

Owning a 1988 Fiero GT or Formula Classic Car

The Fiero is becoming an investment vehicle; values are starting to rise and many sellers are still pricing their cars at yesterday's values. Even the most desirable examples are still priced under \$17,000 (e.g. a loaded 1988 GT with a 5 speed manual transmission in showroom new, Class One, condition).

So which Fiero models by production year are most likely to be good future investments? Currently the 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 Fiero GT and the 1988 Formula models with lots of options are the most valued. The four cylinder 1984 Pace cars are also sought after.

343,766 Fieros were produced in the 5 year model run (automatics plus manuals). The most sought after models listed above represented only 21% of the total 5 year production volumes. The most sought after 1988 GT and Formula models represent less than 4% of the total Fiero production run.

The 88s are most prized because of their unique "Lotus like" suspensions. The rear cradles and front suspension were changed for the 88 model year. Some of these changes were designed to improve handling and decrease bump steer.

Unfortunately, this uniqueness is becoming both a blessing and a curse. GM used existing suspension, cooling, brake components and many other common parts for the 1984 through 1987 Fiero Models. The 1988 Fiero models are a different story; a lot of the unique 1988 only model parts are no longer available from GM, normal parts outlets, or even most salvage yards.

This situation makes owning a 1988 Fiero a challenging situation. It basically makes using a local mechanic a non starter for many jobs. Most commercial auto shops will not deal with a car where they cannot order parts from their normal supplier base (they make money on parts as well as labor).

1988 Fiero parts availability runs the spectrum from remanufactured, to other similar GM parts that need to be modified, to used parts only; a few parts are just not available at all. This latter group includes parts like T-Top seals; these parts are no longer available at any price. Avoid T-Tops if you plan on driving in the rain ... most of them currently leak or will leak soon!

Note: There were two types of T-top seals, CJB (factory option on 88s) and non-CJB (available in the aftermarket and installed on any year Fiero). These different T-top setups require unique body and glass seals, neither of which are currently available. Sun roofs are a better option and seals are available.

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Here are some pictures of the 1988 Fiero GT and 1988 Fiero Formula cars discussed above:



1988 Fiero GT – 6,848 total units produced (manual and automatics).



1988 Fiero Formula – 5,484 total units produced (manual and automatics).

These two beautiful cars were produced in very limited Quantities (less than 4% of the total Fiero Production run). This is why many unique 1988 (Fiero only) replacement parts are no longer supported by GM factory or aftermarket suppliers. The demand is just not large enough for most vendors to invest in production costs, shelf inventory and part distribution.

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Let's look at the type of parts that form this unique availability challenge for the 1988 GTs and 1988 Formula Fiero models:

1988 Front Hubs are different than 84-87 front hubs. The 1988s have non-replaceable wheel bearings in the front hubs and no new factory parts are available. All current 88 front hub/wheel bearing assembly reproductions seem to be of lesser quality than the GM originals. Rodney Dickman is now offering a street only front hub with **replaceable front wheel bearings!** A possible option would be to buy a set of front hub assemblies (including extra bearings) and institute a "check and replace as necessary" preventative maintenance strategy.

1988 brake parts like caliper pins and the tiny springs to keep the pads on have been said to be hard to locate. Slider boots are also hard to get ... used ones seem to fit better than reproductions. As of this writing, springs and pins are still listed on Rock Auto's site.

Unique 1988 parts would additionally include exhaust and coolant crossover pipes and both cooling pipes under the car – all hard to get, even used. The 88 Exhaust Y pipe is easy to tell because it has a tin-like heat shield surrounding it. Rodney Dickman has repair kits available for the coolant tubes according to his web site.

88 Alternator heat shields are available only as used parts.

88 Engine cradles were made specifically for the 88 4 cylinder, or V6. The engine mounting provisions are different on the cradles. The 88 V6 Engine mount is different than pre-88s.

Parking brake cables are unique on the 88s. Reproductions are listed on The Fiero Store website.

Some other 88 parts are available as used only, these include: 88 only rear sway bar and brackets, 88 only 6 x 15 rims, (fronts are unique to 88 models), 88 only rear strut top brackets, 88 only rear trunk lid. (88 had the radio noise filter put into the lid), 88 only twin exhaust cut out, and coupe/formula rear fascia.

Body panels - Most body panels are interchangeable, pre 88 deck lids will work, but the wheel well liners are said to be exclusive to the 88s.

Rodney Dickman has some of the following reproduction parts for sale on his web site (while he is able to have them manufactured): 88 Steering rack rubber mounting bushings, 88 Steering rack bushings and bearings, 88 knuckle girdle, 88 wheel bearing/hub assembly (aftermarket reproduction), 88 suspension bushings, 88 ball joints and paddle nuts, 88 Radiator hoses.

The Fiero Store has aftermarket 88 E-brake cables (Front, Left, Right), reconditioned 88 control arms, upper control arm paddle nuts, and control arm shafts, poly control arm bushings and some other 88 parts listed on their website.

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The list on the previous page is far from complete but should serve to paint a reasonably accurate picture. A lot of 88 parts are: unavailable new, or currently hard to get, or possibly available used, or only available from reproduction parts vendors like Rodney Dickman and the Fiero Store.

PLEASE NOTE: We need to support these reproduction vendors! The 88 parts situation is going to get worse as time goes on and these guys are keeping the 88 Fieros alive.

So what does this situation suggest for varying skill levels as a home mechanic / restorer?

Seasoned Mechanic: The front hub/wheel bearing part is an increasing problem. The original GM part was better than current replacements but is no longer available; buying aftermarket parts plus spares seems like a good idea. All other 88 parts are probably solvable at present but will be an increasing challenge. There are very few “1988 parts cars” available and those entrepreneurs that have squirreled away individual used 88 Fiero parts are very aware of their potential future value and are charging accordingly. Commercial mechanics will be unhappy with this situation; they don’t typically like fixing cars with used or remanufactured parts.

Hobbyist Owner with limited mechanical skills: They should probably stick with 85, 86, and 87 GTs. Parts are generally available at automotive parts stores and local mechanics will likely agree to work on these cars. Some will be reluctant to do certain jobs (e.g. side window dew wipe replacements) but for the most part you can find someone that will work on these cars.

So you ask ... is there any real differences between the 85, 86, and 87 GTs? The 87 GTs have some improvements over the 85 / 86 GT models, but nothing that would be considered a show stopper. Look for the finest Class Two Fiero GT you can find (a restored car with limited recent mileage), in the body style and color you prefer for any of these three years. Availability, color, model styling and price will likely dictate your final choice.

Some think the 85 GTs, with WS6 suspension, ride and steer a little better than the 86 and 87 GTs due primarily to model year changes in wheel and tire specifications. Others think the 86 / 87s corner slightly better but ride harsher than the 85s. There is really little difference between these three GTs in terms of overall performance, handling, and price.

The 88 GTs cost about \$4,000 more and the 88 Formulas cost about \$2,000 more than the 85 / 86 / and 87 GTs (this assumes all cars are in the same excellent Class Two condition). The 88s do handle better than earlier models but at an increasing cost of maintenance. The three earlier model years (85 / 86 / and 87 GTs) are initially less expensive and much easier to maintain.

Buying anything other than a Class Two restored car with some careful recent miles is probably *penny wise and pound foolish*. A restored Class Two car will generally have at least 50% more

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invested in it than it can yield in sales price. In other words a \$9,000 sale price 85 / 86 / or 87 Fiero GT will likely have an invested cost of \$13,000 to \$14,000 in parts and labor.

This kind of investment scenario is true for almost all classic cars ... they are fun to own, restore, and drive but expensive and time consuming to initially prepare. This is especially true for cars with limited parts availability like the 1988 Fiero GT and Formula Models.

Some pictures of the 1985 / 1986 / and 1987 Fiero GTs:



1985 Fiero GT – 22,534 total units produced (manual and automatics).



1986 Fiero GT – 17,891 total units produced (manual and automatics).

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1987 Fiero GT – 15,880 total units produced (manual and automatics).

Hagerty Valuation Tool Prices for the Fiero models listed below:

1985 / 1986 / 1987 Pontiac Fiero GTs – Average 2018 prices for manual transmission models.
2dr Coupe 6-cyl. 173cid / 135hp ... V6 - Fuel Injected models with a lot of options.

#1 Concours (Class One – showroom new with recent full restoration)	~ \$13,000
#2 Excellent (Class Two – restored with some driver mileage since restoration)	~ \$9,000
#3 Good (Class Three – useable but needs some work, definitely not show ready)	~ \$6,500
#4 Fair (Class Four – running but needs a lot of work – may have rust problems)	~ \$3,500

VALUE ADJUSTMENTS: Subtract \$1,000 for Automatic Transmissions on all 4 classes and all 3 model years.

Specific “Class” prices may vary a somewhat between model years but should accurately represent nationwide averages for the three model years referenced above.

Hagerty price estimates are used by most of the televised classic car USA auction events. See the **Hagerty Valuation Tool** website for further details and prices on other models.

Hopefully you are now armed with enough information to make a rational choice that reflects your interest, skill level as a mechanic, and ambition as a classic car restorer. Look carefully and buy with the total final cost of restoration in mind. A \$5,000 bargain could ultimately cost you another \$8,000 to \$9,000 to put it into Class Two condition.

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Restoring a classic car is more a labor of love than a winning investment. You can save a lot of money by buying someone else's excellent work, but only if you do your homework.

Look for a detailed repair history backed up by receipts, pictures and other documentation ... this is a must have with almost all classic car purchases. Most serious classic car restorers keep these kinds of historical records. These records add to the current and future sales price; so continue to maintain this information on your newly purchased Fiero or other classic car.

If you are into fixing, maintaining, or restoring your Fiero, the Michigan Fiero Club can help you with information (we have an extensive technical library) on this fine classic car. We also have good information on parts sources, functional GM parts substitutions, and useful comfort / drivability modifications.

Many of our members are skilled automotive engineers, mechanics, 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 events 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.

The Pontiac Fiero is currently an emerging value in the Classic Car Market ... begin the journey!

All The Best: *Roger Fagnani & Jim Nye*