

1998 Pontiac Sunfire



Number 10 in the John's Car Review series is mom's old 97 or 98 Pontiac Sunfire. This was the car that finally convinced me that Pontiac, indeed, made junk. To be fair I used this car as a light truck, hauling hundreds of pounds of cast iron gumball machine base-plates all over southern Michigan from 2003 through 2006. (I'll let the people who don't know what that means try to figure out what the hell I was doing during that time.) I think this contributed to the ultimate failure of the transmission and/or torque converter, which went something like this:

I was driving my children up from seeing their grandma in Indiana, headed north through the more desolate regions of southern Michigan. I came over a low hill that led into a shallow saddle in front of a rodeo. (Weird, I know, but it's Michigan.) I passed the rodeo on my left with good speed. Moments later I watched as it crept back into my driver's side view while I gently slid backwards down the second hill, engine at idle. My transmission had been transformed into a two speed – neutral and park. Now stranded with two kids in the middle of nowhere, sun setting in front of a rodeo, I called the only person I knew to be available within 20 miles. Helpfully, the person (and you know who you are) responded, "Well, I'm settled in for the night." Sorry to have interrupted your online casino night. I actually can't remember how I got the kids home. Maybe it was the cop who stopped to tell me "You can't park here." The little Sunfire spent the next few months in my dedicated auto garage, one of two I had at my lovely house on the golf course. However, I could never get the thing to engage gears no matter how many times I lifted the engine and removed, replaced, jiggled, and twisted the new transmission and a series of torque converters. In hindsight, I probably didn't spline the torque converter properly to the transmission because I didn't know what the hell I was doing with a front wheel drive. As I write this I realize it is also possible that, rather than the usual suspects, I smoked the differential. No matter. The story ends happily though, as I lost the car along with the two garages, the house on the golf course, and all my tools in the divorce, car still up on jacks with the engine pulled. Last I knew it was put back

together and driven by the mouth-breathing son of the drunken scoundrel who sold me the house. I hope he wrecked it end-over-end like he did his last car. Perhaps I'm letting my personal feelings color my opinion of Pontiac as a brand.