

1972 Ford Gran Torino



Ok, here it is: the 1972 Ford Gran Torino. Buying the one I did was possibly the worst financial decision I made that decade, but I also absolutely loved that car. First, just look at it! Mine was in really rough shape, in need of massive restoration compared to the one in this photo, but to me this is the most attractive body style I have ever seen on a car. I just love the big, fat quarter panels, the long wheelbase, the scoop- really all of it. When you sit in the driver's seat you see miles and miles of hood in front of you, which is quite a contrast to today's drop-hood configurations that give you a full view of the road. I liked it, though. It reminded me of once landing a tail dragger airplane, taxiing around with that huge engine blocking my view. It was just a beautiful thing to behold. Now, here is the one I bought:

I saw it sitting beside the road from the passenger seat of Patrick Guys' pickup truck. I had sold my Buick Regal out of sheer poverty, so naturally why not buy a car to restore? To me the Torino was striking and unique, and I simply HAD to have it. I think I coughed up about \$400 for it and it was in bad, bad shape. It had shag carpet from the 70s on the floor, sopping wet from a roof leak and smelling of someone's dog who had likely been living in there before it was put up for sale. It didn't have an alternator, so Pat and I got it started and running on just a tractor battery. The drive home was interesting because I could only turn left about 20 degrees, so that was fun. I will spare you all the details of what needed done, but here are the highlights:

- The engine had mismatched pulleys and accessory brackets, likely because the heads were from another engine
- Both front springs were broken clean in half
- The engine absolutely had to be rebuilt
- The gas tank was full of rust (Found that out only AFTER I installed the new carburetor)

- The back seat was from a completely different car so the seatbelts were not even installed
- The radiator was Swiss cheese
- and on and on.

After great, great pains (acquiring a permanent back injury in the process) the engine was rebuilt, a Ford guru we knew found all the right pulleys and brackets, all peripherals and accessories were replaced (or installed, in the case of the alternator), an Edelbrock 4 barrel carburetor emplaced, and new rims and tires were set atop completely rebuilt suspensions. Even my kids, little at the time, helped me pull the back seat out. The rebuilt 351 Windsor growled and purred through twin straight pipes and I was happy! Even with a rebuilt engine, the original Windsor of that year only put out around 150 horsepower and so was a bit underpowered for THREE THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY THREE friggan pounds of car! It was still fun!

I could go on about the many strange times I had in the Torino, like the time I returned to Plymouth after several years away and got pulled over by the cops at gunpoint within minutes of my arrival. Ah, there's no place like home. Mainly, though, the memory that is permanently tied to this car in my mind stems from a time I had it in Michigan where I lived for a while. I had it pulled in the garage where I worked to replace the heavy, cast iron intake manifold with an aluminum one in an effort to lighten the thing up even a little. A guy there had been a PT boat captain in Vietnam and had worked with troubled youths in his previous job. Having heard my stories about the seemingly unnecessary work I had put into the Torino, and continued to put into it, he said to me "John, you have to ask yourself why that car is so important to you." It took me a long time to figure out, but it dawned on me that when I work on cars I can hear my dad talking to me, telling me what to do. So, in answer to Steve Dills' earlier question about why I bought such pieces of junk all the time (to which I originally answered "poverty"), the real answer is so I can hear my dad's voice.