

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

The Pontiac Fiero is finally becoming a collector car ... after a decade or more of level value. Valuations for class 1 and class 2 GT models have risen about 6% between 2015 and 2018 (depending on the model and year). These data were taken from the HAGERTY VALUATION TOOL website; an authority on classic car values.

The Fiero is also a very good candidate for the Restomod crowd due to its plastic body, very stiff chassis, low stance, and mid engine layout. The best examples of this type of car have a supercharged V6 or 32-valve normally aspirated V8; Corvette brakes; improved cooling and fuel flow; and performance oriented suspensions, wheels and tires. These cars can usually do at least mid 13s in the quarter mile with either manual or automatic trans.

Typically, Restomods appreciate in lock step with their restored original cousins and are a lot more fun to drive due to their newer technology; improved handling and braking; and last but not least, much increased power to weight ratios.

Let's look at the Restomod market:

The Restomod market is very diverse in terms of equipment, quality, and the intent of the conversions. These cars generally have modern running gear, performance components, and up to date mechanical and electrical systems. It is a 1980s car with almost everything under the original body work from much newer cars and parts sources.

There are several factory like organizations that are doing or have done complete Fiero conversions in their shops. These factory built cars are generally better investments and are less prone to development problems than home built cars. Most of these same shops generally sell kits with specific parts that allow home builders to attempt their own Restomods. Some of these home built cars are excellent; others are less so ... let the buyer beware.

This author has a Design One Systems (Oklahoma City, OK) factory built Restomod that I bought used and restored. I have had several very good mechanics say my car looks like a General Motors specialty vehicle that could have come off a high performance build line in a G M Factory. The car looks that professionally built.

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

This Fiero Restomod is powered by a 4.6 liter 32-valve Cadillac NorthStar V8 engine (300HP) with matching automatic transmission and modified shift points. It currently has only 35,000 original miles on the crate engine and transmission since the conversion was completed some 17 years ago. The car additionally has Corvette brakes; high performance wheels & tires; heavy duty axles & suspension; improved cooling & fuel systems; and an aftermarket quick ratio steering rack.

I have repaired some mal-functioning systems (e.g. retractable headlights, electric door locks, power outlets, windshield washer, remote mirrors etc.); upgraded the interior including new leather seats; put new dew wipes on the windows of both doors; installed a new stereo system with 6 new speakers; had new ultra high performance tires installed; and replaced most of the SuperTrapp tunable exhaust system. This car drives very comfortably in traffic or on the open road; has great sound from both the radio and the exhaust; handles very well; and can turn mid 13 second quarter mile times if asked. This Restomod Fiero also gets 27 MPG at steady highway speeds. I could not be happier!

Some early pictures of my Design One Systems 1985 Fiero GT with a 32-valve 4.6 NorthStar V8



The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

Several other members of the Michigan Fiero Club have Restomods and they are very happy with their cars as well. Some have the 3400 engine, others the Supercharged 3800 V6; still others a normally aspirated General Motors V8 ... all are very quick compared to a stock Fiero GT.

With Restomods it pays to be a decent back yard mechanic as your car is not specifically covered by any one shop manual. This is where belonging to a club that is rich in technical talent is very helpful. Our Michigan Fiero Club has many very talented automotive engineers, former development people and highly skilled automotive technicians in its membership base; these guys have made my Restomod restoration project ... so much easier. They are also a great source for needed repair and replacement parts!

Some other engines that are popular in the Fiero Chassis besides the Northstar 4.6 V8:



3.4 DOHC V6 in the Fiero



3.8 supercharged V6 in the Fiero



350 cu in V8 in the Fiero by V8 Archie



Corvette V8 in the Fiero

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

The current market range for a high quality used Restomod is about \$12,000 to \$15,000; well below the actual cost to build one of these beautiful cars from scratch (my car ended up in the middle of this range). You cannot buy a new or reasonably preserved sports car (with similar performance) anywhere close to the above mentioned costs. A newer sports car would also come with hefty annual depreciation and insurance costs that you would avoid with a Fiero Restomod.

Restomods are not for everyone but in the right technically assisted environment they are very rewarding to own, build or restore, maintain, and drive!

The following are some articles on Fiero Restomods copied from the internet. These articles attempt to cover the spectrum that goes from show oriented performance cars to exceptional sports cars; hope you find this material interesting:

Quick Inspection: John Norman's '87 Pontiac Fiero Northstar V8

Pictures from Hot Rod Magazine:



Engine

Type: '95 Cadillac Northstar, 4.6L (281 ci)

Cooling: Griffin four-core cross-flow aluminum radiator

Computer: Superchips PROM (off-nitrous only), Howell Engine Development wiring harness Power

Adder: 120hp progressive single-stage NOS fogger nitrous system

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

Exhaust: DynoMax UltraFlo Rear-wheel power rating (no nitrous): 267.2 hp at 6,000 rpm; 264.2 lb-ft at 5,000 rpm

Drivetrain

Transmission: stock '95 4T80E automatic Overdrive transaxle, increased line pressure and raised shift points, 3.71:1 final drive, Positraction, B&M ProStick shifter, NAPA transcooler

Suspension

Front: Tubular upper and lower control arms with Carrera coilovers, 1-inch sway bar, 375-lb/in springs

Rear: Gabriel struts, 1-inch sway bar, 10-inch, 450-lb/in springs, modified stock Fiero engine cradle mounted solid to the chassis

Wheels And Tires

Wheels: Black powdercoated 17-inch ARE rims (7-inch wide/5 1/2-inch backspace front; 9 1/2-inch wide/5 1/2-inch backspace rear)

Tires: 40-series, 17-inch Yokohama AVS (215 front, 275 rear)

Bodywork

Panels: DGP body kit (fender flares and wing), Targa-top conversion, custom hood vents to aid cooling

Paint: PPG basecoat/clearcoat '98 GM Black Rose Poly

Done by: Premiere Paint & Body, North Manchester, IN

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

Quick Inspection: Jack Ditter's '87 Pontiac Fiero GT



Engine

Type: '97 Cadillac Northstar, 4.6L (281 ci)

Cooling: Griffin four-core cross-flow aluminum radiator

Wiring: Howell Engine Development custom wiring harness, Superchips PROM chip

Drivetrain

Transmission: stock '97 4T80E automatic Overdrive transaxle, narrowed 1 1/2 inches, 3.71:1 final drive, Positraction, cut Moser Engineering axles, Hurst Shifter, NAPA transcooler

Suspension

Front: Polyurethane bushings, heavy-duty Monroe shocks,

Rear: Polyurethane cradle bushings, Monroe gas struts, locked heavy-duty '81 A-body steering knuckles

Wheels And Tires

Wheels: 15x8 Eagle aluminum

Tires: 60-series, 15-inch Kelly radials (215 front, 225 rear)

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

Bodywork

Panels: Hood and side scoops functional

Paint: original Dark Blue Metallic

Done by: Hewkin Auto, St. Louis, MO

The V8 Story!!

V8 Conversion Project (s)

**Just thought I would share with all Fiero owners my project (s)!by Paul Vargyas ,
August 1999**

If you would have asked me in 1998 (or earlier) if I ever planed to install a V8 in a Fiero, I would have said...NO, absolutely not! Well, like a LOT of people in the club (*Northern IL Fiero Enthusiasts*), after I have owned several Fieros, I got involved in the "how can I go faster" discussions. Since I live about 30 miles from V8 Archie's, I have had the opportunity to see his work at the spring 1998 club meeting held at his shop in Lake Barrington, IL.

I originally thought about a 3800 supercharged V6 (looks hi-tech!), but after looking at the V8 engine installation process, pictures of Fiero V8's and then listening to the SOUND of a V8, I was hooked on the idea of a V8. I thought about doing a installation myself.....even bought a 88 cradle and started looking around for a engine & transmission. I could see that this was going to be a loooooong project. Then fate took over.....The time was right.

In April 1998, I purchased a Red 5-speed Formula with Sunroof, pw, pdl, cruise (sort of hard to find with all this original equipment). I knew the owner and the car. I decided this was going to be the car for my V8 project. I had all the brakes redone with new rotors and calipers and then took the car to Archie's in early June, 1998 and told him I wanted a brand new crate 350 engine, TPI fuel injection with LT-1 injectors, and his "master installation kit". I also purchased poly rear suspension bushings, and new Monroe SensaTrac struts and asked him to install these items during the conversion since the engine cradle would be out of the car.

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

Since I was close enough to Lake Barrington, I had the opportunity to visit Archie's shop on occasion to monitor the installation progress. I was going to offer my "expert help", but Archie quickly explained that he charged \$300.00 extra if I wanted to "help". I decided to let him do his job, so the only "help" I was able to offer was to stay out of the way and do some detailing and parts procurement while the engine was out. The "V8 transition" took about 3 weeks, but I had told Archie that I was in no hurry. I picked up the car on Thursday, July 30th, 1998.

What a ride! ***This is a fast car.*** I have ridden in "hopped up" V6's, 3.1 upgrades and even a 3800 Supercharged 5-speed 86GT. I have owned Corvettes (some years ago) and currently have a 98 Grand Prix supercharged GTP, but all I can say is: #1 There is no sound like a **350 V8** (w/twin cats and twin resonator tips), #2 there is no substitute for cubes when it comes to raw torque & power. Archie feels we are getting about 260-270 hp from this setup. (No hot cam or headers.... yet!). Seat of the pants feeling says there are few vehicles on the road that will keep up with this car.

While I have no official times, a stop watch is showing mid to upper 5's for 0-60 times. The torque is the most pleasant part of this set up. It comes on in any gear at very low RPM's. It really puts you back in the seat. I have added a sport shifter from Rodney Dickman which makes it feel like I have better shift control.

Engine looks great in the bay, the TPI system gives it the contemporary hi-tech look, and there is no noticeable weight transfer penalty (the battery went up front UNDER the spare tire). Handling appears to be close to pre-V8 handling. Possible reason is the addition of 225/50ZR16 Comp TA's on 7.5" rims. Everything works, including the factory a/c.

One of the main problems I can see with this conversion is excess rear tire wear due to the drivers need to use the accelerator too aggressively! I guess I am one of the guys who talked about this with a lot of people in the Club (*Northern IL Fiero Enthusiasts*) and on the Fiero Internet newsgroup list, but decided to do something to make it happen! Before you ask.... Here is what it costs to have this conversion done:

(Note: these are 1998 costs)

Master build kit (manual) \$3150 (Auto is \$2950)

New 350 crate engine (long block) \$1500

TPI fuel injection system \$1600 (incl. LT1 injectors, ECM, chip, wiring harness, intake manifold, HEI distributor, gaskets, etc.) Only \$400 if carbureted)

Labor to do complete installation \$2250 (incl. cleaning/painting cradle, engine compartment, etc.)

Total \$8500 **(again 1998 prices ... today's prices would be significantly higher)**

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

Is it inexpensive? NO ... Was it done right and on time? YES

How much could I have saved if I did it myself? \$2250. Was it worth it to me to have Archie do it? YES.

Can you cut corners yourself? YES (used engine, no 4-core radiator, cheap clutch, no TPI, do your own exhaust etc)

How long if you do it yourself? Too long! (And probably very frustrating).

Was it worth it? YES.

If you have been thinking about an engine conversion for awhile, my suggestion is: go for it, life is short, enjoy it.

BUT, the story does not end here. In July, 1999 I sold this car, and decided to put essentially the same drivetrain in my 88 Formula T-Top car.

This one adds Sanderson headers, SLP Siamese air tubes, more chrome, Koni struts/shocks and a cleaner engine compartment. Costs were roughly the same as above, except that the headers were more, plus I had them "jet-hot" coated, the SLP chromed tubes were expensive (but they look great), the Koni's added costs, but..... the project came out great:



Paul Vargyas

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

Paul has continued his Restomod journey; his web site shows the latest Vargyas ride; a 1988 Fiero GT with T-Tops ... Converted to LS1 power in August of 2006.



This is a superb example of an upper end Fiero Restomod ... congratulations Paul!

There is another type of Restomod that has not been covered in this write-up; namely the Competition Fiero. Many autocross (and other racing formats) are seeing the Fiero as a top competitor. You can race prepare a Fiero inexpensively compared to many other European and Japanese brands. “Fiero as a Completion Car - Part 3” addresses this offshoot of the Restomod Market ... look for it on this website if you are interested.

The Pontiac Fiero as a Restomod Classic Car Investment

This is a very small sample of the many Restomod articles, pictures, and ideas that appear on the internet. As you can see Restomod builders vary in approach, intent, and execution. Research the internet and then decide if this type of investment vehicle is for you.

The Michigan Fiero club can help you with information (we have an extensive technical library) and advice on the development, maintenance and enjoyment of your Restomod.

We have many members that are skilled automotive engineers, development people, and build technicians ... some of our members are even GM engineers that worked on the original development of the Fiero. We also have a rich event schedule that will put you in touch with a great group of fellow Fiero enthusiasts.

Check out the rest of our Michigan Fiero Club web site and join us ... If you don't have a Fiero we will help you find one; Restomod or Traditional Classic.

The Pontiac Fiero is currently one of the best values in the Classic Car Market ... begin the journey!

All The Best / *Roger Fagnani*