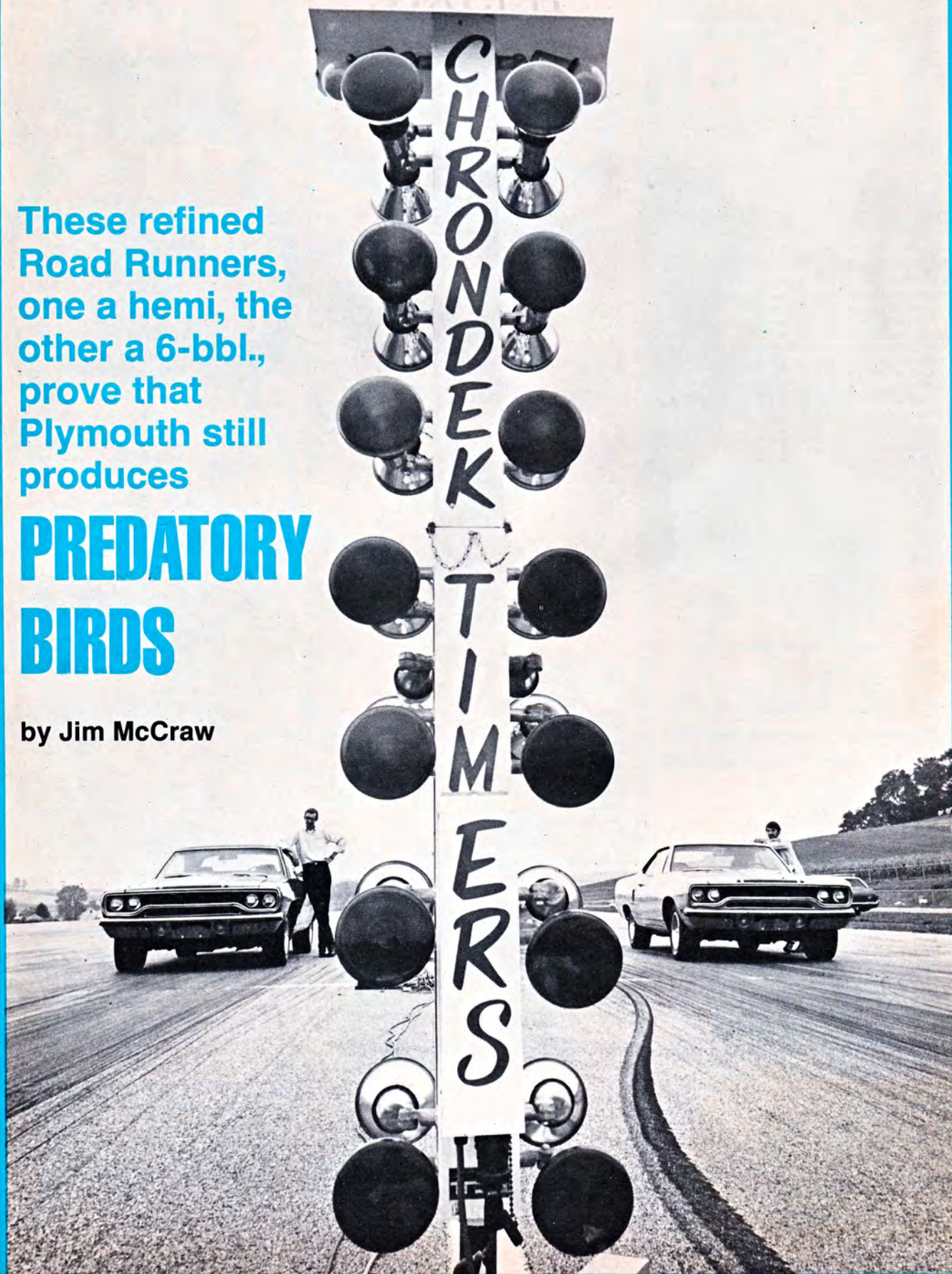


photos by Jim Kelly

These refined
Road Runners,
one a hemi, the
other a 6-bbl.,
prove that
Plymouth still
produces

PREDATORY BIRDS

by Jim McCraw



EVERY YEAR THAT passes brings more and more things to like about the Plymouth Road Runner. It took only half a year to rid the original car of its taxicab appointments. Then the hardtop and convertible came along. The 383 and 426 hemi were soon joined by the 440 wedge, and late last year the 440-6 BBL package was introduced. Now it's 1970, and the RR package shapes up once again as a runaway best seller.

Our first drag test of a 1970 Road Runner was a side-by-side comparison that we really enjoyed doing. Both of our cars were hardtops, both had identical equipment, except for engines. The "Sub Lime" green coupe carried the 8-bbl. hemi, while the red and vinyl black car used the 440-6 BBL package.

A rundown of the equipment on the cars would have to include F60-15 raised letter tires by Goodyear, disc power brakes, power steering, 6-way



ABOVE—The buckets have high backs and built in head rests and are very comfortable, even on those long trips. The rest of the interior and dash appointments are standard '68 Dodge. The gages are one of its redeeming factors, though.

BELOW—Those big, fat G60 Polys don't want to break loose under anything less than a floorboard stomp. They'll win you over in the corners, too. The first run was a walk-through 14.31. That changed with Stiles' crew's mods and the figures dropped to 13.34-107.52. The opened air grabber and removed air filter element were good for a few tenths.



manually adjustable bucket seats, AM-FM radios, and 4.10 Sure Grip rears. Both were Torqueflites.

We picked up the freshly tuned pair of Runners at Plymouth's Detroit offices and drove the pair to our offices outside Washington, D. C., making a high-speed 700 mile break-in period for both cars part of the test. As expected, there were no problems in the portion of the testing except for the abominable gas mileage at cruising

speeds. The 4.10 gearing really made the engines churn, and mileage slipped to 10 mpg or less for the cars' first road trip. Of course, as the engines were broken in, the mileage picked up considerably.

We noted one or two things during the road trips worthy of mention at this point. Both tachometers tintinabulated rather badly, bouncing as much as 1200 rpm with steady throttle pressure on flat roads. Wind noise be-

tween vent window frame and door frame was noticeable, but we didn't mind, as we're advocates of vent windows anyhow, rather than one-piece side glass. The new, high-back bucket seats incorporating headrests and support construction proved comfortable to two different people, one hefty, one not so hefty.

One thing we did notice much to our liking was the quietness of the "new" hemi engine. Our first driving shift

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was with the wedge, and when we switched off, it was difficult to distinguish the two engines by sound. The hydraulic lifter 284-284-60 camshaft does the trick, but still works on the drag strip, as the performance figures will show.

Another feature new to Road Runner in 1970 is the fully instrumented dash layout, pirated directly from the Dodge Charger, with all the necessary gages to keep the driver apprised of what's happening under the bonnet. Ah, yes, the bonnet. Both of our test cars featured the Air Grabber outside air induction system that opens a rectangular door in the hood when the engine fires. It rises about three inches to form a three-sided scoop, the out-sides of which carry a predatory-looking decal, furious eyes, shark teeth,

and all, pronouncing the printed words "Air Grabber". This doohickey also has a manual override switch on the dash so the door may be closed during bad weather. Trick though it may be, the whole apparatus is worth about 10 lb. on the front end, and could be replaced by the original "6-BBL." fiberglass hood with permanent scoop.

The finish on both cars was not up to snuff. Maybe because they were rather hurriedly built as road test cars, maybe because the people who built them were not feeling well, but whatever the reason, the cars weren't built right. Both leaked water terribly during automatic car wash visits. The seat back latch escutcheons were loose on all four buckets, and caused a lot of smashed hands before the backs would release, and the disc brakes on

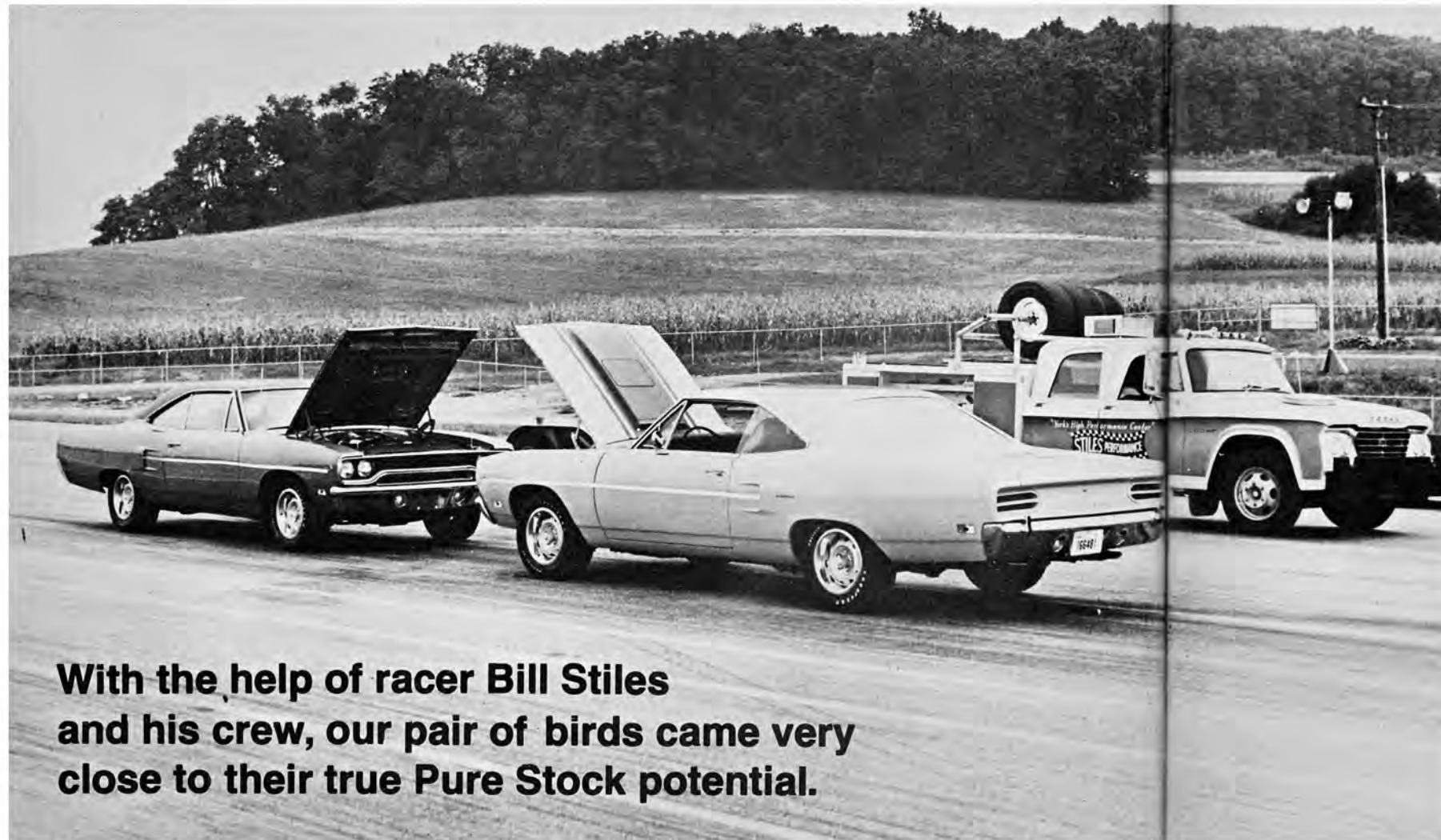
the wedge car squealed and moaned because the disc runout was excessive. And the "Dust Swirl" side trim on both cars was out of alignment by as much as a quarter inch at the door/body junctions.

The engine and drive train components on our twin Birds cannot be faulted. They ran hot, straight, and normal the whole time (and by normal, we mean normal for what they were. Both were temperamental cold starters because of their multiple carburetion setups and smog settings, but once fired, no overheating or balkiness was noted). The Torqueflite transmissions were so solid and quickshifting that one of our testers received a citation for squealing the tires when in fact the trans had done it automatically on a half-throttle 1-2 shift. New this year

and worthy of note are the big 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ " ring and pinion sets formerly reserved for 4-speed cars that now are standard with all Super Commando and Hemi engines, regardless of transmission.

After the trip home and two days of "about-towing" the Road Runners, we took them to York US30 Dragway, where Plymouth ace Bill Stiles was to do the drag strip evaluation on them. Bill's bread and butter are Plymouth performance cars, and since he's a member of SS&DI's tech committee, he was a logical choice as our test pilot.

Bill's choice was to do the 440 tri-carb first, then see what the hemi could do against it. With a few minutes out for familiarization, Bill brought the car to the line and left amidst smoke and noise to a 14.35-101.58 drive-through. Another of the same yielded



With the help of racer Bill Stiles and his crew, our pair of birds came very close to their true Pure Stock potential.



ABOVE—The hemi is still boss! Though it has been relegated a hydraulic lifter cam, to help with emission control, the specs are still the same and the performance may be even better. It sounds just as wild as the previous numbers—just a better deal all the way 'round. The filterless air cleaner base makes an excellent air-router, especially with the trap door ajar.



ABOVE—Bill Stiles removes the filter element in the second stage of the Pure Stock test. BELOW—The 440 6-BBL looks much more production this year than last. The intake manifold is now the same orange as the rest of the engine. Both cars were identical save for the engines and paint color.



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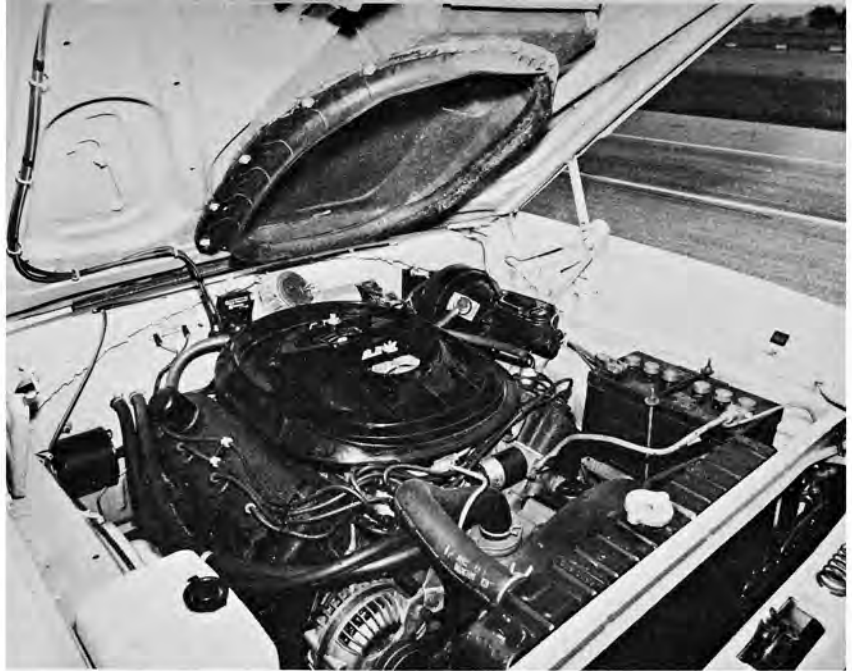


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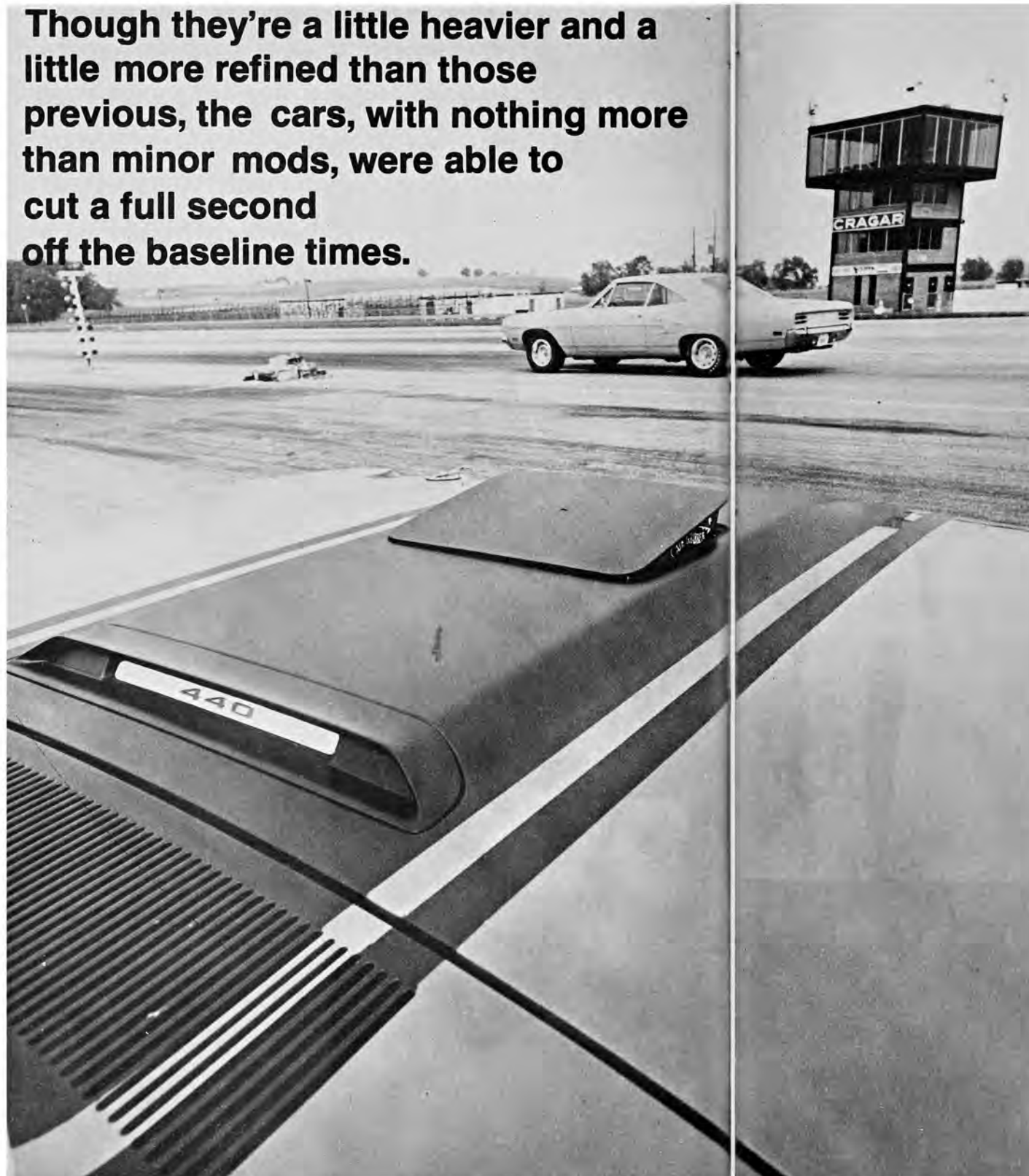
a 14.32-100.89 mph, and a third run, with less throttle in first gear produced a 14.00-103.44. The car was then checked for full throttle opening, which was OK, and the timing was reset from 38 back to 33 degrees, as the car had been shooting ducks at the tops of the gears and flattening out. With only these two things done, the wedge responded with a 13.76-102.85 mph run, backed up by a 13.72 at 103.09 mph. After water flushing and a radiator spray, the car was again ready. But this time, the huge element was removed from the air cleaner and the trap door in the hood opened wide. Two runs proved that something else was needed: a 13.81 at 103.09, and a 13.92 at 102.62. With more intake air, the car needed a different driving technique.

Stiles was just the guy to provide it, too. By shifting the automatic at 5000 rpm instead of 5500, the car went 13.70-103.56, 13.69-103.68, and a final 13.65 at 104.04 mph. Throughout the wedge test, tires were kept at 30 psi front, 32 psi rear, and the car was brought out at anywhere from 800 to 1400 rpm, with the higher rev range proving most beneficial. Stiles assured that more could be had from the car by disconnecting an accessory here and there and jacking around with tire pressures, but said he was anxious to flog the hemi to its best pure stock performance.

The hemi just couldn't be held down. Even on its initial pass down the strip, while turning a lowly 14.31, the trap speed rung up on York's Chrondeks at 104.65 mph. With equal torque in the low ranges and superior rev capabilities, the hemi just had to make top end. Of course, the breathing system on a street hemi has been improving every year now since 1966, so its performance is excellent as well.

After another warmup run, this time a 14.18-104.65, the hemi and its driver were ready. Just smoothing it out of the gate, rolling 25-40 feet, then opening all eight barrels, Stiles made the Road Runner run 13.73-107.52. The following run would have been fine, except that momentary fuel starvation in the traps did in the mph end, down to 104.89, while the elapsed time fell to 13.58. All systems equal, but cooler than before due to a fresh watering, the hemi Road Runner scored a 13.55-105.38 mph and was then parked for

Though they're a little heavier and a little more refined than those previous, the cars, with nothing more than minor mods, were able to cut a full second off the baseline times.



ABOVE—Here are the only things that really peeved us about the "road birds." A \$25 car wash annihilated the passenger side because the big-window weather stripping was inadvertently left off—on both cars! The dust swirl tape side trim was slightly mismatched, by an eighth of an inch, or so. P.S. The fly didn't seem to mind.

changes.

Among the changes made were the inflation of tires to 32 psi, removal and replacement of the Champion N-10-Y plugs with a fresh set, and removal of the air filter element. After a fresh batch of coolant water was installed, the car was rolled into the beams once again. Stiles, shifting at 6500 rpm, rolled to a 13.48 with a speed of 107.27. Following this, a 13.42-107.65, with no changes and no cooling time.

By destroying the hemi's nemesis, unnecessary heat, Stiles was able in a few minutes to record the best of the day's runs: First, a 13.37-106.88, followed by a 13.34-107.52 mph blast, proving that, while it has been smogged and smogged again over the past two years, even with a hydraulic cam, the hemi is a superior engine that responds to even the smallest tune job. Whether the hemi is worth the extra money and extra weight over the 440 6-BBL. for four tenths and 3½ mph remains a question answerable only by the buyers of 1970 Road Runners.

These cars are respectable, if not outstanding performers, right off the showroom floor. They are to be considered decent handlers, despite their weights (3600 to 4000 lb., depending on scales, load and accessories). They sell like gangbusters, but this year, we think the stylists have gone off the deep end with the dust swirl business and the air inlet door. The time spent on design and implementation of these options (thank goodness they're not standard) could have been well spent on designing leakproof doors, windows, and trunks, which these cars have needed since their original introduction, not to mention a little more classy interior finish (Plastic panels and Phillips head screws, like brown shoes, just don't make it).

As to the Road Runner's performance capabilities within the realm of Pure Stock, a future issue will carry a similar side-by-side on these cars with allowable mods, and possibly still another with some more expensive work in them. Then we'll see just how rapid the Rapid Transit System really is. ■

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