



# 2 ROCKIN' PURITANS FROM PLYMOUTH

The 383 had smooth power with reasonable economy. The big 440 was smooth enough too, but we couldn't wean it from the gas pump.

BY DONALD MAC DONALD



**B**ARELY A BAKER'S DOZEN of years ago Ford was the only low-priced U.S. car with a V-8 engine. Plymouth contented itself with a top-line, 110-hp flat-head 6 and Chevy was still relying solely on the durable "stovebolt."

Now, what with such Mitty-like influences as stock-car racing and funny cars at work, the "Super Commando"

engine option in one of our Plymouth test cars is actually too big to be legal on the NASCAR and USAC circuits. Plymouth has come a long way from the days when the three sails from the Pilgrim-carrying Mayflower were the symbol of its power and speed.

A detuned version of this brute of a 440-cu.-in. engine normally powers Chrysler's 5200-pound Imperial. Add 100-hp worth of tuning, a set of dual exhausts, subtract 1400 pounds of luxurious deadweight and you have the Plymouth GTX, a member of that rarified set that can crack 0-to-60 in 7 seconds or under.

To keep one foot on a more normal

accelerator, we paired the GTX with a Satellite equipped with a 4-barrel 383, an engine that most engineers who work for Plymouth buy. Both drove through a 3-speed TorqueFlite, and not counting about half a pound of extra emblems on the GTX, both hardtop bodies were identical. The GTX had a handling package with front-disc brakes, the 383 did not. Both had air conditioning and power steering—adding-up, except for the difference in cubes to just about the package specified by the average buyer of performance-oriented Belvederes.

Many readers have questioned our statement that the Super Commando

## 2 PLYMOUTHS

*continued*

will stay with or even slightly ahead of the Hemi in an otherwise identical car for speeds and distances up to but not quite including the standing quarter. We based this on the fact that the 440's torque peaks at 3200 rpm whereas the Hemi, with only 10 lbs.-ft. more (490), doesn't come on until 4000 rpm. Now the figures prove it. We got an average 0-60 time of 7.03 with the automatic 440, compared to our most recent test stick Hemi which averaged out at 7.4 seconds. For the quarter, the figures were 93.6 mph in 15.4 seconds versus the Hemi's 94.0 mph in 15.0 seconds. More important even than this is that the Hemi costs \$564 more than the 440, standard in the GTX, and the latter carries the full 5/50 warranty compared to the understandably restricted 12/12 (original owner only) for the Hemi.

The 440 is a completely docile street engine, although ours was a little cranky to start and tended to "hunt" a trifle under light-load cruising. We checked and it wasn't the plugs, so we suspect that the second difficulty, at least, indicates that the opening point of the secondaries is critical. The engine is, however, expensive to feed. The most you can expect from varied driving is 12 miles to a gallon of super premium, compared to an easy 15 mpg with the 383. Both cars shared that Belvedere peculiarity of the gas gauge crying "empty" when only 15 or so gallons of the 19-gallon capacity is used. Suspicious drivers don't get very far between gas stations, particularly in the 440.

Though tilt steering is not available in any of the Belvedere line, we felt that the present positioning of the fixed wheel is ideal for the average driver. With power assist, though, most of production comes through with the steering set up too tightly. This eliminates the backlash that enables you in other cars to set up for a sweeping turn and get through it without constant corrections. Manual steering is no solution with any of the heavy V-8s unless you want to muscle your way through 5.3 turns lock-to-lock.

With the exception of a rather improbable 150-mph speedometer, the instrument panels were the same in both cars. There are gauges for everything but the oil pressure. This would only bother a driver new to the car, but in order to get any illumination at all of the quadrant, one had to turn the rheostat up to the point where the other instrument lights were annoyingly bright.

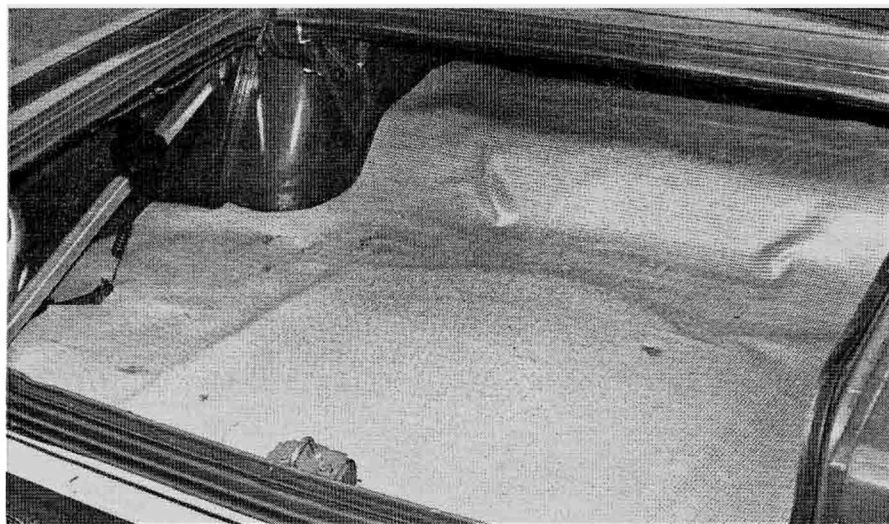
With a few generic exceptions, the standards of finish inside and out were high on both cars. One is just a matter of more care at the factory level; *i.e.*,



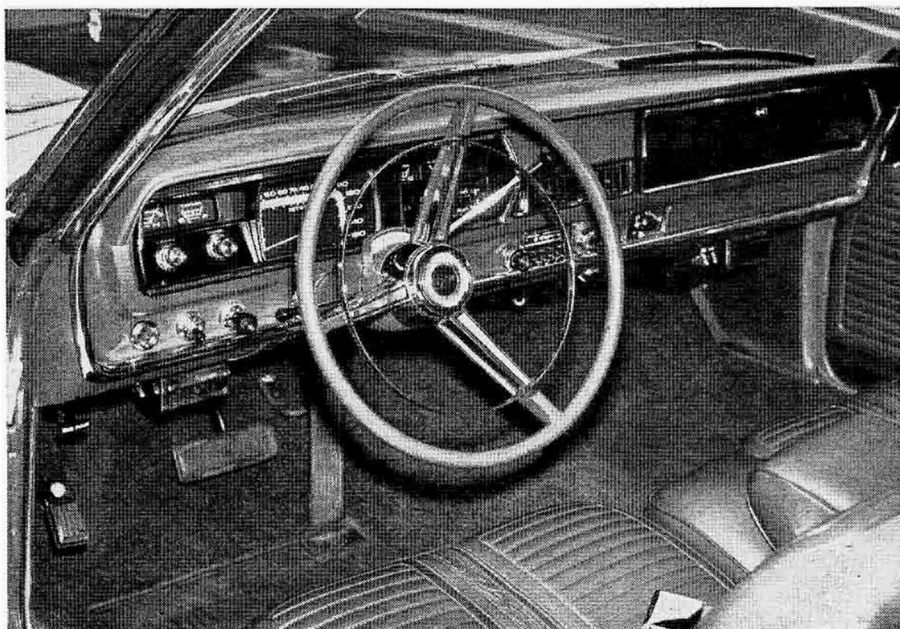
*Wide rear window, thin "C-post" allow drivers to see rear non-fin tender tips.*



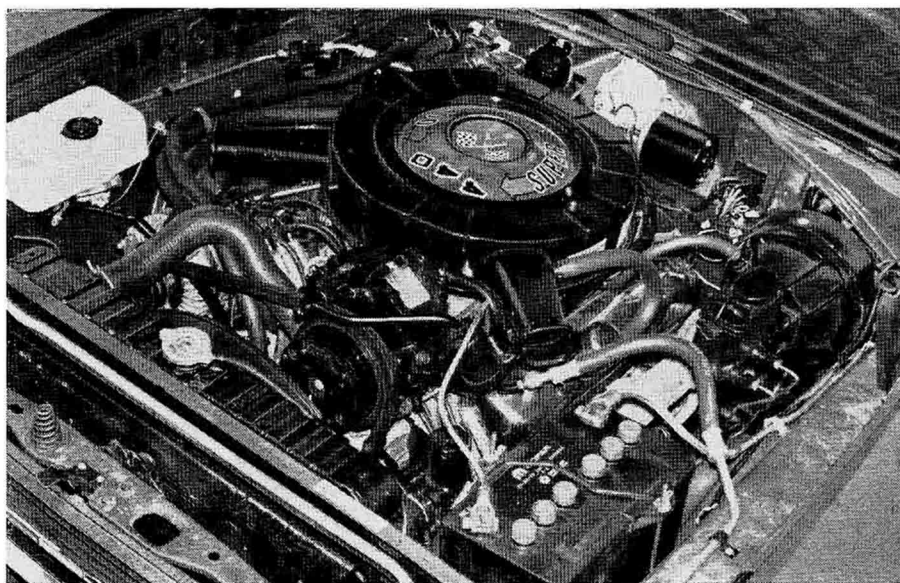
*Non-functional scoops are the trademark of the GTX option. Grille is changed from '66.*



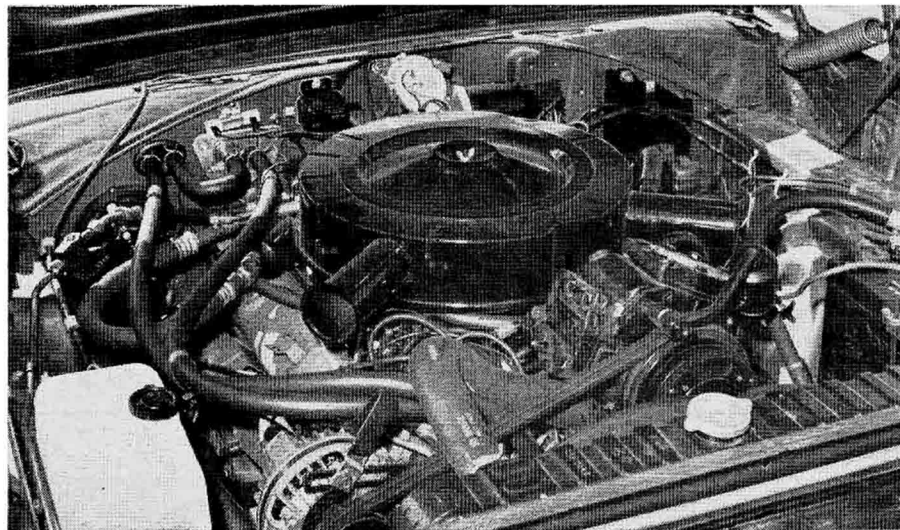
*Trunk is capacious, desirably features spare in covered well, but liner is flimsily cheap.*



GTX dash is workmanlike, differs from the Satellite only in 150-mph speedometer.



383 option in Satellite fits neatly, and does not require sound-deadening shield.



440 Super Commando taxes GTX engine compartment, lacks Hemi's accessible plugs.

we wonder why so much effort is spent on fit and polish when the rubber window seals are left ragged and covered with goop. Another is the ugly swirl of metal just above the top front door hinges caused by too drastic a draw when die-formed. A third, which is just plain penny pinching and dollar foolish, is the sloppy, flimsy mottar used to "carpet" the trunk. Inside, the upholstery is vinyl and undoubtedly durable, but the embossed designs are vaguely reminiscent of a Tijuana handbag.

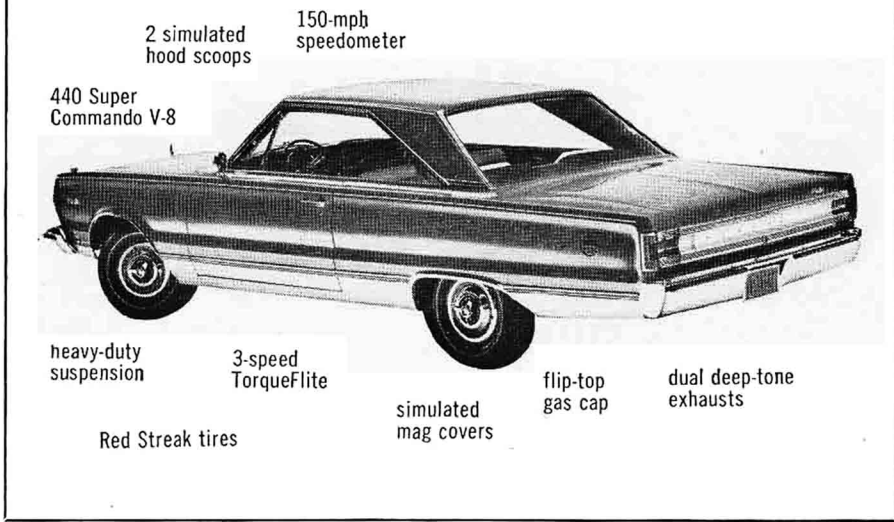
Access to controls in general rates excellent, although lighting the knob labels would help. The combined heater/air conditioner on both cars was the master of both snow and desert heat on one trip across the San Bernardino mountains, but we could have used more sweep to the wipers. There is a rather bad blindspot left by the limited outward reach which would be solved if others would stoop to copy Pontiac's articulated design.

In commenting upon the ride of our standard sprung 383, one must remember that in 1966 all Chrysler products were deliberately destiffened to capture customers who had been weaned on the still softer rides of General Motors products. Fortunately they did not go all the way. Purely from a ride standpoint we actually favor the Plymouth standard suspension over the handling package that was on the 440. It's stiff enough not to wallow or balloon at high speed, and of course it doesn't jar you around on city streets as the 440 tended to do. We'd vote for the factory ride except for what the optional package does for handling. The standard suspension is a little prone to understeer and plow, but when you stiffen it up the car becomes nearly neutral which is best for those who like to drive rather than just steer. Partial credit, too, must be given to what MoPaR now calls "Red Streak" tires, a competitor's name for the Firestone-pioneered tire.

The front-disc brakes on the 440 didn't produce any appreciable difference in stopping distances over the drums on the 383, but they were smooth and potent at a touch. If you went from one car directly to the other, you'd have initial moments with the unassisted drums where it didn't seem like the grippers were going to grip. In an interesting aside we talked to Ray Morris, sales manager of North Star Motors in Los Angeles, who loaned us his personal 383 for this test. We asked him why, with most every other extra on the car, he didn't specify power brakes. His answer was that potential customers among General Motors owners just weren't used to the more responsive Chrysler power brake. Maybe so, but we'll take our exercise another way.

Both cars had that kind of outside mirror that adjusts from within. They're

**GTX RECIPE: TAKE ONE BASIC SATELLITE,  
STIR IN CALL-OUTS, THEN BAKE FOR 7 SECONDS**



2 simulated hood scoops  
150-mph speedometer  
440 Super Commando V-8  
heavy-duty suspension  
3-speed TorqueFlite  
Red Streak tires  
simulated mag covers  
flip-top gas cap  
dual deep-tone exhausts



**cars at a glance . . .**

The second year around, styling-wise, but the performance image is stronger than ever... GTX with 440 cubes can be purchased for about the same price as a 383 Satellite with comparable options, making the GTX the better buy.

**how the cars performed . . .**

<b>ACCELERATION (2 aboard):</b>		<b>383 V-8</b>	<b>440 V-8</b>
0-30 mph	3.5 secs.	3.4	3.4
0-45 mph	5.8 secs.	5.0	5.0
0-60 mph	8.6 secs.	7.0	7.0
0-75 mph	12.2 secs.	10.0	10.0
<b>TIME AND DISTANCE TO ATTAIN PASSING SPEEDS:</b>			
40-60 mph	4.4 secs., 332 ft.	3.4 secs., 294 ft.	
50-70 mph	4.8 secs., 422 ft.	4.0 secs., 352 ft.	
<b>STANDING START QUARTER-MILE:</b>			
	16.3 secs., 90 mph	15.4 secs., 94 mph	
<b>BEST SPEEDS IN GEARS @ SHIFT POINTS:</b>			
<b>383 V-8</b>		<b>440 V-8</b>	
1st	47 mph @ 5000 rpm	1st	45 mph @ 5000
2nd	77 mph @ 5000 rpm	2nd	68 mph @ 4800
<b>SPEEDOMETER ERROR:</b>			
Electric Speedometer		30	45 50 60 70 80
Car Speedometer			
(Satellite)	32	48	52 62 73 83
(GTX)	32	48	53 63 73 84
<b>MPH PER 1000 RPM: (383 V-8) 24.0; (440 V-8) 21.3</b>			
<b>STOPPING DISTANCES:</b>			
(Satellite w/drums)			
from 30 mph, 36 ft.; from 60 mph, 155 ft.			
(GTX w/front discs)			
from 30 mph, 32 ft.; from 60 mph, 158 ft.			



Any Satellite with optional H-D suspension proves a lithe master of all kinds of roads.

**specifications . . .**

<b>ENGINE:</b>	<b>383 V-8</b>	<b>440 V-8</b>
Bore and stroke (ins.)	4.25 x 3.38	4.32 x 3.75
Displacement (cu. ins.)	383	440
Horsepower:		
325 @ 4800 rpm		375 @ 4600
Max. torque (lbs.-ft.)		
425 @ 2800 rpm		480 @ 3200
Compression ratio:	10.0:1	10.1:1
Carburetion:	1 4-bbl.	1 4-bbl.
<b>TRANSMISSION:</b>	3-spd auto. (column)	3-spd auto. (floor)
<b>FINAL DRIVE RATIO:</b>	2.94:1	3.23:1
<b>SUSPENSION:</b>	Independent front, non-parallel control arms with torsion bars; solid 1-piece rear-end housing with semi-elliptic springs. Direct-acting tubular shocks at each wheel.	
<b>STEERING:</b>	Rack and sector, with integral power assist. Turning diameter: 43.7 ft., curb-to-curb. Turns lock-to-lock: 3.5.	
<b>WHEELS:</b>	(383 V-8) 14 x 5.0K stamped steel. (440 V-8) 14 x 5.5K stamped steel.	
<b>TIRES:</b>	(383 V-8) 7.75 x 14 rayon. (440 V-8) 7.75 x 14 Red Streak nylon.	
<b>BRAKES:</b>	(383 V-8) Duo-servo dual-system hydraulic — 10-ins. dia. drums x 2.5 ins. front and rear. (440 V-8) Duo-servo, dual-system, power assisted hydraulic — 11.04 ins. dia. front discs; 11 ins. dia. drums x 2.5 ins. rear.	
<b>FUEL CAPACITY:</b>	19 gals.	
<b>MILEAGE RANGE:</b>	13.5 — 16.8 mpg (383 V-8); 9.8 to 13.1 (440 V-8).	
<b>BODY &amp; FRAME:</b>	Body-frame integral.	
<b>DIMENSIONS:</b>	Wheelbase 116 ins. Track 59.5 ins. front, 58.5 ins. rear. Overall length 200.5 ins., width 76.4 ins., height 54.1 ins. Usable trunk capacity 21.6 cu. ft.	
<b>CURB WEIGHT:</b>	(383 V-8) 3742 lbs. (440 V-8) 3851 lbs.	

**prices and accessories . . .**

**MANUFACTURER'S SUGGESTED RETAIL:** (excludes state and local taxes, license, options, accessories and transportation) 2-door V-8 Satellite hardtop \$2769 (273-2V V-8 standard). 2-door GTX hardtop \$3178 (440-4V V-8, auto transmission, handling package, console standard)

<b>OPTIONS AND ACCESSORIES:</b>	
383-4V engine	\$149.60
42R/2-4V hemi engine	546.00
3-speed auto. trans. (std. GTX)	216.20
4-speed manual transmission	188.05
Front disc brakes	69.50
Power brakes	41.75
Power steering	89.65
Air conditioner	338.45
H-D suspension (std. GTX)	21.50
Sure-grip differential	37.60
Center front seat w/arm rest	52.85
Power windows	100.25
Front console	52.85
Road (styled) wh.els (set of 4)	97.30

**2 PLYMOUTHS**

continued

a good idea but why must they be placed so that the proper setting is invariably just outside the limit of the knob movement? This isn't just true of the two Plymouths, as the problem has been cropping up on other test cars more often than it has not. You get to feel a little put upon when you have to slide the seat back and forth to see in the mirror.

A glance at the performance figures leaves no doubt that the 440 is superior. It would finish the quarter five car lengths ahead of the 383, but remember that the 383 would be going long after the 440 quit for lack of gas. There's a

3-mpg spread between them. Therein lies your choice — superior versus adequate performance for the price of 200 gallons of gasoline in a year's average driving. Surprisingly there is no significant penalty at all in price because just dealing in the basics, the cars are priced within \$43.20 of each other. Add the free Red Streak tire option and handling package on the 440 and this difference is wiped out. The reason is that the big engine and automatic transmission are standard on the GTX whereas the 383 engine and automatic transmission cost enough extra on the Satellite to pull its price up even with its huskier brother.

We think the cubic inches are worth it when they are free. You can get the extra gas back at trade-in time. /MT