

The history of the Cactus GTO Club Inc. of Arizona

The Cactus GTO Club of Arizona was the state's sole chapter of the GTO Association of America for 35 years. It uniquely began with a Beach Boys concert in 1987. Within the parking lot of the venue, original club member Dave Salerno, who owned two vintage GTOs, shared his admiration for the GTO owned by concert attendee Greg Smith. The idea was mentioned about forming an Arizona chapter of the GTOAA.

In January 1988, Salerno and Smith joined with Alan Galard, Pete Orlando and others to form Cactus GTOs Inc. Meeting initially in conference rooms and fast-food restaurants over its 33 years of existence, the club grew from its handful of original members to 93 members by 2022. The club members stayed connected through the *"Valley of the Goats"* monthly newsletter, which debuted in January 1988 when the club formed.

Although this chapter has been based in Phoenix, members came from all over the surrounding area to enjoy the value of The Great One. Members' cars ranged from 1964 to 1974 GTOs to the last run of 2004-06 GTOs. The club also recognized the Tempest and Lemans line from Pontiac for membership.



Cactus GTOs hosted monthly meetings, arranged breakfast cruises, overnight trips, caravans to California for Pontiac events, and for many years were connected with the Kruse International Automobile Auction, where members served as drivers for the auction house. The event was a major fundraiser for the club and helped pay for holiday parties and charitable donations.

More recently the club has been associated with working as drivers for the Motorsports Auction Group (MAG) and has held its meetings jointly with other Pontiac fans from the Desert Renegades chapter of Pontiac-Oakland Club International.

Aside from singing the unofficial club theme song "Lil GTO" by Ronny & the Daytonas and enjoying the camaraderie and shared dedication around the Pontiac namesake, Cactus GTOs Inc. dedicates its time and effort to giving back to the community that makes the club possible. By participating in events and cruises that help fund charities like Toys for Tots, the club finds ways to help those in need while also utilizing their beloved machines. In 2019, the club donated to the auto shop program at East Valley Institute of Technology in Mesa so the school could buy computer tablets for class members.

One event the members particularly enjoyed was the Adopt-a-Highway volunteer cleanup. The club worked a mile of highway along the beautiful Apache Trail near the Superstition Mountains. Twice a year, members cleared debris along the highway.

Twice a year, the members could also attend a Car Clinic hosted by club member Frank Gostyla at his "Monster Garage," where the club got together to help fix up their vehicles, talk shop and bond over their Pontiacs. The club always had members with expertise in the nuances of Pontiac models, including Gostyla, Tim Blattner, the late Mike Baumgardner, Carl Sikes and Mark Delano.

More recently, club member Stan Ford led the setup of swap spaces at the Good Guys Southwest Nationals held in Scottsdale twice a year to help club members sell parts, while sharing history and memories with other enthusiasts.

The Great One. The Goat. Gran Turismo Omologato. All spell out what GTOs are all about. The original muscle car. – by *Mark E. Neumann*