

TORONTO AUTO SHOW II

Camaros, Firebirds transport you to muscle-car heaven

Largest group of F-body GM cars under one roof includes Knight Rider copy, Indy 500 pace cars

PETER BLEAKNEY
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

At the Statler-Hilton Hotel in Detroit on June 28, 1966, General Motors held a press conference announcing the impending arrival of its new rear-drive sports coupe.

When asked, "What is a Camaro?" a project manager replied: "A small vicious animal that eats Mustangs."

Both the Chevrolet Camaro and corporate sibling Pontiac Firebird went on sale in late 1966 as 1967 models with a mission to worry the phenomenally successful Ford Mustang.

On the 700 level at the AutoShow, you'll find an exhibit called "Icons: The Legend of Camaro and Firebird."

With 41 vehicles representing the four generations of Firebirds and five generations of Camaros, this is the largest collection of F-Body GM vehicles ever assembled under one roof.

Mark Foster, president and founder of the Camaro Country F-Body Group, brought his phantom grey 1991 Camaro RS to the exhibit.

His Ontario-based club has 270 members, and he thoroughly enjoys nourishing the family feel of this tight-knit F-Body community. "Camaro means friend, and when you meet people with a passion for that same car, you instantly become friends."

There are many super clean originals here, one of my faves being Jason Ramsay's 1968 Camaro RS/SS finished in original Seafrost Green. Under the hood is a 350 hp 396 ci V8.

Also on display are eight factory

Indianapolis pace cars spanning 43 years.

Not every F-Body here is a factory edition.

Legendary GM tuner Ken Lingenfelter brought the sixth prototype of his Wanda L TA, a beast that is close to limited production. Not at all happy with GM's decision to deep-six Pontiac, Lingenfelter decided to build his own Trans Am, inspired by the 1974 Super Duty and built around the current Camaro.

The heart of the matter is a Chevy LS3 V8, which Lingenfelter rebuilds to a true 455 ci, and tweaks to the tune of 655 naturally-aspirated horsepower. It has a functional shaker scoop that indeed does shake, due to the "pretty nice race cam we put in there."

The Knight Rider KITT tribute was a brand-new Trans Am in 1982

The snout is pure Pontiac Trans Am and there's a stylized screamin' eagle on the hood.

While Lingenfelter is planning a V6 Formula version as well as a more affordable V8 car, this full-blown edition will come in at just under \$100,000 U.S.

How many will he build? "Could be 25. could be 500. It depends on demand."

Fans of the 80s TV series Knight Rider will get a kick out of John Engelman's tribute to KITT, the talking robotic 1982 Pontiac Trans

Am that paired up with David Hasselhoff for four seasons of chasing evil-doers.

Engelman's 1982 Trans Am was purchased new by his father and, after his death in 1989, the car bounced around the family for a number of years. He started restoring it in 1999 and, being a fan of KITT, the last four years have seen its transformation into the TV car.

There is a subculture of KITT car builders out there, and Engelman has sourced bits and pieces from far and wide. The dash came from Florida, the steering wheel is made in Holland, and the front bumper assembly with the all-important row of lights comes from a manufacturer in Michigan who bought the original moulds from Universal Studios.

And KITT's voice? You'll hear original actor William Daniels.

The centre-piece of the exhibit is Pat Ryan's 1967 Sunoco Camaro Z28. Bought in Toronto, and race-prepped at the Gorries Chevrolet-Olds dealership (its body was acid-dipped to reduce weight), it scored Chevrolet's first points in the Trans Am race series at the season opener

Continued on next page



PHOTOS BY PETER BLEAKNEY FOR THE TORONTO STAR
1977 "Smokey and the Bandit" Pontiac Firebird Trans Am SE (top) is owned by Joe Silba. 1968 Camaro RS/SS is owned by Jason Ramsay.

ON ON1

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2011 ★ TORONTO STAR ★ X15

TORONTO AUTO SHOW II



PHOTOS BY PETER BLEAKNEY FOR THE TORONTO STAR
Legendary GM tuner Ken Lingenfelter brought the sixth prototype of his Wanda L TA (above); the Pontiac Firebird KITT is seen above, right, while the '67 Sunoco Camaro Z28 raced by Craig Fisher is at right, below.

Continued from previous page

in Daytona with Canadian Craig Fisher at the wheel.

Fisher subsequently joined the Penske team, the Camaro went with him and he paired up with Mark Donohue. Their greatest success was a first in Trans Am class and third overall at the 1968 12

Hours of Sebring. The car is presented in the livery from that race.

Bringing us up to modern times is the "Baddest Camaro Ever Produced," the 2011 ZL1.

Available through select GM dealers and created by New Jersey-based SLP, the ZL1 pounds the pavement with a custom-built 750 hp supercharged 427 ci V8. As

would be expected, the Camaro is completely reworked from its coil-over shocks to its Brembo brakes to its carbon-fibre hood.

Unlike anything else in the Camaro/Firebird exhibit, this one you can buy — providing you have \$80,000 U.S. to spend after already purchasing the six-speed manual donor car.

