

Prize Pontiacs

By Tim Dye



These Pontiacs didn't win a prize, they were the prize. Starting in 1959 Marathon gas stations started a promotion called the "Picnic Sweepstakes." The grand prize was an all expenses paid trip abroad. Then there were weekly prizes of a new Pontiac and daily prizes consisting of picnic baskets, coolers, ice chests and all manner of picnic gear.

In 1960 the sweepstakes ran from July 4 through August 28 and attracted more than 3 million entries from Ohio Oil's marketing area. The lucky weekly winners of a new 1960 Pontiac were Allan Dotson, Elyria, Ohio; R.J. Harrolle, Kentland, Indiana; Thomas McKinney,



Here are some of the weekly prizes given away during the eight week contest in 1960. Plaid was a popular motif for picnic and camping gear.

West Terre Haute, Indiana; Barbara Noble, Flint, Michigan; Tony Hunt, Jackson, Michigan; William Haverkamp, Brazil, Indian; Douglas Paris, Milford, Illinois and Phillip Moots, Findlay, Ohio.

The sweepstakes were hugely popular and continued once again in 1961. There were some changes, no longer was there a grand prize of a trip abroad. The weekly prize of a new 1961 Pontiac Catalina two-door was the grand prize. Also the length of the contest was shortened from eight weeks to six weeks, running from April 24th through June 5th. This meant there would only be six new Pontiacs given away, not eight. The changes must not have bothered the general public, before the contest was even over in 1961, Marathon had surpassed the number of entries from the previous year. Also different was the fact that not only did you win a new Pontiac but you also received \$1,000 to go with it.

I have no information about whether or not the sweepstakes went on another year or not. I know I would have been getting my gas at Marathon had I been old enough to drive at the time!



Shown here is Barbara Noble of Flint, Michigan accepting the keys of her new 1960 Pontiac from Marathon dealer George Frey.



Six two-door 1961 Pontiac Catalinas were given away along with \$1,000, one each week of the contest. Lawn chairs, coolers, and lanterns were among the weekly prizes Marathon stations gave away.