



1968 Pontiac Performance Catalog

by Tim Dye

Ben Franklin, the most notable printer in American history could never have imagined the technical advancements in the printing profession. Gone are the days of hand setting type one letter at a time, inking the letters with a brayer, printing one sheet at a time by pulling a large lever with force to make a good impression on the paper. Printers in Franklin's day, and even half way through the 20th century, before letterpress printing fell out of favor were considered craftsmen. Today a pressman has to possess a combination of offset printing knowledge and an equal amount of computer savvy, as larger modern presses are controlled by several computers.

By 1968 offset printing (a combination of ink and water using a metal plate which has the image burned onto it) had progressed to the point where presses with multiple units could print 4-color pictures at a good rate of speed and hold registration for good quality. All color pictures are made up of four colors: yellow, magenta, cyan and black. Screening the photo separates the colors and turns the image into a series of small dots. If you get out a magnifying glass and look closely you can see the dots that make up a printed picture. Keeping it in register means printing each color in the exact same place as the sheet passes through the press, and it has to do this each and every time.

The 1968 Pontiac performance catalog was printed at Case-Hoyt Printers, a printing firm that as coincidence would have it started in 1926, the same year that GM introduced the Pontiac. 1968 was their first year to handle the Pontiac account. For many years a printing firm out of Chicago, named Regensteiner, had printed Pontiac's brochures. The press at Case-Hoyt was a brand new Harris 5-color sheet-fed offset press capable of printing on sheets of paper as big as 78" x 55" and touted as the world's newest, fastest, biggest press of its kind.

It took several people to operate the press. The picture on the next page shows the actual press that the 1968 Pontiac performance catalog was printed on. This photo was more than likely staged, and the man on the far right, in the tan clothing was probably the shop foreman. The man in between the press and the table (facing table) where the pulled samples are constantly inspected is probably the lead press operator and is responsible for the quality of the product and all things to do with the press. There are three other men in the picture, one would be a second pressman, another man would keep ink and water in the



1968 Pontiac High Performance brochure. It measures 11" x 11" and has 24 pages.

press, (which on a press that's big) with all the units in operation would keep a person busy. The low man on the totem pole would be the feeder, he would have to unwrap and stack the paper at the

infeed end of the press and handle stacking and flipping the paper over, coming off the delivery end of the press. And if there was a mis-feed and the press stopped you know who the lead press operator was going to have some words with. There is a lot of pressure on the job in the pressroom of a busy shop.

I have covered the press personnel and how the catalog was printed, and in a caption I briefly outlined the bindery process, but it takes a lot of people to get a job like this to the press. The art director for this job was William Gilmore, an employee of Pontiac's long time advertising agency MacManus, John and Adams (since 1934). He probably came up with the concept for the design of the catalog, and then his staff would have made it happen. He is shown in the catalog behind the wheel of the Overhead Cam Six Firebird convertible. There



Actual press at Case-Hoyt Printers used to print the 1968 Pontiac performance catalog.

is always a well thought out design theme, and then that theme is carried throughout the publication. In the case of the 1968 Pontiac performance catalog, to achieve the look they were after a variable screen technique which was used along with varied shaped dots to give the photos a stippled look, this was part of the theme.

The text throughout is printed in a light gray color and was written by Jim Wangers, also of MacManus, John & Adams. Colored text can be achieved two ways. One is by screening the four colors to get the desired color. For instance, if my memory serves me right 185 red is 100% magenta, 100% yellow, 0% cyan, 0% black. The other way is to add a fifth color, sometimes called a spot color. Remember earlier in the story I mentioned this was a five-color press, they used all five units on this job and ran the gray as a spot color.

Other considerations go into the making of the catalog such as paper type, weight and finish. All of this is to give the end user a certain feel when they look at the printed piece.



Well known freelance car photographer Dennis Gripenotrog took the pictures. They were shot in both the California and Detroit areas. Gripenotrog was hired for this shoot by Boulevard Photographic, he was featured in a 1996 book called "The Car and the Camera."

Having read this you may look at this brochure a little differently the next time you pick it up. 🍷

This is an actual press sheet off the press and shows the printers layout for the catalog. The entire catalog is printed two-up on one sheet of paper. After the first side is printed the paper is flipped over and the same image is printed on the other side, on the opposite end. After it is dry, it is cut, folded and stitched.



This is William Gilmore, art director at MacManus, John & Adams. The 1968 Pontiac performance catalog was his project and he is shown driving the OHC Firebird in the catalog.