

CAR and DRIVER ROAD TEST

BARRACUDA FORMULA S

No killer in the stop light Grand Prix, the Barracuda Formula S relies on balance for its basic appeal.



If you have an emotional hang-up about needing to own the fastest street machine on your block, forget the Barracuda. Not that this fast-back from Plymouth doesn't have considerable value as an ego builder, but it's not, and probably never will be, the kind of muscle-bound super stock that does such a big job tearing up the pimple-pickers of America. This is not to imply that the Barracuda is a low-performance automobile, but merely to establish early in the going that its long suit is balance, not the brand of spleen-rupturing acceleration that is presently in vogue around the nation.

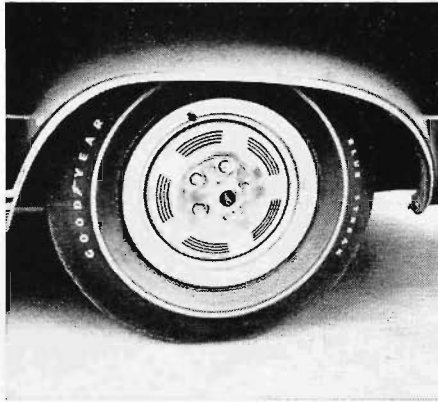
We like the sound amalgam of brakes, handling and power that has been injected—in annually heavier

doses—into the Barracuda. To be sure, it began life as a rather dull automobile; little more than a gussied-up Valiant Signet with an oversized rear window. We complained about that Barracuda when it was introduced in April, 1964, claiming that Plymouth was shortsightedly stunting the performance potential of the car in favor of a marketing plan described as "broad appeal." By this, the powers behind such policies at Plymouth meant that the Barracuda would be all things to all people; a workaday sedan for Pop, a compact off-to-the-shopping-center wagon for Mum, and a weekend hot rod for Junior to parade around the local drive-in.

But Junior and his High-School-

Harry buddies thought the Barracuda was dumb. The first time they got blown off by some punk in a 1955 Powerglide Chevy, they went wailing home and told Pop that he could take his "broad appeal" Barracuda and trade it in on a Willys Jeepster. At least you could buy *that* with four-wheel drive. At the same time, the sports car nuts of America were writing off the Barracuda as just another Detroit deception to woo them away from their zingy, zappy European two-seaters. It was a bad scene for Plymouth, accentuated by the great splash that the option-laden Mustang was making among both the sports car set and the hot rodders, so the Formula S package was developed for the 1965 model

Though the Barracuda's styling is basically unchanged for the third model year, the Formula S trim and the optional racing stripes make it a highly visual car in most surroundings.



year. This was a simple gesture to capture some of the performance-oriented customers who suddenly seemed to be coming out of the woodwork all over the country.

Now in its second year, the Formula S Barracuda continues as one of the most sophisticated low-cost sporting vehicles in the world. It handles like a sports car, stops in excellent fashion, and offers flexible performance while doing yeoman service as a day-to-day family sedan. Barracuda sales in 1966 are running at a brisk pace, though most industry observers feel they are considerably beneath the sales potential of the car. Much of this is traceable to the almost self-conscious way in which Plymouth originally marketed the Barracuda, but some major personnel changes have taken place since then and we look for the automobile to sell much better in the future. If it does not, it will be a denial of all logic in the realm of car sales, because the Barracuda is a truly worthwhile car.

Though its styling can create arguments among car buffs, there is no question about its basic advantages. There is a great quantity of usable space in the rear, which means that it is utilitarian as well as sporting. With a fold-down rear seat, the car rivals a compact station wagon for roominess, and a Barracuda owner will find that he can stuff everything from three rough-housing children to a load of skiing

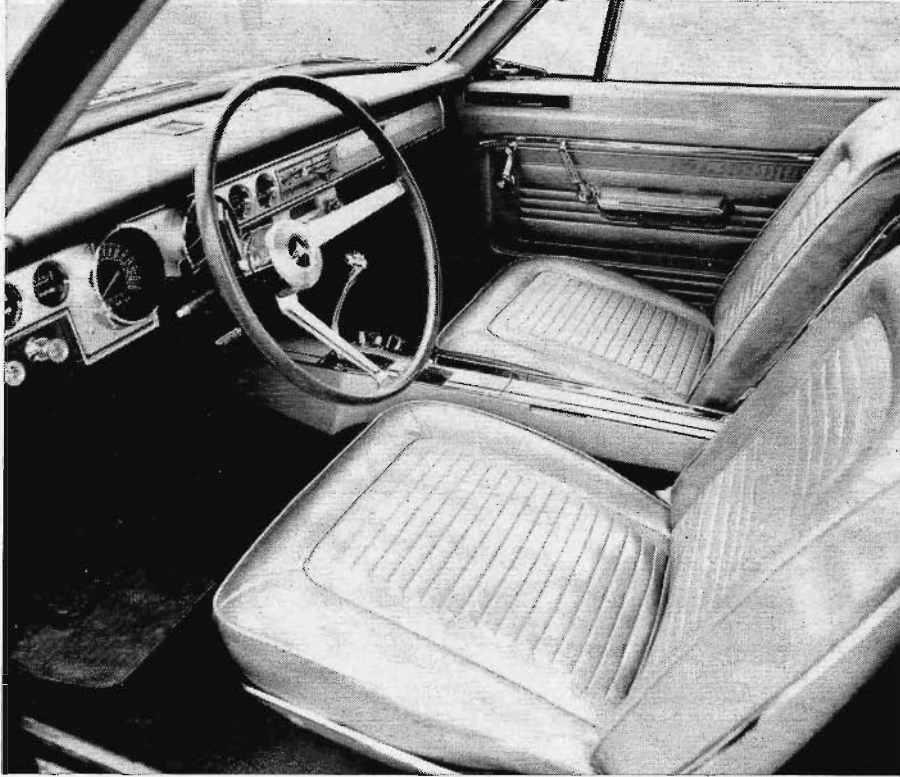
gear back there with a minimum of knee-barking fuss.

Plymouth made no basic changes in the Barracuda shape for 1966, though a new grille was added to alter its exterior appearance slightly. The automobile in stock trim somehow seems to totter precariously on its skinny tires, but in Formula S trim—with the wide-rim 14-inch wheels and the tough-looking wheel covers, the car takes on an entirely new visual personality. And it's a very pleasant one at that.

Inside, several minor but important trim changes were made. Most noteworthy was the repositioning of the optional tachometer right smack in the middle of the dash board. The face of the tach is large and fully readable and Plymouth should be complimented for rescuing this important instrument from its former position on the transmission tunnel. The tachometer, incidentally, is part of the Formula S package, though it can be purchased as an option on all Barracudas equipped with V-8



Excellent bucket seats and a well-positioned steering wheel make the Barracuda's cockpit a livable place for long trips. The high-performance 273 engine features 235 horsepower with plenty of chrome trim.



engines. The space is normally occupied by a vacuum gauge on stock 'Cudas. Also supplied with the Formula S package is, for whatever it's worth, a 150-mph speedometer. Regular Barracudas have speedos that only read to 120 mph, but all you lucky Formula S owners get 30 mph more. This is lovely, but the best Formula S ever to come down the assembly line won't run either speed, so what's the difference? The all-vinyl interior is well assembled and looks extremely durable. We were especially impressed with the thin-shell bucket seats that bear a close resemblance to those used in the larger Belvedere and Sport Fury versions. Back and shoulder support is excellent, even for extended stints behind the wheel.

Most of the appealing features of the Barracuda must be purchased as options, either in the Formula S package or otherwise, but there is an admittedly extensive list of worthwhile equipment from which to choose. Certainly among the most recommended are the front disc brakes, which transform the car into an effective stopper from almost any speed. The brakes are 11 1/8-in. Kelsey-Hayes units, and can be purchased with or without a power brake booster. Our test car had the booster and, though we are not great fans of power brakes, the boost pressure was low enough to negate the possibility of lock-up under normal usage. For only \$81.95 extra, we consider the discs indispensable.

The Barracuda we tested was British racing green, with a broad set of gold racing stripes and side pin-striping. The stripes are not part of the Formula S option, and can be purchased on any Barracuda for about \$30. They look fine, but prospective buyers should be warned that cops generally react to drivers of cars with racing stripes like they do to coffee house proprietors and junkies.

Our car also had the \$27.90 worth of tinted glass all around that blended with the green paint to cre-

*(Continued on page 88
Specifications overleaf)*

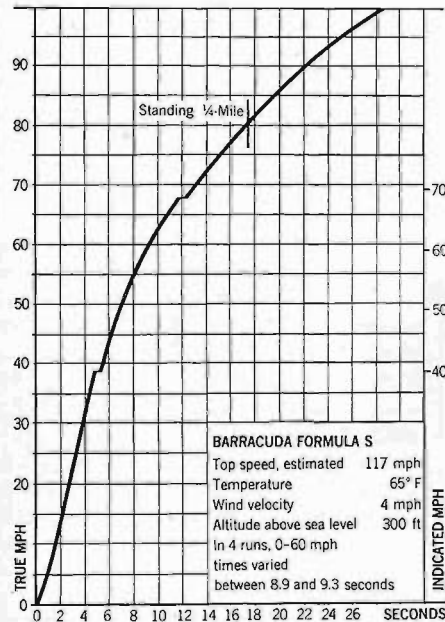
PLYMOUTH BARRACUDA

Manufacturer: Chrysler-Plymouth Division
Chrysler Corporation
12200 East Jefferson Avenue
Detroit 31, Michigan

Price as Tested: \$3,011.81 FOB Detroit

ACCELERATION

Zero To	Seconds
30 mph	3.9
40 mph	5.4
50 mph	7.0
60 mph	9.1
70 mph	13.4
80 mph	17.3
90 mph	22.1
100 mph	29.6
Standing 1/4 mile	.81 mph in 17.6



ENGINE

Water-cooled V-8, cast iron block, 5 main bearings
 Bore x stroke..... 3.63 x 3.31 in, 92 x 89 mm
 Displacement..... 273 cu. in, 4481 cc
 Compression ratio..... 10.5 to one
 Carburetion..... Single 4-bbl Carter
 Valve gear..... Pushrod-operated overhead valves
 Power (SAE)..... 235 bhp @ 5200 rpm
 Torque..... 280 lbs-ft @ 4000 rpm
 Specific power output..... 0.86 bhp per cu. in,
 52.5 bhp per liter
 Usable range of engine speeds 1000-5500 rpm
 Electrical system..... 12-volt, 48 amp-hr battery,
 470W alternator
 Fuel recommended..... Premium
 Mileage..... 16-22 mpg
 Range on 18-gallon tank..... 290-400 miles

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission..... 3-speed automatic with torque converter

Gear	Ratio	Overall	mph/1000	Max rpm	mph
Rev	2.20	7.10	-	11.53	-62
1st	2.45	7.91	10.35	57	
2nd	1.45	4.68	17.52	96	
3rd	1.00	3.23	25.35	117	

Final drive ratio..... 3.23 to one

CHASSIS

Wheelbase..... 106 in
 Track..... F55.9 R 55.6 in
 Length..... 188 in
 Width..... 70 in
 Height..... 54.5 in
 Ground Clearance..... 6.0 in
 Curb Weight..... 2820 lbs
 Test Weight..... 3100 lbs
 Weight distribution front/rear..... 57/43%
 Pounds per bhp (test weight)..... 13.2
 Suspension F: Ind., unequal-length wishbones and torsion bars, anti-sway bar
 R: Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs
 Brakes..... 11 1/2 in discs F, 10-in drums R, 314.7 sq in swept area
 Steering..... Recirculating ball
 Turns, lock to lock..... 3.5
 Turning circle..... 36 ft
 Tires and wheels..... 6.95-14 Goodyear Blue Streaks on 4.5J rim

CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting..... Good
 Response..... Good
 Noise..... Fair
 Vibration..... Good

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission linkage..... Fair
 Power-to-ground transmission..... Good

BRAKES

Response..... Good
 Pedal pressure..... Good
 Fade resistance..... Excellent
 Smoothness..... Good
 Directional stability..... Good

STEERING

Response..... Fair
 Accuracy..... Good
 Feedback..... Excellent
 Road Feel..... Fair

SUSPENSION

Harshness control..... Good
 Roll stiffness..... Good
 Tracking..... Very Good
 Pitch control..... Excellent
 Shock damping..... Excellent

CONTROLS

Location..... Good
 Relationship..... Good
 Small controls..... Good

INTERIOR

Visibility..... Very Good
 Instrumentation..... Very Good
 Lighting..... Good
 Entry/exit..... Excellent
 Front seating comfort..... Excellent
 Front seating room..... Good
 Rear seating comfort..... Good
 Rear seating room..... Good
 Storage space..... Excellent
 Wind noise..... Good
 Road noise..... Good

WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater..... Excellent
 Defroster..... Good
 Ventilation..... Good
 Weather sealing..... Good
 Windshield wiper action..... Good

QUALITY CONTROL

Materials, exterior..... Good
 Materials, interior..... Fair
 Exterior finish..... Good
 Interior finish..... Fair
 Hardware and trim..... Fair

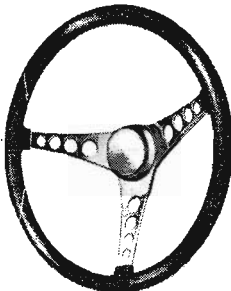
GENERAL

Service accessibility..... Good
 Luggage space..... Excellent
 Bumper protection..... Good
 Exterior lighting..... Good
 Resistance to crosswinds..... Good



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BARRACUDA FORMULA S (Continued from page 48)

ate a pleasing monochromatic look. Whether or not that is worth that sort of money is up to you, because we are more inclined to view tinted windows as a styling fillip rather than a boon to better vision.

Our car also carried the sensational Chrysler Corporation Torque-Flite three-speed automatic transmission which we feel is the finest unit of its type in the world. It can be purchased on any Chrysler car for about \$177, and we would make a blanket recommendation that any V-8 automobile you buy under the Chrysler banner have it.

Formula S includes everything from a high-performance engine to special nameplates, and it will cost you \$245 above and beyond the regular cost of a Barracuda. Specifically, the Formula S purchaser will get a 235-hp V-8 with a four-barrel carburetor; heavy-duty suspension (stiffer rear springs and shock absorber plus heavier front torsion bars and a rear sway bar); the afore-mentioned tachometer; Good-year Blue Streak 6.95-14-in. tires mounted on 5½-in. rims; bolt-on wheel covers that look like a regular wheel with the hub caps removed (?) and Formula S nameplates (yes!).

Now this is a very good deal whether you realize it or not—mainly due to the excellent things the package does for the Barracuda's handling. In stock form, the car is acceptable by domestic standards, which some cynics might describe as mediocre, but the stiffer underpinning on the Formula S turn the Barracuda into a real, honest-to-goodness, here it is, folks! sporting machine. It tracks beautifully with just a trace of understeer, through corners of all types, regardless of the surface. Though a bit of harshness is the price you pay for such handling, the shock control is outstanding and you can go pounding over railroad crossings or down country roads without great shock waves resonating through everything from your teeth to your eyeballs. In all, the Barracuda Formula S cannot be faulted for its handling.

The engine, which somebody in the corporation decided would be just great if labeled the "Commando 273" is a mildly tweaked version of the regular Plymouth-Dodge 273 cubic inch V-8. It develops a steady 235 hp., which is enough to run the Barracuda to 60 mph in slightly under nine seconds but not enough to tear up the opposition on the way to work. But as we said earlier, the strong suit of the Barracuda Formu-

la S is balance, not raw power, and in this sense, the engine is just fine. It is responsive and flexible, thanks mainly to its solid valve lifters which permit it to rev well beyond the limits imposed on most American V-8s by their hydraulic lifters. And besides, the mechanical versions sound very tough, clattering away like they do at idle. Neat noises come out of the Formula S anyway, though in 1966, Plymouth backed off on its nasty-sounding, straight-through muffler that was part of the package in 1965. Too many law enforcement agencies were belly-aching about the excessive noise.

We do have some complaints about the car, though they are comparatively minor. For example, our test vehicle had a rear view mirror that made all cars astern look as if they had been styled by George Barris. Like they were maybe two feet high and eight feet wide!

Though we loved the transmission, we were rather upset to discover that somebody in Plymouth engineering discovered the "lock-out" principle, and got a bit overzealous in its application to the TorqueFlite. A lockout on reverse gear is fine, but why one on second gear? One of the great beauties of the TorqueFlite transmission is the simplicity with which it can be shifted up and down, but now the procedure is complicated by a button on top of the control lever that must be pressed to downshift from third to second. Who needs it?

We found the Formula S a delight with which to spend long periods of time. The excellent seats, the low interior noise levels, the efficient ventilation system all combined to make traveling in the car a pleasant experience. One plus factor in this regard is the longish 3.23-to-1 final drive ratio, which permits the engine to loaf along at 2500 rpm at 70 mph. This makes for great cruising, but of course cuts into that low-speed acceleration that gets the drag racers of the nation so excited. However, that is generally irrational expression of auto taste and, with today's flexible, torque-laden V-8s, anybody who buys a road car with final drive ratio tighter than 3.55-to-1 need psychiatric help.

No, the Formula S Barracuda, in its present form at least, won't capture the hearts of teen-age America. It could, provided Plymouth stuffed in its 383 V-8 or even the Hemi, but this would utterly destroy the beautiful balance of the automobile. And in this case, we're four-square behind maintaining the status quo. **CJD**

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