

PLYMOUTH ROAD TEST

PLYMOUTH SHOWROOMS are jammed, and with reason. Not since the introduction of the '55 Chevrolet has a car changed so completely. This Plymouth retains the good points of its predecessors—easy handling, smooth ride—and also excels in some categories where no one thought it had much of a chance. **MOTOR TREND** always recommends that prospective buyers drive a car as much as possible before deciding. This year that is even more important with Plymouth because of its changed character.

Our Belvedere four-door sedan has the one powerpack presently available on the Fury 301-cubic-inch V8, including a four-barrel carburetor, special manifolds and distributor, and dual exhausts. The car had full-time power steering, power brakes, and the three-speed TorqueFlite transmission, so was Plymouth's hottest car at the moment. A Fury model, to be introduced later, will have still more power.

The smaller V8 (available on Plaza models only, and the only V8 for them), and the big V8 without powerpack offer somewhat less zoom and somewhat better fuel mileage. In addition, regular gasoline is recommended for all engines except with powerpack, as in the test car.

TorqueFlite comes only on the Belvedere and the top-priced station wagon; PowerFlite, available on the whole line, costs less, gives less acceleration and should yield only negligible differences in fuel mileage. Stick shift leads them all in economy, should best PowerFlite in acceleration and come close to a tie with TorqueFlite in the go department.

Does It Handle Differently?

Chosen by MT as the easiest car to drive in 1955, Plymouth is right up there again on several counts. Sheer effort required to steer a Plymouth with power steering is just about nothing at all. The steering is the fastest in the field, with $3\frac{3}{4}$ turns lock to lock; for fast driving, we would like to see this cut to three.

Ball-joint suspension, new this year, aids in aiming although there is no feel of the road at all, at any speed.

The tiny wheel sits down in your lap for easy control and to make it possible for any driver to see over it.

Vision would be far better than in either Ford or Chevrolet if it were not for extreme distortion at the right side of the windshield. Quality control has an immediate assignment here, we trust. The cowl-mounted mirror has good features and bad. Its mounting on the cowl is nearly universal, it's very wide, and it gives way if struck. It also vibrates so much as to be nearly useless at high speeds or when the road isn't smooth.

Once you get over the idea that someone is following you too closely or that they're passing you on the inside, the rear fins become a help in thick traffic or in parking. It won't be easy to tuck this "small" car into reduced parking spaces; the new and enormous Suburban models will be even harder.

Handling on the road is likewise a cinch. It may not be the sort that puts you at your ease, for that's a sensitive wheel and any jerk or tug on the wheel beyond its one-inch rim play is totally uncorrected. A crowned road causes no perceptible pull. Wind gusts have little effect, this car being the heaviest of the Big Three by a considerable margin. There is, at the moment, no easier car to handle on a long trip except for the one factor that the full-time power steering demands constant vigilance; if you've never driven a car with Chrysler power steering, it will take some getting used to.

Is It Any More Roadable?

It certainly is. Up to its indicated top speed, the car feels good. Cruising is effortless at high speeds. You don't have "completely flat cornering," as your over-enthusiastic Plymouth salesman may tell you. You do have truly excellent cornering ability; you'll be able to negotiate all ordinary curves with ease and comfort, and quite extraordinary ones with safety. Give it a try, because this is hard to believe from the hushed, un-fussy behavior of the car on a smooth street or highway. It simply feels too soft to behave with such aplomb in tight spots. Figures show the Plymouth's weight distribution to be the worst of the Big Three, but suspension makes a difference, and this car's roadability is fine.

And on the rough roads? There's vibration in the body, steering wheel, and seat. Yet the wheels cling to the road on a washboard or even in thick gravel. Braking and turning are

safe on bad surfaces if you employ even a modicum of caution.

We took to the air once on a very severe dip, then came down and continued on our way, the car recovering very rapidly.

Is Performance Hotter for '57?

In every acceleration category, the test car almost exactly split the difference between the 200-horsepower '56 Belvedere's times and those of the '56 Fury hardtop. It was the middle performer of the Big Three cars tested and even came away with top honors in the 0-45 times. In fairness, the times were all very close to those of the Ford, and a Turboglide Chevrolet will almost certainly be the 0-45 top dog in additional testing.

The increase in performance is more important as an indication of how much the once-slow Plymouth has changed. The difference between it and Ford is small, however individual cars may match up, and both are hot cars, though not as torrid as the Chevy.

You'll find the Plymouth accelerates without undue commotion. TorqueFlite makes a big difference in available torque at the lower end.

How Has Fuel Mileage Changed?

As often happens when a car's engine grows, steady-speed fuel tests are the worse for it. As on the Ford, fuel mileage at a steady 75 is up slightly.

Tank averages dipped in city driving and rose on a long trip, which contained more highway miles than the test in 1956.

Are the New Brakes Better?

Not on the test car. Swerving—the result of spot fade—was present from the fourth stop onward, even including a five-minute cooling-off period.

The new front suspension utilizes forces tending to cause brake dive and effectively counteracts it. There is some nosing down, but it is so slight as to allow passengers to remain in their seats even in a panic stop (see photo, page 79).

The typical Chrysler Corp. propeller shaft emergency brake is powerful and substitutes for a parking pawl in either of the automatic transmissions.

Has the Ride Yielded to Roadability?

Not at all. If anything, it's smoother than before. Noise and feel from road surface irregularities are both low, with some vibration. All passengers will benefit from the new flatter cornering and will find curving highways more comfortable than in any previous Plymouth. Speeds up to an actual 65 on washboard roads brought a clatter from various parts but no passenger discomfort.

On the worst of highway dips it is fairly easy to bottom the car. In ordinary driving this would not occur.

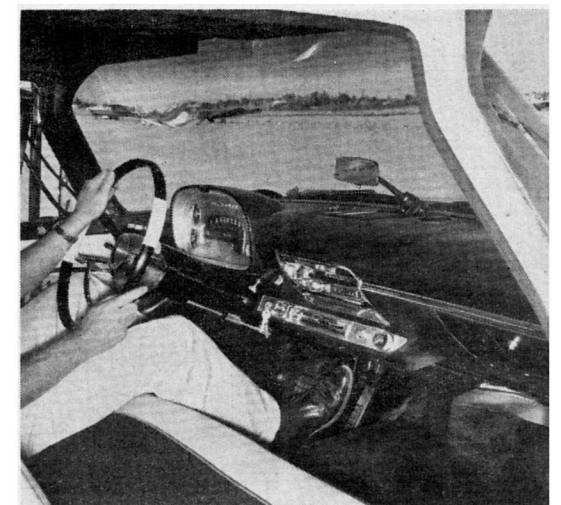
Can You Get at the Engine?

The test car's engine room was too full of power equipment to make anything easy except minor maintenance. The oil dipstick and battery can be reached with ease, but that's about it. Power steering hoses and wiring even block the oil filler neck. The transmission dipstick is tucked under the heater blower and back of the big air cleaner. Plugs can be reached at a stretch, though No. 1 on the left bank is awkwardly located behind the generator.

What's Different About a Plymouth?

The extreme ease of driving will probably impress you most. The ultra-easy power steering, new and comfortable driving position, and pushbutton-operated TorqueFlite and PowerFlite make control of this bigger car a simple matter. You may get to like the surprising fins as a driving aid, too, and other drivers will get plenty of warning from those enormous tail lights.

You enter in a semi-sports car manner, so that you can clear the low wheel. The thin-looking seats gave us plenty of comfort throughout our test, but we'd be leery of those extra-



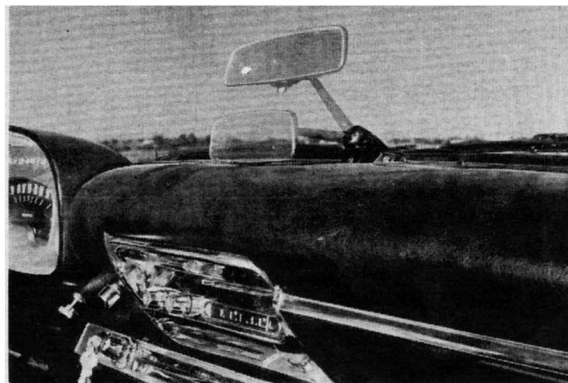
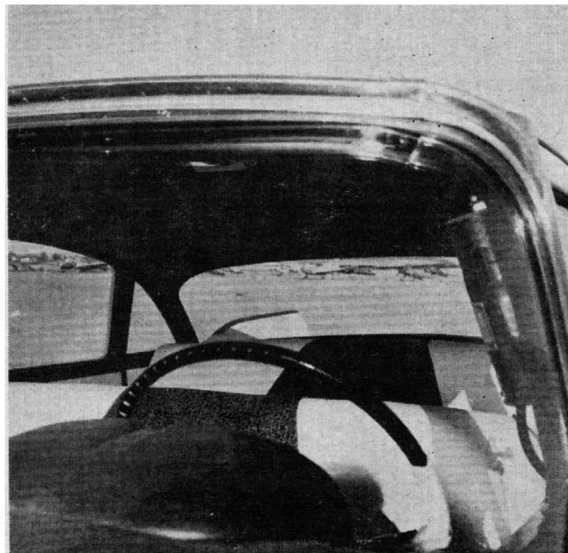
PLASTIC GRIPS on small, low-set wheel avoid slipping of hands on rim. Optional foam-filled dash pad has excellent dull finish. Note windshield distortion.



GETTING OUT requires agility, smaller feet than these. Rear quarter window is fixed. Metallic insert on door panel should prevent wear for many years.



TORSION-BAR HINGE reduces interference with luggage to a maximum. Trunk is very deep, but not high, so spare is mounted flat. There is no water drain.



PLYMOUTH ROAD TEST continued

shallow ones in the rakish hardtops pending further trial.

Most noteworthy of all Plymouth's achievements in the new car is the combination of a soft, smooth ride with a high degree of roadability. The use of torsion bars at the front with those strange leaf springs at the back is great. The rear ones don't look as though they could work, with their fat, short front section and long, wand-like rear portion, but work they certainly do.

In the main components of this car you get similarity to, or even duplication of, the more expensive Chrysler products. The suspension is the same, the transmission the same, even the body shell (though not its trim, of course) is that used throughout the line with the exception of the Imperial.

A goof is evident in the placement of the too-small glove compartment, far away from the driver.

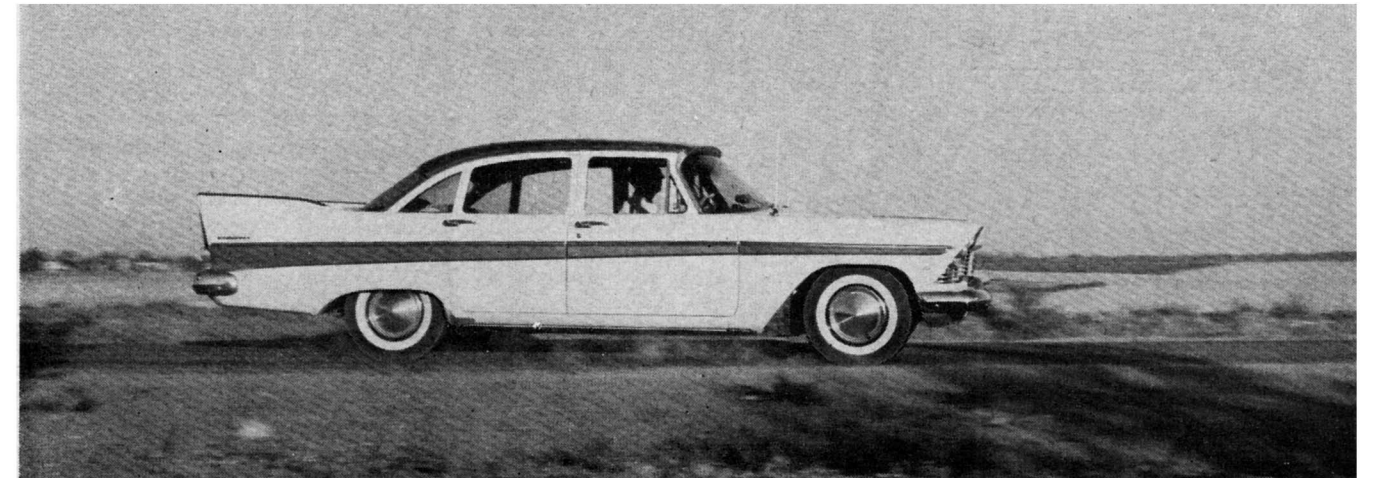
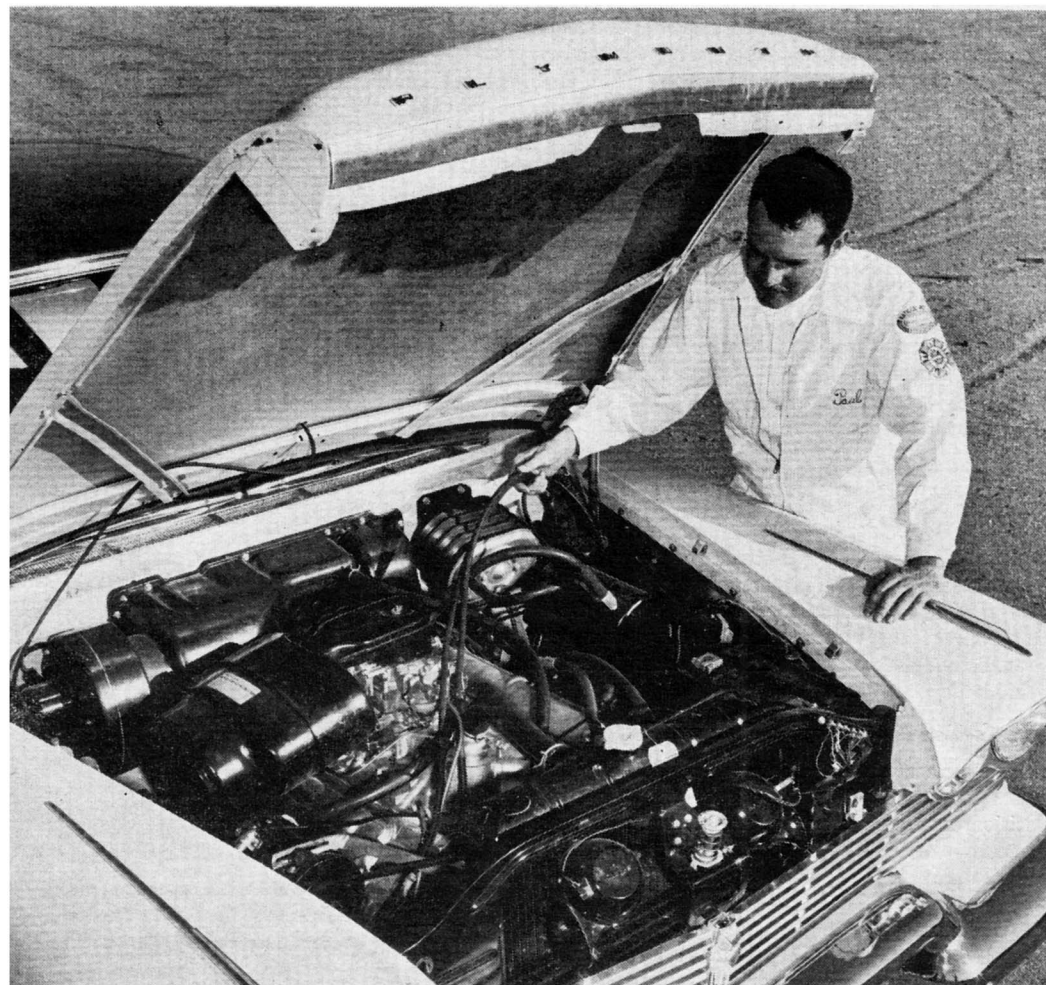
How Is It Built?

Denying its nearly two tons with a general impression of lightness, the test car suffered from chronic hood shake and a stiff trunk latch, along with flimsy-sounding doors, standard on the line since 1955. As on some '56s, the TorqueFlite push-button cover plate did not fit and let its light shine into the driver's eyes. There were no serious examples of irresponsible assembly. As with other makes, look over carefully the one car you are going to buy and get complaints taken care of NOW. Windshield distortion appeared no worse to us on individual cars, but check those available.

AS YOU LOOK BACK, the rear fin may bother you at first when you mistake it for another car. Later it will become useful when you're parking or maneuvering in a tight spot.

COWL-MOUNTED MIRROR, shown here in double exposure, can take up any position you want it to. It gives way if struck.

THREE HOSES belong to MT's test equipment, but the rest is all there on any Plymouth with power steering, brakes, heater, and powerpack. Side-mounted air cleaner nestles under low hood with no need for a bulge. Hood silencer pad (not on test car) and factory undercoating now come as a package.



P E R F O R M A N C E

'57

(235-bhp engine)

ACCELERATION From Standing Start
0-45 mph 6.65 0-60 mph 10.7
Quarter-mile 17.9 and 77 mph
Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 4.2 45-60 mph 4.2
50-80 mph 11.5

FUEL CONSUMPTION Used Mobilgas Special
Steady Speeds
19.7 mpg @ 30 18.5 mpg @ 45
15.5 mpg @ 60 13.9 mpg @ 75
Stop-and-Go Driving
12.0 mpg tank average for 80 miles

Highway Driving
15.0 mpg tank average for 806 miles

OIL CONSUMPTION None added in 886 miles

STOPPING DISTANCE 170 feet from 60 mph

BRAKE FADE (Series of slow-downs at rate of 15 feet per second per second from 60 mph, slowing to 20 mph, accelerating at full throttle back to 60, repeating 12 times) Burning odor began after second stop. Swerve to right on fourth stop prevented holding deceleration rate. Brakes locked on sixth stop, reducing deceleration rate to 10 feet per second per second. After five minute cooling period: Deceleration rate 10 feet per second per second because of swerve to left on seventh stop. Deceleration rate 13 feet per second per second because of left swerve and locked wheel on eighth stop. Deceleration rate 13 feet per second per second because of right swerve and locked wheel on ninth stop. Deceleration rate rose to 15 feet per second per second on 10th stop and remained there, with right swerve less noticeable on 11th stop but worse on 12th stop. Hard pedal was noticed only immediately after the fade tests because it was swerving rather than high pedal pressure that decreased deceleration rate.

SPEEDOMETER ERROR Read 30 at true 30, 48 at 45, 52 at 50, 64 at 60, 80 at 75, 88 at 80

'56

(200-bhp engine)

ACCELERATION From Standing Start
0-30 mph 4.5 0-60 mph 11.9
Quarter-mile 18.9 and 76 mph
Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 4.4 50-80 mph 13.4

FUEL CONSUMPTION Used Mobilgas Special
Steady Speeds
21.5 mpg @ 30 19.3 mpg @ 45
16.6 mpg @ 60 13.3 mpg @ 75
Stop-and-Go Driving
12.7 mpg tank average for 561 miles

STOPPING DISTANCE 167 feet from 60 mph

SPEEDOMETER ERROR Read 31 at true 30, 47 at 45, 63 at 60, 79 at 75

SPECIAL 1957 SHOW ISSUE!