body. Thus, the list price for the V-8 Nomad (you could order a six, though few did) was \$2571, while the Safari started at \$3047. The Safari came with standard V-8 and Hydra-Matic, but its actual sticker price usually approached \$4000 with the addition of a few options. This put it at the high end of a station wagon price spectrum with some 50



# Consumer Guide Auto Series, 1983

entries, ranging from the \$1869 Rambler Super Suburban two-door to the \$4200 Chrysler New Yorker Town & Country.

As with the Nomad, most everybody liked the Safari's styling at the time. Walt Woron described it as "a portent of the future with its 'leaning forward' look." Though considerably different from the Nomad in appearance, the Safari was actually the same from the beltline up; inner wheelhousings, glass, doors, roof, and tailgate were all identical. The rear quarters and floorpan, however, were exclusively Pontiac, mainly because the Safari rode a longer 122-inch wheelbase against the Nomad's 115.

A \$500 price difference was a big one in 1955, but it gave Safari a big edge in luxury over the Nomad. While the Chevy had vinyl upholstery, for example, the Pontiac's seats were covered in leather. The Nomad's rear cargo area was covered with linoleum; the Safari's was carpeted. Initially the Safari's rear seat had a different folding arrangement and was larger and more comfortable, but for 1956-57 its rear seat was interchangeable with Nomad's.

The Safari was pretty fast for a station wagon, though not in the same league with the lighter hot Pontiacs. Typical 0-60 mph times were around 13 seconds with the 200-bhp engine option. The Safari followed the rest of the line in styling and mechanical revisions for 1956-57. The last models were probably the best from the performance standpoint because of Pontiac's newly enlarged 347-cid V-8 offering up 270 bhp or 290/320 via Tri-Power. "Pontiac is no longer grandma's car, because we don't think granny could stand the acceleration built into this torpedo without blacking out," wrote Tom McCahill. "[If you] put your cigar out the window, friction will ignite it instantly . . . You'll be doing zero to sixty before you can yell 'cop.'"

Comparisons between the Safari and Nomad are inevitable but interesting. Despite their common design root, there really is a great difference between the two cars, especially on the road. Engine options, for instance, give the two cars approximately equal power-to-weight ratios. The Pontiac 290-bhp engine gave the '57 Safari about 13:1 pounds per horsepower. Chevrolet's top engine that year was the 283-bhp, 283-cid fuelie, which gave the Nomad a similar figure. Neither of these engines, however, was common in the wagons. More typical would be a 270-bhp Safari (14:1) and a 250-bhp Nomad (almost identical). Engine for engine, there was no on-paper performance advantage for either car. Neither was there an advantage against the watch, model year for model year. For instance, we tested a 1956 Safari with the base 227-bhp Star Chief V-8 against a '56



Corvette Nomad show car from the 1954 Motorama



1955 Safari rode shorter Chieftain chassis.



Near final studio mockup for '55 Safari

1955 Chevrolet Bel Air Nomad hardtop



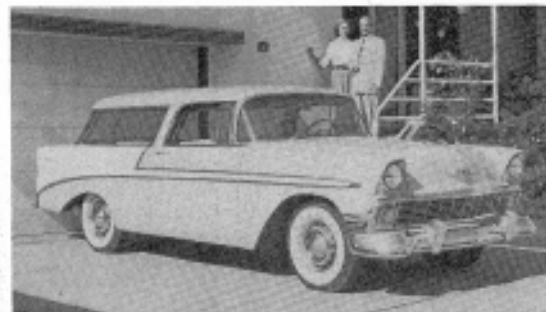
# Consumer Guide Auto Series, 1983



1956 Safari continued to share Nomad greenhouse.



1956 Star Chief Custom Safari hardtop wagon



Above: 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air Nomad

Below: Nomad for 1957



Nomad equipped the base 162-bhp Chevy V-8. We found acceleration times and top speed virtually the same.

No, the real contrasts come in areas other than off-the-line pickup. The Pontiac definitely has the more sporting ride, for example. It slams itself down on the road, letting the occupants know all about surface conditions constantly through the seats of their pants. By comparison the Nomad seems softly sprung. It plows and understeers with all the clumsiness typical of mid-'50s Detroit cars, but as long as you don't try to push it through corners like an Alfa Romeo the roll isn't really excessive or bothersome. The Nomad has an even, gentle ride, with a lack of chop that belies its shorter wheelbase. The Safari constantly seems to be seeking some place on the road other than where you want it to be. In those simpler days, of course, the main way to get improved handling in a Detroit car was by stiffening up the suspension to the level of an oxcart. Thus the Safari usually outhandles the Nomad despite its greater bulk. Yet some Chevrolets are a little less forgiving than the Safari we drove.

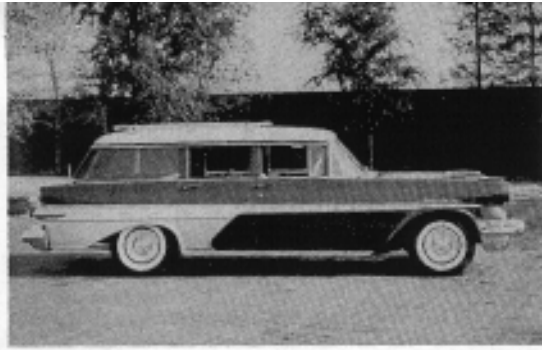
To its credit, the 1955-56 Safari stops as well as it goes, mainly because it has larger brakes than the Nomad. Pontiac brakes were widely praised by road testers in 1956 as one of the car's best features, being notably resistant to fade compared to those of rival makes. This changed dramatically on the '57 models, where Pontiac reduced wheel diameter by an inch (to 14 inches). The correspondingly smaller lining area combined with more horsepower to render the brakes inadequate in hard, all-out stops. If hauling your Safari down from speed is as important to you as making it go quickly—and it should be—you'd be better off with a '55 or '56. Besides, most people find them better-looking than the '57.

As you'd expect, both Safari and Nomad have excellent outward visibility, the thin-pillar roofline and broad expanses of glass making the view literally panoramic. The only factors that limit your observation are the size of the rearview mirrors and, in some situations, the wide center post. The driving position in both cars is bolt upright, and the bench seat provides no lateral support whatsoever. Interestingly, though, the Pontiac could be ordered with a little-known backrest recliner option. Steering wheels are large and, in our view, clumsy in both, though strictly normal for the '50s.

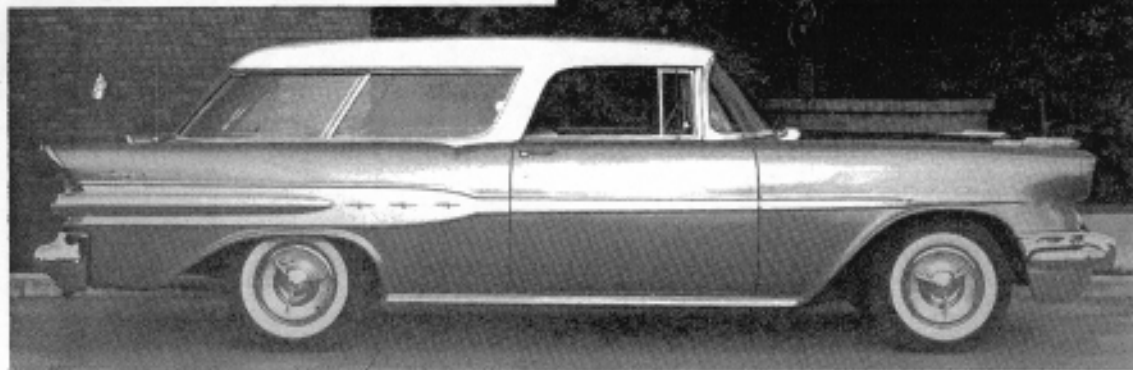
Though the current recession has, temporarily at least, put a lid on soaring prices, the Safari remains expensive as a collector car. Rarity does not always guarantee collectibility, but it sure helps. Though some 20 percent of total Nomad production has



## Consumer Guide Auto Series, 1983



*Left: All Pontiac wagons were called Safari for '57. Rare Transcontinental model is shown.*



*The "real" Safari at last gained Star Chief script for 1957.*

survived, the Safari's percentage is half that. Other factors enhancing desirability are the Safari's direct connection to the original Carl Renner design and a growing interest in Pontiac performance cars of all types from 1955 on. But the Safari has thus far trailed the Nomad in enthusiast popularity. Not too long ago, collectors settled for a Safari because they couldn't find a decent Nomad; others used Safaris as parts cars for Nomad restorations.

Now, there's a small but vociferous group of *aficionados* devoted to preserving "Pontiac's Nomad." They like its larger, more powerful engine, and they prefer its Hydra-Matic to Chevy's Powerglide for obvious reasons. They don't mind the hard ride, and they say the lower-tune V-8s return decent gas mileage. As for the Safari's extra helping of gee-gaws and glitter, the Pontiac people have a good rejoinder. The plentiful bright metal, nicer interiors, prettier colors, and wider range of accessories and power options were, they say, a better interpretation of the original Nomad idea than the Chevrolet version. They also point out that all through its three years of production the two-door Safari remained more faithful to that idea than the Nomad (for example, the beltline dip on the '55 was still present on the 1957 Safari but not on the '57 Nomad).

Obtaining parts for a Safari is both more and less difficult than for a Nomad. It's easier in that demand for 1955-57 Pontiac parts is not as high as for corresponding Chevy parts, harder in that there were only a fourth as many Pontiacs built in these years as Chevys. There are some reproduction parts made for Nomads that will also fit Safaris, but few parts

unique to Safaris have been reproduced. One enthusiast has reproduced the tailgate lettering, but that seems to be about it for now. Finding new-old-stock parts unique to any single model-year Safari is almost impossible.

Collectors believe the Safari's future as a desirable Pontiac is secure despite the big lead Nomads have in value. But this current state of affairs contrasts sharply with both models' slow sales when new. And it's because these pretty wagons didn't sell that they lasted only three years. They were the highest-priced models in the line, costing more than even the convertibles. They were relatively impractical as station wagons (or at least that's what we were led to believe), because they had dressy interiors and only two doors. And they all leaked. Of course, such factors don't deter today's collectors—when the price is right (and it won't go down). And compared to, say, a 1957-58 Bonneville, the Safari is relatively more practical for conveying an entire family to car events. As for those notorious rain leaks, they're not that important for a collectible that is almost invariably stored indoors and not often driven in the rain.

Mention should be made of the Custom Safari Chapter of the Pontiac-Oakland Club (c/o Dennis Vaughan, 12530 W. Randall Park Dr. N, Miami, Florida 33167). This group, chartered in 1977, accepts all 1955-57 two-door Safaris plus the 1957 Star Chief Transcontinental four-door wagon. Since its founding, CSC has doubled in size, and now claims 80 members who own 130 Safaris between them. Its bimonthly publication, *Safari News*, is filled with restoration tips and list of cars and parts for sale or wanted. Dues are \$5 per year.



# Safari Search

Place your part ads here and also get them on-line @ [www.customsafari.org](http://www.customsafari.org).

## Cars for Sale

**1956 Safari, nearly complete**, asking \$4000.00. Located in central Texas. Contact George Green (682) 465-5134



## Parts for Sale

**1957 Pontiac:** Front Brake Drums complete with Backing Plates, Shoes, Wheel Cylinders and Wheel Bearings, \$100 each; also Two Radios with Speaker Boxes, one Maroon and one Green, \$150 each; Complete Rear End Differential with 3.23 Gears, \$100; 5 Hub Caps Good Condition, \$100.....just call **Bill Hanners @ 239-543-3510, FL.**

**1955 Pontiac:** Parting out a 2 door Chieftain. email Rich Pye @ [rpye@rochester.rr.com](mailto:rpye@rochester.rr.com) or phone 585-637-2720 with needs.

## Wanted

**1957 Safari:** Stainless Spear, front of gas door. Trim under the tail lights. Call Donn Fallenbuchel, (928) 855-5494.

**1957 Safari Car Wanted:** If you have any leads on one, please contact Dwight at [dwhitmire3153@charter.net](mailto:dwhitmire3153@charter.net) or call cell 770-851-1010 or work 770-531-1010.

**1955 Safari:** Left molding rear quarter lower (drivers side) part #520522. Rear light switch, both NOS or excellent used. Please contact Harold Cary (641) 424-2663 or email at [buzz@netconx.net](mailto:buzz@netconx.net).

**1956 – 58 Safari Photos and Literature.** Editor needs more photos and literature regarding the 1956 through 1958 Pontiac Safaris. Send copies or e-mail scanned items to Rich Pye.

To place a free ad to sell a car or parts or to place a want ad, send your request to Rich Pye. Your ad should be related to 1955-58 Pontiacs, and it is recommended to include photos (electronic or paper). Ads are also welcome, send a business card for Pontiac related items or services to Rich.

## POCI Chapter #10

[www.customsafari.org](http://www.customsafari.org)

The Custom Safari Chapter is an official international chapter of the Pontiac Oakland Club, International, Incorporated. The POCI headquarters address is: P.O. Box 539 Victor, NY 14564

Annual Dues are \$18.00. Renewals are due January 1st of each year. New member dues are prorated quarterly from January 1st. Applicants must be a current member of POCI prior to joining the chapter. Send payment to Starr Evans.

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