

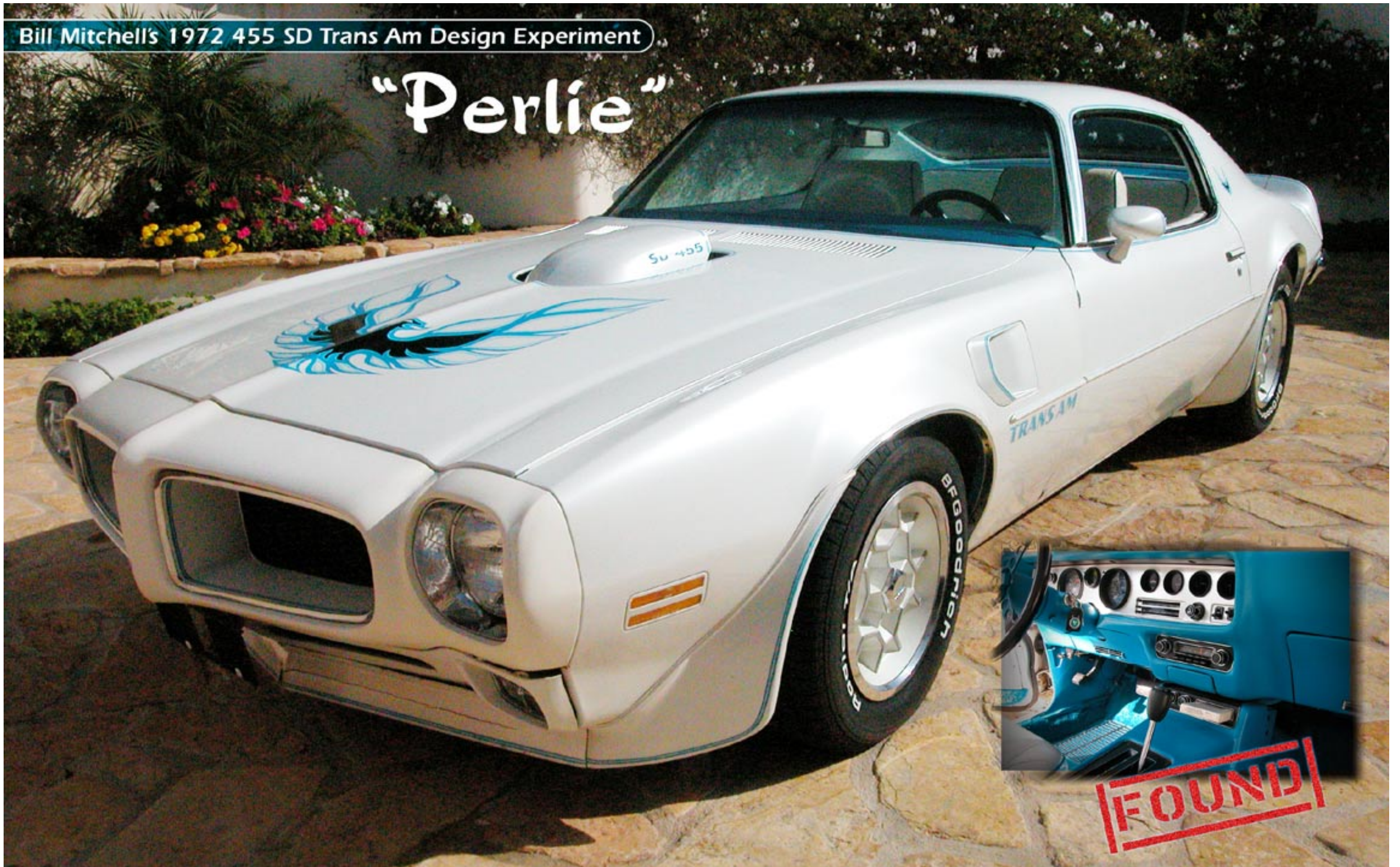
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# the War Whoop

Bill Mitchell's 1972 455 SD Trans Am Design Experiment

"Perlie"





It's only so often that you get a chance to walk through the door of history, let alone have that door opened for you. We all have the backgrounds of our own Pontiacs documented and rehearsed for quick delivery at the local cruise night and car show. But when I stumbled on the piece of GM history you see here, I was led down a path that would give me insight to the innermost workings of the very people that built our hobby from the ground up.

Before I get to the "One of a Kind" unrestored, all original, 30K mile 1972 455 SD Trans Am and its gifted life, I must first touch on a little Pontiac history. Most of you know who Bill Mitchell is. In a quick review you will remember that Bill was the head of design at GM as well as GM's Vice President. He was Harley J. Earl's successor as GM Design Chief and is most notable for his dealings with the Corvette. If you dig deep enough you can uncover a very colorful personality in Mr. Bill Mitchell. He was a leader that managed with an iron hand, a man that enjoyed his career and the accolades that came with it. The hobby lost Bill Mitchell with his passing in 1988, but Bill left us many unique vehicles and stories, one of which you read here.

The Trans Am was introduced in 1969 and was a low production high performance vehicle from the start. Now, one of the most valued Pontiac Muscle cars, early Trans Am's bring a high dollar and much respect in our hobby. So what do

you get when you cross Bill Mitchell, head of GM Design and the Pontiac Trans Am? "Perlie".



At first glance you might try to pass this car off as a '73 Trans Am, but a closer look and a little digging will confirm that "Perlie" is indeed a one of a kind GM Design department show car that was conceptualized and designed by Bill Mitchell. The most glaring modification is the addition of the "Hood Bird" or "Screaming Chicken"

that was not available on the Trans Am until 1973. Even more revealing is the size of this decal, far smaller than what was produced for the 1973 model year. Bill did not stop there, the addition of a smaller version also appears just behind each side window. What makes this odd is that Bill was the one who axed the addition of the "Screaming Chicken" on the 1970 Trans Am show cars that were being put together by Bill Porter in the GM design department. As we all know the '70-'72 Trans Am's were released with the single stripe down the center of the car. Why Bill included these "Screaming Chickens" on this '72 will remain a mystery.

The car's nickname, "Perlie" was given to the car by the first non GM owner. This name was quite appropriate as the car is adorned in a rich deep pearl white that was layered thick by the Design Department.



In those days real pearl was used to create the finish, and it shows. Never have I seen color like this. Pushing the limits further, this color was added to the Honeycomb TA wheels as well as the dash insert. Even the exhaust extensions got the Pearl treatment. Sadly, these exhaust tips lasted a mere 6 months and were replaced by chrome tips. The paint tricks did not stop with this one of a kind pigment. They painted the wheel well blue, another design studio trademark, and every inch of the car is outlined in a double line hand painted pinstripe of blue that enhances the bold lines of the second generation F-Body. This blue paint detail echoes the interior treatment that is unlike any Trans Am I have ever seen. The high pile rich blue carpeting is a different nylon pile than a normal Pontiac pile (rumored to have been taken from the Cadillac line) along with the electric blue interior that Bill Mitchell really liked reflects light in a blinding manner that swallows you up as you sit in the one of a kind custom leather buckets. Every detail of the interior has been modified in a tasteful yet bold way. Rounding out the experience, a factory 8 track, GM Design floor mat steel grills and door panels that look like a combination of 72-73 and 74 models. All in leather of course and finished off with the GM Design Department badge.

It took all my strength to remove myself from the cockpit and move to the front of the car where the goodies continued! Opening the 455 SD shaker hood revealed more rarities, most notably the aluminum 4bbl intake (casting 485640) that channeled air into the highly modified Pontiac Power Plant. "Perlie" was sent to the Pontiac Motor Division Engine Development department on March 17th 1972, (Thank you PHS!), where it got the full treatment. Heads, cam intake and tuning that put this TA way ahead of the pack in 1972! Harnessed with a automatic transmission and all the luxury amenities, this TA spelled FUN!. This monster performance is what ultimately preserved this car. That story follows as we look beyond the car and deeper at how a car like "Perlie" made it out intact. Current owner Neal Wichard of the San Diego Chapter of POCI was able to get his hands on "Perlie" and did the best thing ever. NOTHING, other than remove the non functional factory experimental transistorized ignition, drain the fuel system and add a fresh set of tires. But this seemingly small effort yielded the greatest find.



Hidden away for over 30 years, on top of the original gas tank Neal found a label with the following hand written note, "White Trans Am, Mitchell's". It was as if I was in the Pontiac plant and I could see it all going down in my minds eye! This is a true piece of Pontiac History.

So why is it that we get so excited about cars like "Perlie"? Our hobby has grown to the point that we want to know more about how things were. Why did things get done the way they did and what happened to them afterwards. Our hunger is for historical accuracy and insight into the people and auto makers that created what is the center of our passion. What makes a car like this so great is that it is made to us here completely intact. The path goes something like this. Bill Mitchell put together a string of show cars and GM Design Department cars that were displayed as part of the Pontiac Motor Division Car Pool. This pool of vehicles was used for public relation events such as the "Road America" shows as well as many others. "Perlie" was conceived in mid 1971, was pulled from the production line September 27th 1971 and requisitioned to the Pontiac Motor Division Show Car Pool. All of the aesthetic modifications happened immediately and the car hit the show circuit. This car was also used personally by Mitchell as well as his close friends. "Perlie" was well traveled early on in its life. By March 1972 the Engine Development Department got to add their touch, and back to the show circuit it went until October 27th 1972, when it was retired from the Pool. One of two things happens to a car like this at



the end of its life as a contemporary show car. Sadly, and most commonly, they are destroyed. This is usually due to extensive modifications that make the car unsafe, or illegal by the EPA. "Perlie" actually dodged this fate as the factory experimental intake manifold didn't conduct the heat away from the gas, so the EPA kicked it out and it never made it into production. Today, this alone would seal the fate of a car. The second path and the one less traveled was that these cars hit the used car lot. You had to be tied in pretty well, often referred to as a "Brass Hat Dealer" to get a chance at these cars. It just so happened that Public Pontiac on Lincoln Ave. in Skokie IL. was one of these "Brass Hat Dealers". So off to Skokie went "Perlie" and as the story goes, lasted all of a few hours before it was sold as a used car to owner #1. The car lived



in Florida with the first owner for a short few years. Then via a "good friend deal" it was sold to owner #2 in Wisconsin who sold it less than a year later to a its third owner in Michigan. All of the first three owners are close friends and have asked that they remain anonymous. This was a key ingredient to the survival story. Our Michigan owner was and is a big Corvette enthusiast. He had heard that "Perlie" could keep up with just about any Corvette. He had to have this TA. For 27 years it sat with little to no usage surrounded by Corvettes until today.

"Perlie's" current owner and long time Pontiac enthusiast, Neal Wichard allowed us to come in and bring you up close to this one of kind find. If it wasn't enough that the 1972 Trans Am is the most rare of the breed next to the debut 1969 model, this one may even be more the collectable as our hobby continues to gravitate towards the historical land marks that give us a peak inside the walls of Pontiac. The San Diego Chapter is proud to have members like Neal Wichard and sends out our thanks for giving us a glimpse at a very rare and very special 1972 455 Super Duty Trans AM.

Year	Trans Am
1969	689 / 8
1970	3196
1971	2116
1972	1286
1973	4802
1974	10255
1975	27274
1976	46701
1977	68745
1978	93341
1979	11709
1980	50896
1981	33492
1982	52960
1983	31930
1984	55374
1985	44028
1986	48870



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January 2004 SDPOCI MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



**Neal Wichard's 1972 455 SD Trans Am**