

# Such a Deal

Rare online Fiero find prompts sanity-questioning road trip

**This story starts out as an orphan car of a different stripe. Besides my love of Fieros—I've owned four during the past 20 years—I also have a thing for Ramblers, 1964 to 1969 Americans and Rogues to be exact. I've owned seven and currently have three: a six-cylinder 1964 American convertible, and two V-8s, a 1968 Rogue hardtop and a 1969 station wagon.**

And like many similar stories, this one starts with surfing on eBay. In my case, after I was done searching Ramblers, I plugged "Pontiac Fiero" in the search box and more than 50 items were listed; but one yellow Fiero, in particular, caught my attention. It was described as follows:

"Attention collectors, this Fiero was the first fastback body produced by International Research Motorsports (IRM) of Gaithersburg, Maryland, and was displayed at SEMA and many Fiero Club and POCI events in the mid-'80s. This car sat in a warehouse from the '90s until late 2005 and has 20,600 original miles on it. I was told by the owner of IRM that it was a turbo project done in conjunction with Pontiac Motorsports, however they never could calibrate the computer to make it work before the project was canceled. We have removed the turbo; it will come with the car."

The ad continued, "We replaced the fluids and fuel and exhaust systems in the car and it started right up and runs excellent though it is burning a little rich. The transmission shifts smooth. The A/C needs to be charged. The car has the custom IRM suspension system and sits lower to the ground than a stock Fiero; this car really hugs the road."

The bidding was hovering around \$2,500 with no reserve. The mileage was what originally attracted me, then the near-perfect interior and finally the unique IRM body kit. As I happened to have Gary Witzenburg's seminal 1986 Fiero book, "Fiero, Pontiac's Potent Mid Engine Sports Car" close by, I was able to verify the car's provenance (it's pictured on pages 86 and 91). As is my practice, I contacted the seller, Bob McCool, and told him that I would make a last-second bid.

I was all set with a \$3,500 bid when, with 15 seconds to go, my phone rang and





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**ENGINE:** A stock four-cylinder engine was under the hood at the time of purchase, but an incorrect controller caused problems on the road.

**REAR HATCH:** Here's a close-up look at the unique fastback styling of the car.

**INTERIOR:** With less than 21,000 miles, the interior was in great shape.



**LEFT: Fiero has a legacy at Indianapolis, serving as the pace car in 1984.**

knocked out my DSL; and 30 seconds later, I saw that the car sold for less than \$3,000. I immediately e-mailed Bob and told him that if, for any reason, the deal with the winner should fall through, that I'd match his bid. Ultimately that's what happened and a week before Christmas of 2006, I flew from California to New Jersey to spend the holidays with my family and to pick up the car.

Taking the Metroliner train from Iselin, New Jersey, to Baltimore, Bob picked me up and questioned my wisdom of driving a more than 20-year-old car, the mileage notwithstanding, 3,000 miles back to California. I told him I had done it several times and didn't expect any problems that I couldn't handle. Famous last words, I know.

I handed over the balance of our agreed upon price and drove the car up to New Jersey to my parent's house. Having seen me do similar silly things, they weren't totally surprised when I appeared on their doorstep with a yellow, custom-bodied Fiero. My Mother, God love her, thought I had bought another Ferrari, so I had to explain that it was simply an underpowered but very clean Pontiac.

In the days that followed, I learned a few interesting facts about my "1985" car. The first thing was that it was actually a 1984 Fiero, verified first when I insured it for the drive from Maryland to New Jersey. This fact would become crucial in the days that immediately followed.

When Bob sold me the car, he included several ECUs he picked up on eBay and, in an effort to get the engine to not run rich, put the prom from one of them into the ECU in the car. Unfortunately, he didn't get the CHECK ENGINE LIGHT to reset. When I went to a repair shop to get the codes read, the mechanic wasn't able to read the code.

My next step was a trip to a local Pontiac dealer, where I found out that the 1984 and 1985 ECUs were different and I had an intact ECU for a 1984 Iron Duke. I figured that with the misdated title, maybe the car was running the wrong box, or at least the right prom in the wrong ECU. In about 20 minutes I removed the installed ECU and saw that it lacked the bar codes on the two eBay ECUs; I suspected that it was a custom ECU for the turbo application, which turned out to be correct. After installing the 1984



**LEFT: Rock Café, along Route 66 in Oklahoma, is a landmark of the Mother Road.**



**ABOVE:** In Roswell, New Mexico, even the McDonald's has a UFO theme.

**ARTICLES:** The car came with copies of stories published on the car from more than 20 years ago.

**ENGINE PARTS:** Unused turbo equipment was also part of the package.

**BELOW:** Near the Texas/New Mexico border, a quintet of forlorn Fieros was spotted—along with a lone Mitsubishi.

ECU, the check engine light went out and I was in business, ready for a 3,000 mile trans-continental adventure in a 22-year-old car on 18-year-old tires. What an idiot!

The trip cross-country, for the most part, was uneventful. I overnighted in Ohio, making it to Tulsa next to stay with family there. Unfortunately my plans to make it to Albuquerque were short-circuited in Amarillo, when a New Year's Eve blizzard closed I-40 for two days and I was lucky enough to get the last room in town.

Taking a more southerly route, I was able to get to Deming, New Mexico, but not before driving through Tex-Mex, New Mexico and seeing five Fiero coupes parked in someone's front yard. After heading west, my next stop was Phoenix,

where I stayed with a friend who insisted that I at least replace the rear tires which, by that point, were almost bald.

After getting the car back to California I addressed a few of the car's issues, including installing the cross-drilled rotors that Bob had sold with the car and treating it to two front tires and a four-wheel alignment. Next up was recharging the A/C system, going with high-priced R-12 rather than an R-134 retrofit, which turned out to be a wise move even though the service and recharge was still \$250.

Having cracked the front spoiler pulling out of a driveway, I had it repaired and painted and finally got the T-top locks fixed. The car drives just like you'd expect any stock, Iron Duke-powered low-mile-

age Fiero; that is to say it is very tight but with some creaking due to the Cars and Concepts T-top installation. It's likely that this Fiero is one of the first, if not the first Fiero with T-tops installed, something that I am trying to verify.

I've driven the car about 4,000 miles since getting it to the West Coast, but feel that the car is much too nice to use as a daily driver and I am looking for another Fiero, maybe a 1988 with the upgraded suspension, to serve as the recipient for a transplant. Having recently driven a Fiero GT powered by a 4.9-liter pushrod Cadillac V-8, I'm thinking that this will be the best way to go, but I'm considering all options.

Regardless, it's been a fun experience so far. ■

