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1958 Pontiac Bonneville Sport Coupe

THE DAYS OF
CHROME *and*
HYPERBOLE

It may not be wine and roses, but I miss the days when cigar chomping, seer-sucker suit wearing ad men were in charge of naming stuff... particularly car stuff! Take this for example, the 1958 Buick featured 160 ‘floating’ chrome squares on its grill. Did they call it a “Buick grill?” How plebian! No, it’s the “Fashion-Aire Dynastar Grill.”

In the realm of the overstatement, copy flacks were not about to be outdone. The sales brochure for the 1958 Pontiac proclaimed it to be “the boldest advance in 50 years!” I guess the writer never heard of George Patton or Albert Einstein.

Today, we have all these engineers in lab coats coming up with names like “ABS” and “DOHC.” Personally, I’ll take a “Hyper-Galaxo-Tronic” sunvisor and a “Plasma-Thrust” door handle over an “EFI” any day!

Which leads us to the subject of this issue’s featured car—a 1958 Pontiac Bonneville Sport Coupe. Not only does it fairly drip chrome, it is laced with all manner of wonderful and totally ridiculous euphemisms. Here, for your reading pleasure, is the Rosetta Stone of 50s vintage Pontiac “Ad-Speak.”

Pontiac Ad Speak *What it Actually Means*

Wonderbar, *No, it's not German or a new candy bar. It's a signal seeking radio.*

Sportable, *Still a radio, this time one you can remove and play anywhere.*

EverLevel, *Air suspension*

Memo-matic, *Memory seat adjustment*

Safe-T-Trac, *A locking rear differential*

Strato-Flight Hydra-matic, *An automatic transmission*

Aero-Frame, *A frame*

Autotronic Eye, *Automatic headlight dimmer*

Panavisor, *Basically, a big green plastic sunvisor*

Lurex, *Little silver carpet fibers*

Morrokide, *Ehh... vinyl upholstery*

Calypso Green, *Green*

Jeweled Action Response, *What happens when you press the accelerator pedal*



Now that you are fully trained in conversational Pontiac, let's take a closer look at this great little gem of a car from the days of "Howdy Doody"—and crouching under a school desk so as not to get incinerated by an atomic bomb.

One of my fondest childhood memories is being squired about Scottsdale in my uncle Vic's '58 Bonneville convertible. It was a Saturday tradition in the fall—first, a Sun Devil home game (this is long before the days of the Pac-10) followed by prime rib at the Pink Pony. The car was white and robin's egg blue and I thought it was God's own chariot—I still do.



THE POP-CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE 50'S IS BEING EATEN BY TIME. DRIVE-IN MOVIES AND ROLLER SKATE CURB SERVICE ARE AMONG THE SAD CASUALTIES.

continued on page 20



1958 Pontiac Bonneville Sport Coupe

The 1958 model year witnessed a major move toward platform sharing and the mile-long options list. For example, the Pontiac Bonneville and Chevrolet Impala shared the same basic body. Both car's modest base price quickly went stratospheric once those option boxes started getting checked. In the case of the Bonneville, its base sticker of \$3,481 easily elbowed well into Buick territory with the addition of hotter engines, transmission and suspension upgrades, convenience items and style packages. Swap the bench for buckets—check! Radio that hunts for a signal—check! Spinner hubcaps—check! Simply got to have a “Full-Flow Oil Filter” and a dash mounted compass—check, check! “Excuse me Mr. salesperson, this pen’s out of ink.”

Though certainly not a “stripper,” our Mallard Turquoise and Patina Ivory Sport Coupe is free of options of questionable value. It does have the 285 hp engine mated to the 4-speed Hydromatic transmission—a solid, middle of the road choice. The upholstery is vinyl rather than leather and the car does without the automatic headlight dimmer, power windows and other finicky electrical gizmos.

About the setting:

Steven King once penned a yarn titled *The Langoler's* wherein a herd of giant packmen with spiky teeth ate the past and created space for the present. Likewise, the pop-cultural heritage of the 50's is being eaten by time. Drive-in movies and roller skate curb service are among the sad casualties. Fortunately, while scouting for photo shoot locations, our intrepid photographer **Michael Craft**, located a “passion-pit” that has yet to be turned into another Levittown.



SPECIFICATIONS

1958 Pontiac Bonneville Sport Coupe

Year/Model	1958 Pontiac Bonneville Coupe
Production Run	219,823 (all Pontiacs) 12,240 (Bonnevilles) 9,144 coupes, 3,096 convertibles
Body Style	2-door, 4/5-passenger Coupe
Engine	370 cubic inch, V8 cylinder,
Horsepower	255@4,500 RPM manual, 285 @4,600 automatic 330 Tri-power 3 2-barrel Rochester carbs.
Transmission	3-speed manual, 4-speed automatic
Wheelbase	122 inches

* Specification data can, and often does, vary. When discrepancies occur, we use the most often cited information.



The name “Bonneville” was first applied to a 1954 GM Motorama concept car. The first production Bonneville appeared in 1957. Each dealer received one.



AUTO TRIVIA

- The Bonneville represents the last gasp of Harley Earl's rocket ship themed styling. He retired from GM in 1959.
- 1958 marked the 50th Anniversary of General Motors. It was dubbed the "Golden Jubilee" and featured a year-long celebration with special events and promotions.
- The late 50s saw the rise of the "Options list" whereby an entry level car could be up-graded by adding extra-cost mechanical and convenience items—or "Outfitted to a man's taste in elegance" as the ads put it. On the '58 Pontiac, such options as a speed warning alarm, compass, spotlight, removable transistor radio, air suspension and triple 2-barrel carburetors were available... at a price.
- The one-year-only body style proved costly for GM. Knudsen's "Wide-track" designs would hit the market starting in 1959.

A Timeline History of Pontiac up to 1958:

- 1899** Pontiac Spring and Wagon Works comes into being
- 1905** PS&WW acquires Rapid Truck Company
- 1907** Oakland Motor Company founded
- 1908** PS&WW and OMC merge under "Oakland" name
- 1909** GM under William C. Durant buys Oakland
- 1926** Pontiac introduced as a companion brand to Oakland
- 1927** Pontiac eclipses Oakland in sales
- 1932** GM ceases production of Oakland
- 1942** War halts production of Pontiac
- 1946** Production resumes using 1942 style cars
- 1949** First all new, post-war design hits showrooms
- 1955** All new bodies, chassis and engines introduced
- 1956** Semon "Bunkie" Knudsen becomes General Manager of Pontiac, John DeLorean named Co-head of Engineering
- 1957** First use of "Bonneville" name (convertible, 600 produced)
- 1958** Tri-power Bonneville is Indy 500 pace car, last year of "Indian" design motif

1958 was the first year for dual headlights on a lower priced GM product. The upscale 1957 Cadillac Brougham had featured them.

Optional air-suspension was offered but proved to be troublesome. Dealers were supplied with kits to convert the cars back to standard spring and shock setups.



The mantra of late-50's car design was "Longer-Lower-Wider." Under Bunkie Knudsen, Pontiac would push the concept to the limit with its now famous range of "Wide-Track" cars.

The brakes—drums all around—were the car's weakest point. Two or three hard stops could send the pedal to the floor and leave the pads smoking.

Due to corrosion issues, the exhaust pipes were no longer integrated into the rear chrome bumpers.

To unclutter the Bonneville's side view, the gas cap is placed out of sight behind a swing out backup light.