

# 1969 Pontiac Trans Am Ram Air III

If missing the original Ram Air hood and Ram Air air cleaner parts, you are looking at spending \$10,000–\$15,000 if you can find the right originals

by Colin Comer



The Worldwide Group

In March of 1969, Pontiac released a little publicized option package, the Trans Am Performance and Appearance Package. Only two ads were published, one in Road and Track and another in Motor Trend. The Trans Am was conceived to campaign in the SCCA's road racing series. Pontiac paid a \$5 license fee to SCCA for each T/A sold. This fee continued to be paid through 2002 models.

The Pontiac Firebird Trans Am has long been regarded as the performance icon of the “pony cars.”

This Trans Am retains the original matching 400-ci motor with an automatic transmission. Options include a factory AM radio, power steering, power brakes, and sport wood steering wheel. A fresh suspension has been installed, along with a posi-traction differential, all new brakes, lines, and springs. The Ram Air components have been serviced to insure proper functionality. Included with the purchase is much factory paperwork, original books, manuals, and keys. Full documentation of the refurbishment is also available showing \$15,000 in recent receipts.

This first-year Trans Am was purchased new in Farmington, New Mexico. The current owner is only the second person to hold title. The only repaint was completed by the original owner. As this is one of only 114 Ram Air III Trans Am Coupes with an automatic transmission, the new owner can rest assured that it is one of the lowest production and most sought-after muscle cars to exist today.

*The SCM Analysis:* This 1969 Trans Am sold for \$77,000 at the Worldwide Auction in Houston on May 6.

*The original Trans Am was a late 1969 model year introduction, first available for sale in April of 1969 as a \$724.60 option to the base Firebird. All were white with twin blue stripes across the hood, roof, and rear deck, a blue tail panel, functional ram air hood, 60" rear air foil, and fitted with non-functional “air extraction” scoops on the front fenders.*

*It was a fantastic-looking package, and not the screaming-chicken, bloated “Smokey and the Bandit” second-generation examples most people envision when you mention Pontiac Trans Ams. More importantly, the 1969 Trans Am was engineered as a complete package, with suspension upgrades and engineering done by the legendary Herb Adams, factory engineer at the time. There is something to be said about the purity of an original design, and while later Trans Ams are fine cars, none captures the look and feel of the original 1969 version.*

*However, contrary to the auction catalog, the 1969 Trans Am has not been long regarded as the performance icon of the pony car world. In fact, they have been somewhat overlooked in the market, in spite of the extremely low production of just 697 cars (eight of which are ultra-rare convertibles). Chalk this up to a serious blunder by Pontiac, in which the original Trans Am was supposed to go to market with a 303-ci Pontiac V8 which suffered serious developmental problems and never saw production. In its place, Pontiac transplanted two versions of its 400-ci V8, thereby making the Trans Am ineligible for the race series it was named after. So much for “Win on Sunday, Sell on Monday.”*

*The Trans Am's cousin, the Camaro Z/28, with its 302-ci engine, was raced quite successfully in the Trans Am series, bolstering its sales substantially. Jerry Titus, perhaps the*

## DETAILS

Years produced: 1969  
 Number produced: 697  
 Original list price: \$3,556  
 SCM Valuation: \$55,000–\$75,000  
 (+ 75% for RAIV)  
 Tune-up/Major service: \$150  
 Distributor cap: \$15, on sale, \$7.99  
 Chassis #: Left side of dash, visible through windshield  
 Engine #: Right front of engine block, above oil pan rail and next to timing cover—partial VIN  
 Club: [www.firebirdclub.com](http://www.firebirdclub.com)  
 More: [www.classicalpontiac.com](http://www.classicalpontiac.com)  
 Alternatives: Plymouth AAR 'Cuda; 1967–69 Chevrolet Camaro Z/28; 1970 Dodge Challenger T/A  
 SCM Investment grade: B

## COMPS



1969 Pontiac Trans Am  
 Lot # 395, S/N 223379N104523  
 Condition: 3  
 Sold at \$106,920  
 Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/14/2006  
 SCM ID# 40345



1969 Pontiac Trans Am  
 Lot # 1023, 22337PN106695  
 Condition: 1  
 Sold at \$113,400  
 Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/14/2006  
 SCM ID# 40320

most successful driver to field Pontiac Firebirds, cited numerous developmental problems with the Pontiac race program that never seemed to get sorted out.

In the production 1969 Trans Ams, the tried and true 400-ci Ram Air III engine (code L74) was standard equipment, and the mighty Ram Air IV (code L67) was an option. Only 55 coupes were produced with the RAIV engine, 46 being 4-speeds and nine with automatics. The base RAIII engine was fitted to 520 coupes with manual transmissions, 114 coupes with automatics, and all eight convertibles, split evenly as four manuals and four automatics.

While the RAIII was a very tractable engine well suited for daily driving, the RAIV, with its huge "round port" cylinder heads, aggressive camshaft, forged high compression pistons, and free-flowing cast exhaust headers, was really too much engine to lope around town.

The Ram Air III example sold above appears to be a solid car sold right in the price range I would expect. However, the auction description concerns me, as it does not inspire confidence in regards to the originality of the car. For example, "original matching 400-ci motor with an automatic transmission" doesn't clearly spell out that the car has its original "numbers matching" engine and transmission.

Or, "A fresh suspension has been installed along with a posi-traction differential"? Since a Posi-Traction differential was standard, why would one need to be installed? I have not examined this car personally, so cannot verify whether my concerns are justified. This may be a fine example with a poorly written auction description. The problem with 1969 T/As is the scarcity of special one-year-only items, plus the ease with which these cars can be cloned.

For example, if missing the original Ram Air hood and Ram Air air cleaner pans, you are looking at spending at least \$10,000–\$15,000 to correct, IF you can find these original items. A proper carburetor for a 4-speed car is a \$3,000 part these days. Various Trans Am web sites and books will show you what to look for to verify a real '69 T/A and real '69 T/A parts. The bottom line is the same for any low-production specialty car: Research the car and carefully inspect the one you intend to buy. It is easy to see how buying the

"wrong" '69 Trans Am for a slightly below market price is no bargain, given the expense of making one correct when missing key original components.

Recent sales of RAIII automatic coupes have been in the \$70,000–\$100,000 range. A 4-speed coupe in similar condition is easily worth another 25%, in spite of being produced in far greater numbers than the automatic versions. Should you stumble upon a RAIV coupe, expect to pay double what a RAIII car is worth.

And, for the most expensive hair dryer in the Pontiac world, get ready to stroke a check for right around a million bucks for one of the eight convertibles produced, if one should hit the market.

If the subject example checks out as a legitimate numbers-matching car with all the right bits and pieces, this was a great deal for the buyer. I see a lot of upside in a good '69 Trans Am, and I would expect them to appreciate ahead of the market.

The '69 Trans Am is an exclusive, visually appealing, and usable example of the great homologation specials that rolled out of Detroit in the 1960s. No decal remover, silk shirt, or gold chain required.◆

---

COLIN COMER is founder and president of Colin's Classic Automobiles, as well as an avid collector and enthusiast.