

De Tommasos of

Bob Lerose's 1971 Pantera GT5-S

Story by Brian Lerose

Photos by Bob Lerose

This is a tale of two Panteras that started off very similar to one another, and ended up very differently—my father's and my own.

I had wanted a Pantera since I was ten years old. I always dreamed of building a wild, custom car with flares, huge tires, and a wing. I finally bought my Pantera, #1272, in 1996. Back then I was known as "Kid Pantera", because I was just 21 years old.

My Euro pushbutton was in good shape when I bought it and only needed minor upgrades and maintenance throughout my years of ownership. Because the car was a pushbutton, I felt there was no way I could modify it into the car I had envisioned—it was just too rare.

Inspired by my original vision, in



My father managed to buy a very original '71 Pantera in great shape. Although it would have been a great car as it was or a good candidate for a concours restoration, he decided to complete my dream by turning it into a GT5-S replica.

2006, my father, Bob Lerose, bought a very solid 1971 Pantera, #1629, with the intention of converting it into a GT5-S. I was thrilled to help him with this project in any way I could, living

out my Pantera dream car vicariously through him.

Even though I live in Connecticut and he lives in Florida, I was able to help him track down parts and see his



The interior and engine bay of #1629 were both in absolutely excellent condition.

the Quarter

daily progress thanks to modern technology, like E-mail, the internet, and digital photos.

I flew down to Florida for the weekend to check out the newly acquired Pantera and was pleasantly surprised by its condition. What I found was a very original, low-mileage, unmolested Pantera. This car was obviously well taken care of and probably not driven very much.

It was an early 1971 Pre-L car (not a pushbutton) with a flat decklid and two-piece windshield molding. The chrome on the car was perfect as was the interior. It even had the original gray carpeting in near perfect condition. Even the red paint was presentable.

Now for the negative: this Pantera had an unbelievably heavy clutch pedal. It was almost impossible for me to drive. The previous owner tried to fix



De Tomaso provided the original G15-S fender kit and Hill Pantera came through with the front fender



Taking a deep breath, my father cleared the perfect fenders for the G15-S Pantera

this by putting in a new clutch. When that didn't remedy the problem, he decided to sell the car. He just hated driving it with the clutch the way it was.

After hearing all this, I remembered the early Panteras had a different clutch linkage set up than the later cars and that there was an upgrade to reduce the pedal pressure.

We checked under the dash, and sure enough it was the old style linkage. A factory clutch

linkage effort reduction kit was obtained from Pantera Performance Center and made the car much easier to drive.

(When the previous owner heard about this, he was kicking himself for selling the car).

Around this time, my grandfather, who also lives in Florida, was telling his friend about our Panteras. It turned out that this friend personally knew Mrs. De Tomaso. He put us in touch with her and Santiago De Tomaso, and through that introduction, we were able to get some of the hard-to-find GT5-S body parts we needed for this project. What a small world!

Mrs. De Tomaso even sent me an autographed photo of her from her racing days, plus a De Tomaso hat and sweatshirt.

After fixing the clutch issue and tracking down the hard-to-find parts, it

was time to start the modifications. The first task was restoring the engine compartment. All of the original undercoating was scraped off and the dimples and welds were smoothed out. Lexus pearl white was chosen for the new paint color and the engine bay was sprayed

first, before the rest of the bodywork started.

All of the engine accessories were replaced...alternator, high-flow aluminum water pump, fuel pump, high-torque starter, and an electronic ignition. An Edelbrock aluminum intake manifold, carburetor, and new finned aluminum valve covers replaced the original setup.

The air conditioning was upgraded with a new rotary compressor, rear condenser, dryer, fan, shroud, and hoses (good air conditioning is important in Florida!). The hoses were re-routed inside the passenger quarter panel to keep the engine bay looking clean.

A new lay-down aluminum radiator with sucker fans from Pantera Performance



The De Tomaso fender and the Hall Pantera front end came together perfectly after some minor tinning



Whacking away the quarter panel makes gas tank and penis accessible! However, his car is in a great condition that no work was required



My father cut the openings for the side grilles and rolled the metal, while I fabricated the mounts and then he hit me. De Tomaso provided the latest of side grilles for this project

Center replaced the original and helps keep the car cool in the Florida sun.

The suspension was treated to new adjustable shocks, polyurethane bushings, and adjustable upper rear A-arms, also from PPC.

I found a set of “Vader” square headlights for sale in the back of the POCA newsletter. Once these were installed, the Pantera looked more modern and no longer had the “bug-eyed” look of the stock headlights.

By the time the engine compartment and front trunk were finished, all of the parts needed to do the GT5-S body upgrade had arrived.

We were surprised to see the fac-



The new fenders were saw welded in place, and afterward she welded all ground nook

tory sheet metal did not have the cut-outs in the rear quarter panels for the GT5-S side grilles or the brackets to hold the grilles in place. Luckily, I have a friend in Connecticut who has an original Pantera GT5-S, and I was able to take all of the measurements needed off of that car. My Dad cut and then rolled the opening for each side grille in the rear fenders. Using a water jet cutting machine at my office, I fabri-

cated replica brackets to mount the side grilles and mailed them to Florida. The De Tomasos sent the last set of GT5-S side grills they had in stock and it all came together perfectly.

The wheel arches of the fenders were rolled by hand and each new fender was trimmed until it fit the lines of the car perfectly. Then came the nerve-wracking point of no return—my dad sawed through the body of the Pantera and cut off the old fenders.

The new fenders were clamped in place and welded on. The steel front valance was not available from the factory, but Bev Hall of Hall Pantera was gracious enough to break up one of their GT5-S kits and sell just the part we needed.

Bob decided forgo the factory-style delta wing, and instead chose to go with an Amerisport low wing at the rear of the car and louvers to replace the original grille over the A/C



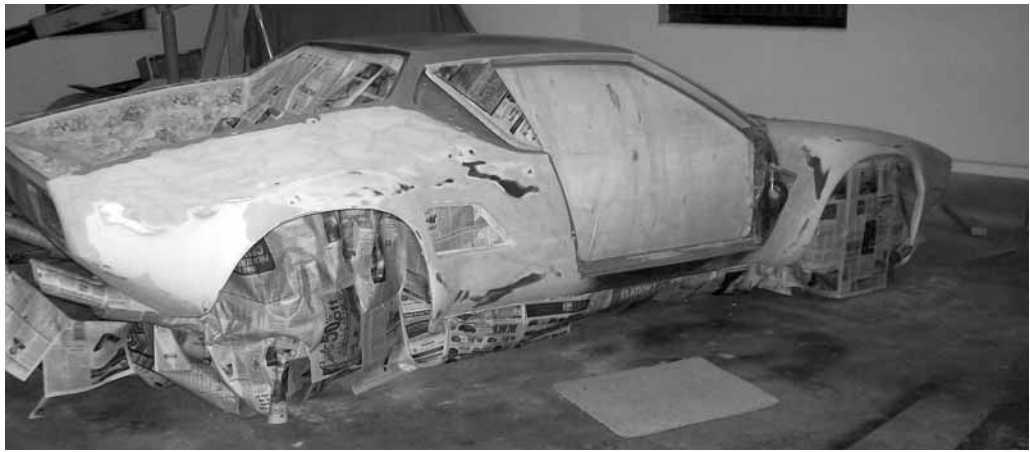
After the fenders were installed, the car was on the suspension, wheels and tires for a final check of the overall fit

condenser. He ordered these through Pantera East.

The huge wheels and tires came from Pantera Performance Center. The rear wheels measure 19x13 and the fronts are 18x11. Tires are Michelin Pilot Sport, rear 345/30ZR19, front 265/35ZR18. The side mirrors are also from Pantera Performance Center and they are glued on to the vent window glass.

My dad spent a few weeks perfecting the bodywork and then sprayed the whole car using PPG Omni Lexus pearl white paint, which required two coats of white, two coats of pearl, and two coats of clear with wet sanding between each coat.

The original bumpers were painted matte black and since the chrome window moldings were so perfect, he decided against blackening them out as is normally done on



The final lines were defined by peat block sanding and filling over the course of several weeks



With the bodywork complete, several coats of primer were laid down



The pearl white paint came out absolutely perfectly

widebody conversions.

I found an original GT5-S interior for sale on Ebay and after talking with my father he decided he wanted to buy it. We knew it wouldn't just bolt in but thought we could make it work with some modifications. When I contacted the seller, it turned out to be Kirk Evans of Amerisport.

He explained that this interior would not fit in an early 1971 car because there were just too many differences, but he was willing to create a whole new interior that would fit, including a new dash, console, new bulkhead incorporating his flat firewall kit, door panels, and seats. Kirk even agreed to deliver the interior himself and help install it! Kirk sent leather samples and pictures of different stitching designs and the final look was chosen. The idea was to make this interior look classy, yet sporty. Bob wanted a modern, rich look, like the inside of a new Lexus.

Although the interior was supposed to be delivered in four weeks, it ended up taking six months to arrive. Pontiac Fiero seats were used, and the De Tomaso emblem was embroidered in the headrest. Bob found a wood Momo



The deep pearl captures the light and gives the molar curve of the GT5-S a whole new dimension



The engine bay was completely cleaned and painted the same as the exterior of the car. The engine was cleaned and the essential accessories replaced, but since the 1971 motor came from the factory with the desirable closed-chamber heads and a fairly aggressive cam, and had very low mileage, he decided it didn't need to become a part

steering wheel and shifter that he liked, and then hand-crafted the rest of the wood grain to match. He made the door inserts, gauge panel, and dash inserts out of burlwood ash which he stained with red mahogany and then cleared using a product called Concept 2000.

Being a custom cabinet/furniture maker by trade, he paid special attention to where the burls in the wood were in order to create the most visually appealing design. The door inserts are "booked", meaning one piece of wood was slit down the middle and the two halves were opened like a book, creating two pieces of wood that are mirror images of one another. So if you look at the burls in the grain on the driver side, the same burls will be in the same spot on the passenger side.

The original rugs were used as a pattern for the new brown rugs. It is



Pontiac Formula
Tomáš Gowasch designed the interior headrests

interior retrimmed in



Rather than attempting to restore an original GT5-S interior in this early car, over the space of six months Kirk Evans did a masterful job of creating an all-new interior, using his American GT5-S dashboard, front and center console pieces as the foundation. The result is simply



*I had a water jet car that
created the GT5 S badges
to accompany the original Pan-
tera badge*

definitely one of the nicest interiors I've ever seen in a Pantera and judging from the reactions it receives at car shows, many others seem to agree.

After nine months of 30+ hour weeks working on the car, my Dad's conversion was almost complete. I was thrilled to help him with the final touches, like designing and making custom GT5-S emblems on the water jet.

I still hadn't seen the finished car in person, just the pictures that Dad e-mailed to me. I wanted to go visit and see the final results myself.

In the meantime, I mentioned that



*My father made all the wood in the bookings
and rights design mirror images of one another*

I was thinking about having my pushbutton Pantera repainted. Dad offered to paint it for me if I would ship it to him. That's when I was struck with another idea.

I decided then and there to do the ultimate Pantera road trip. My wife and

I would drive from Connecticut to Florida in our Pantera and then leave the car with my Dad for the winter while we flew back.

Which will lead to the second half of this story...in the next issue of POCA Profiles!



Bob Le Ross poses with my pushbutton Pantera and his completed GT5-S conversion





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