



Pontiacs & Oaklands star in new exhibit

The Oakland Motor Car Company of Pontiac, Michigan, was purchased by General Motors in 1909. The company continued to produce modestly priced automobiles until 1931. GM introduced Pontiac as a companion make for the more-expensive line of Oakland automobiles and eventually overtook Oakland in popularity. It supplanted its parent brand entirely by 1933.


Sold in the United States, Canada and Mexico by GM, in the hierarchy of GM's five divisions, it was slotted above Chevrolet, but below Oldsmobile, Buick and Cadillac. Starting with the 1959 models, marketing was focused on selling the lifestyle that the car's ownership promised than the car itself. By emphasizing its "Wide Track" design, it billed itself as the "performance" division of General Motors and that they "built excitement."

Amid the late 2000s financial problems and restructuring efforts, GM announced in 2008 it would follow the same path with Pontiac as it had with Oldsmobile in 2004 and discontinued manufacturing and marketing vehicles

under that brand by the end of 2010. The last Pontiac-badged cars were built in December 2009, with one final vehicle in January 2010. Franchise agreements for Pontiac dealers expired on October 31, 2010, leaving GM to focus on its four remaining North American brands: Chevrolet, Buick, Cadillac and GMC trucks.



A new exhibit at the Forney Museum of Transportation Features Oakland and Pontiac automobiles from the entire life of the brand. Many of the cars are owned by members of the local chapter of the Pontiac-Oakland Club International. At least three of the cars on display are owned by SACK members.

There were no plans at press time for an organized SACK tour of Forney's Pontiac-Oakland exhibit. So if you want to show some love for the museum and the cars on display, you're encouraged to grab some friends and visit the exhibit on your own time. The exhibit runs until April 30. 

Top: A glorious '59 Pontiac Bonneville is one of many stars of the Forney's new Oakland & Pontiac exhibit that runs until the end of April. The Oaklands on display include **1**, a sport cabriolet; **2**, a beautifully restored roadster; and **3**, a one-off fruit truck. *Photos by Joel Klassen.*



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GM's price ladder and the birth of Pontiac

As General Motors entered the 1920s, the product "ladder" started with the price-leading Chevrolet marque, and then progressed upward in price, power, and luxury to Oakland, Oldsmobile, Buick, and ultimately Cadillac.

By the mid-1920s, a sizable price gap existed between Chevrolet and Oakland, as well as a wide gap between Oldsmobile and Buick. Also, a product gap existed between Buick and Cadillac. GM pioneered the idea that consumers would aspire to buy up an automotive product ladder if a company met certain price points-called the Companion Make Program. To address this, GM authorized the introduction of four brands priced and designed to fill the gaps. Cadillac

would introduce the LaSalle to fill the gap between Cadillac and Buick. Buick would introduce the Marquette to handle the upper end of the gap between Buick and Oldsmobile. Oldsmobile would introduce the Viking, which took care of the lower end of the same gap.

Oakland's part in this plan was the 1926 Pontiac, a shorter-wheelbase "light six" priced to sell at a four-cylinder car's price point, but still above Chevrolet.

Pontiac was the first of the companion marques introduced. By 1929, GM sold 163,000 more Pontiacs than Oaklands. The discontinuation of Oakland was announced with the onset of the Great Depression in 1931. Pontiac was the only companion make to survive beyond 1940, or to survive its "parent" make.



1932 Sport Coupe



1933 Sedan

Pontiac's evolution over the company's first 40 years placed the brand among America's most popular makes. The Forney's exhibit showcases Pontiacs from the 1920s forward and illustrates the ever-changing styling trends that helped keep the line so popular.
Photos by Joel Klassen.



1948 Torpedo



1957 Safari



1957 Bonneville



1965 GTO



1962 Catalina



1963 Catalina



1964 Bonneville



1965 Grand Prix



1967 Bonneville



1969 Catalina

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Pontiac/Oakland

1. The museum's 1/25 scale car lot diorama is populated with Pontiac models from the mid 1950s to the 2000s. At least a couple of the real cars in the exhibit are depicted in scale here. Some of the featured cars from Pontiac's final decades include:

2, a '71 Firebird Trans Am; **3,** a '77 Firebird Trans Am; **4,** an '84 Firebird; **5,** a '79 Catalina Safari; **6,** a late-'90s Grand Prix; **7,** a '71 GTO convertible; **8,** an '87 Fiero GT; **9,** an '07 G6; and **10,** a mid-'00s Solstice roadster. *Photos by Joel Klassen.*

