



THE BIRD THAT EATS SNAKES!

by Roland McGonegal

The hemi engine is as powerful and scary and sweet as ever, and the Road Runner body is tighter, racier, better looking, and more agile than ever before.

AS IT SOMETIMES happens in the automotive industry, there will be a car that is produced, that sells extremely well and becomes very popular without intention. When the people at Chrysler Corporation, and the people at the Plymouth Division in particular, came on the scene last fall with the Beep Beep car, they knew damn well what their intentions were before they introduced their new Road Runner. This car is produced strictly to capture the youth market—and it does. Some people may want the body style but not the teeny-bopper image and the standard powerplant that goes with it. To remedy this, the good people at Plymouth can substitute a more sophisticated engine—in the form of the King Kong Hemi.

We took delivery of the car on a weekday afternoon from the Chrysler Corporation office in New York. The ride down to our office in Virginia is about 230 miles and the Hemi only gulped $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tank of Sunoco 260 on the way.

Basically, the car was red Tudor coupe with a shipping weight of 3390 lbs. It was equipped with a Torqueflite transmission (for consistent performance), decor group, power disc brakes, rear speaker AM radio, power steering, undercoating, a 3.55 Sure-grip rear, special suspension F70x 14 Polyglas tires—and the Hemi. As it happened, our original car was to have a 4.10 rear gear and F70x15 Polys and matte black hood stripes—but it came through

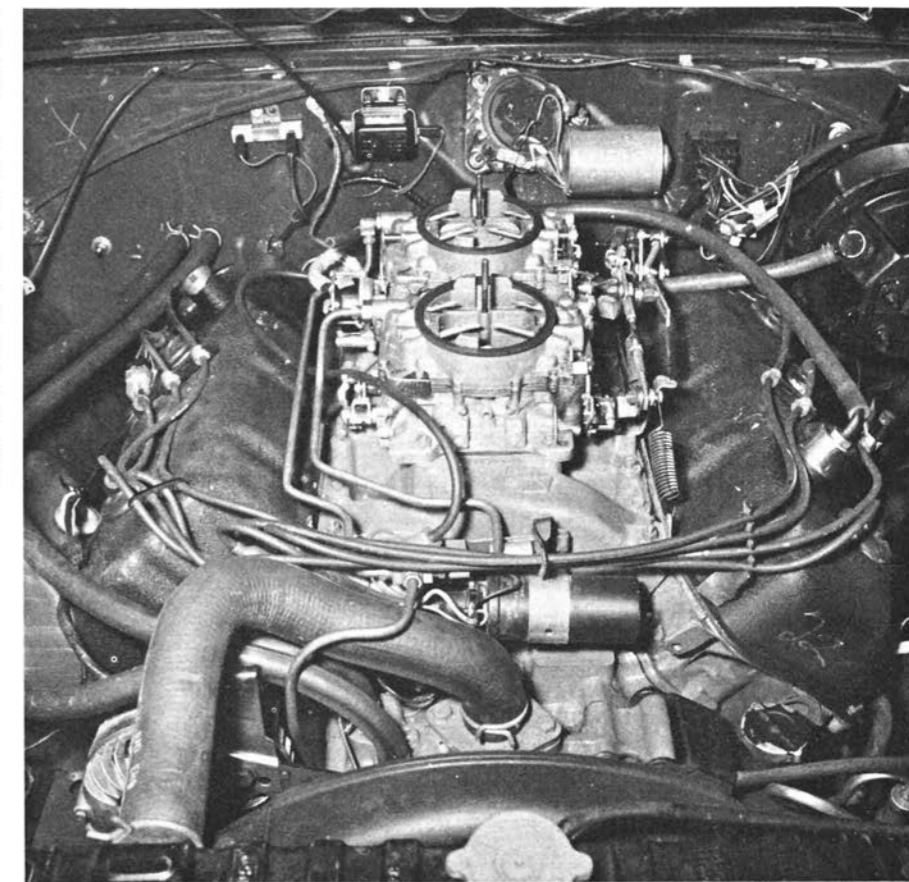
with none of these.

The interior was finished(?) in black vinyl, and was without benefit of a console (they're no good in the drive-in anyway.) Since there was no console, there were no bucket seats and the shift stick was located on the column ala family car. All accessories were operated by quasi toggle switches mounted on the dash. With an engine of this magnitude, you'd expect the factory to supply some half-way accurate gauges to hawk it. As usual, there were none. The car did come with a factory tach that wasn't half bad. Despite these shortcomings, the plain-jane interior was solid and a vast improvement over last year's taxi cab attire.

The 426 cu. in. engine produces 425 factory rated horsepower and

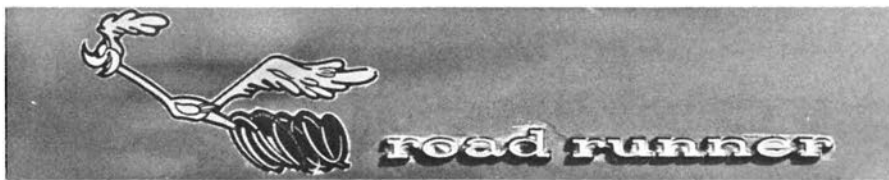
490 ft. lbs. of torque at 5000 rpm. The engine gets its 426 inches via a 4.25" bore by a 3.75" stroke. Forged, tinplated pistons are hung on drop forged steel rods utilizing floating wrist pins. This combination forces the air/fuel mixture against cast iron heads holding stellite-faced valves measuring 2.25" at the intake and 1.94" at the exhaust. A drop forged steel crank twists the whole assembly.

The cam is chain driven and has .490 lift and a 284 degree duration. It pops the intakes at .028 and the exhausts at .028. Carburetors are dual Carters and carry part nos. 4139S for the front and 4140S for the rear. The primaries are $1\frac{7}{16}$ " and the secondaries are $1\frac{1}{16}$ ". A Prestolite ignition provides the fire at TDC, and the engine is fully ad-



OPPOSITE PAGE—Here's what the Hemi Road Runner feels like when pedaled to the boards out of the gate. Off the snap was good, even with the 3.55 cogs. RIGHT—King Kong has two mouths in the form of Carter quads. Not shown is the fresh-air intake cover, but rubber air cleaner seal is visible at top of photo. Street Hemi is still rated at 425 big ones. Smog controls are kept at a minimum and engine is smooth in all ranges.

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TOP—Comin' at ya! Looking like a GN stocker, the Runner handled similarly on the street. Well, not really, but the heavy duty suspension makes a world of difference. CENTER—At the strip, tires were bled to 30 psi for better bite. Goodyear Polyglas tires performed better than we expected. ABOVE—Beware Snakes, Road Runner will do it to ya!

vanced 30° @ 3100 rpm.

The Torqueflite trans is lashed to the firebreather and transmits the power through the ratios of 2.45 in 1st, 1.45 in 2nd, 1.00 in high, and 2.20 in reverse. Twenty-nine tooth axles take the gaff from the 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ " ring and pinion used in the automatic cars.

Coil springs and independent, lateral, non-parallel control arms

with torsion bars support the front end with the aid of a .094" anti-roll stabilizer. Aft are heavy duty shocks and leaf springs. The left side carries six leaves and the right has five leaves plus two half leaves.

This suspension does seem to get with the program as far as ride and handling are concerned and may be even on the stiff side for the unsuspecting driver. We weren't bothered

by it a bit, though. It really felt good to have the feel of Corvette-like suspension in a full-size passenger car.

Another item that is definitely a must when operating a car of this nature are the front disc brakes. We panic stopped the beast three successive times from 80 miles per hour and they smoked, but faded not a whit.

Test day dawned foggy but soon the sun appeared and we were on our way to Capitol Raceway for the test session. After we set up the lights and starting system, and removed the tools, and camera equipment, we staged the car for a trial run. The car was brought to 1800 rpm with one foot on the brakes. The gas was feathered for the first 75 feet or so to try and control wheel spin and then applied fully for the remainder of the quarter. Transmission gears shifted by themselves, ram-air hood vents were closed and the driver was very, very rusty. The resultant figures were a 14.96 at 98.03 mph. Another pass was made immediately which netted an et of 14.23 and a speed of 101.58.

Changes were in order, so we made some. The front skins were pumped to 50 psi but the rears were left at 35. The fresh air traps in the hood were opened up and the air cleaner top was removed from the dual Carbers. The Torqueflite was left in drive as before, and this netted a 13.82 at 102.85 mph. This was better, but it still really wasn't getting with the program. For the remainder of the test runs, the car was shifted manually and we soon realized that this was the only way to go. With this procedure, the et dropped to 13.60 and the speed was bumped to 105.38—improvement! Now that we were getting the feel of the car, we got a little braver. So, on the next run, 1st was held until 7000, 2nd until 6,700 and the traps were cleared at 5500—at least so said the factory tach. Time and speed for our first "banzai" pass was 13.57 and 106.76. Another immediate run netted a 13.53 et and a 107.27 speed. Before cooling the Hemi beast down for a while, we made one more pass. This time the gas pedal was flogged unmercifully out of the gate, wheelspin produced much un-needed smoke and the et rose to a 14.00 while the speed dropped back to 105.88.

By this time, the engine was hot and so were we (it was near 80 degrees). So, after liberally soaking the radiator with cold water, we crossed over the highway and partook in a sumptuous repast of Cokes and cheeseburgers. An hour later,

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with the car fairly cool, we made four more passes and came up with a low et of 13.50. We then shut the car down and let it cool for about twenty minutes.

We made seven more runs with the best one of the day being the first of these. The fire-breather ran a 13.38 at 108.00 with the tires bled to 30 psi. The remainder of the runs got progressively worse because of engine heat, breakdown of the factory installed plugs, and the engine attitude after 22 or 23 all-out runs. There were also some 1st to drive shifts (passing up second gear altogether) which dropped the R's down too far to make a decent recovery possible.

Now, if these times don't seem too impressive for the big, bad Hemi, remember that it was box-stock and still had the original plugs installed, it ran through stock exhaust headers, mufflers and tailpipes, and used street tires. In other words, we ran the car exactly as it comes from the

BELOW—Several burnouts were made before staging for the first run. Large space between the top of the tires and the wheel-well was due partially to the fact that we received the car with 14 inch wheels instead of the required 15's: *BELOW CENTER*—Stopping power was fantastic with power discs. We panic-stopped the Road Runner three successive times from 80 mph and still encountered no fade. Car ran well all day despite the 80 degree temperature. All runs were made with stock exhaust, plugs and tires.



dealer with nothing extra added. We felt that the Road Runner made an impressive showing stock—but, with a good tune and stocker tires, the low 13 high 12 second bracket would not be far off.

The most incredible thing about driving the car anywhere was the looks it got from other people in the cars next to us. The boppers in their 383 'Runners would slide along side at a stop light, look over and look away and look over again, pinching themselves. The block lettered "HEMI" on those fresh air scoops just seems to do something to people. ■

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ABOVE—The Runner was equipped with the Torqueflite trans and shifted manually for the best results. Here, the car leaves after holding the motor to 1800 rpm and then putting the wood to it. Shifts were made at 7000 in 1st, 6800 in second and the traps were cleared at 5300. The best of 23 all-out runs produced a 13.38-108.00.