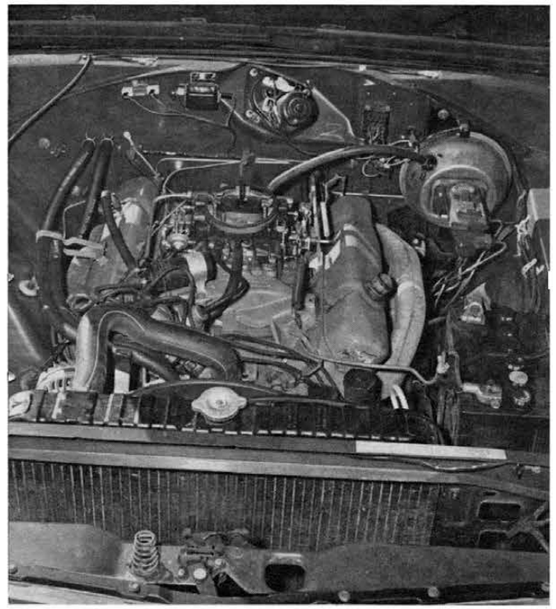
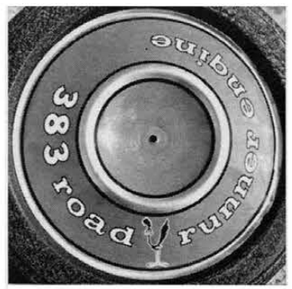

PHOTOS BY GORDON CHITTENDEN







### Hang the Package, Bring on the Performance

# PLYMOUTH'S ROAD RUNNER

PLYMOUTH FIGURES, and rightly so, that one way to win you over this year is to give you lots of car for your money. In the case of the Road Runner, Plymouth's idea is to give lots of *performance* for the money, and it does this partly by putting gobs of go-goodies into the car, partly by not charging tremendous amounts for it, and partly by keeping things simple.

Keeping the price at a reasonable level ($3034 base price) makes the Road Runner a sort of Scotsman's Supercar. It's far from plush—in fact, it looks like it borrowed a taxicab's interior. Yet it doesn't scrimp in those areas that make an enthusiast's adrenalin boil. Standard equipment includes a highly tuned 383-cid V-8; four-speed all-synchro transmission; 11-in. drum brakes front and rear, heavy-duty suspension with firm springs and shocks plus thicker torsion bars and antiroll bar; F-70-15 Wide Oval redline tires; extra-duty cooling system with viscous-drive fan; tachometer; plus unique exterior trim and emblems.

The Road Runner emulates what a young, performance-minded driver might do on his own, if properly experienced and motivated. Take a basically light, inexpensive, stripped model and load it to the hilt with equipment to make it run and handle. Only instead of the owner's having to build such a car himself—bit by bit, hit and miss—the factory builds it for him, thus giving added assurances of the job's being done right, of reliability, of having adequate handling and braking to cope with the engine, of a new-car warranty, and perhaps just as important (though often overlooked), of getting a car whose resale value will hold up much better than something similar done privately.

The Road Runner's standard 383 engine isn't the same as used in other Chrysler Corp. cars. It delivers 335 bhp at 5200 rpm, 425 lb.-ft. of torque at 3400 rpm. This increase of horsepower over Chrysler's three other versions of the 383 (290, 300, and 330 bhp) comes about for several reasons. First the Road Runner 383 uses the corporation's 440-cid Super Commando heads and camshaft. This lends higher valve lift (0.450/0.465 intake and exhaust as against the normal 383's 0.425/0.437) and longer duration. Second, the Road Runner's standard 383 comes with a large-runner intake manifold and a Carter AVS-4426S four-barrel carburetor with 1.44-in.-diameter intake barrels and 1.69-in.-diameter secondaries. Add to this the 440's crankcase windage tray, twin exhausts and unsilenced air cleaner as standard equipment, and this becomes a pretty potent combination.

A floorshift four-speed manual transmission (ratios: 1st, 2.66; 2nd, 1.9; 3rd, 1.39; high, 1.00, and reverse, 2.58) comes with the package, but you can get the column-shift heavy-duty TorqueFlite optionally. Standard rear-axle ratio, 3.23:1 may be ordered with SureGrip. There's a special drag-strip option that combines SureGrip with a 3.55:1 ratio.

In driving the Road Runner, we found the engine is very strong in every-day traffic—lots of punch and admirable flexibility. While it idles on the lumpy side, it quickly smooths out and purrs along beautifully at high cruising speeds. The car felt free and fast at 70-80, with lots of torque and revs left for quick passing. Our test car came with TorqueFlite, and 3.23:1 axle ratio. Torque at takeoff was more than the street tires could handle. We noticed this both in city driving and at the strip. You simply have to be careful starting out, otherwise you find the rear tires breaking loose immediately. This tendency would undoubtedly be magnified with the four-speed transmission, and actually we consider both transmissions equal in spanning the quarter mile with the 383.

When we did our acceleration testing, we came away slightly disappointed. At 15.37 sec. and 91.4 mph, the car just didn't come up to our expectations. We did have two people aboard, and the street tires let a good deal of torque go up in rubber smoke, but we at least had the compensation of knowing that stickier tires and less weight would probably have let us break into the high 14s.

The TorqueFlite performed superbly, as TorqueFlites always seem to—extremely quick, positive shifts, no slippage, consistent reaction as we shifted the column-mounted quadrant by hand through the gears. Our car came with SureGrip rear axle, which helped acceleration time quite a bit.

Brakes turned out even more disappointing than the Road Runner's acceleration. During the first panic stop from 80 mph, the cold rear drums locked up tight, the rear end began wagging like a dog's tail, and we had to get off the pedal to regain control. During that first stop, our decelerometer registered 17 ft./sec.$^2$—not very good in anybody's book. As the rear drums warmed up, they began to fade and give the front drums a chance to do some work, and readings went up (maximum: 20 ft./sec.$^2$—on the third, fourth, and fifth stops). After that, and giving the brakes about a minute's rest between stops, all four drums started fading; and although we could control the car and keep it straight, meter readings leveled off at about 19. The brakes' poor performance can be blamed on badly chosen front/rear brake proportioning, and we feel Chrysler engineers should take another hard look at the valving here.

The Road Runner rides and handles predictably enough. With its fairly heavy engine in front, there's a good deal of understeer. It's not worrisome, though, and easily correctable by applying more power to the rear wheels when storming around fast turns. Power steering, which our test car had, gives an overall ratio of 18.8:1—not terribly fast, but ample. Chrysler's power steering is such that the driver loses almost all road feel, so in tight corners we had to judge how hard the front tires were scrubbing by listening to them squeal and by the car's general attitude.

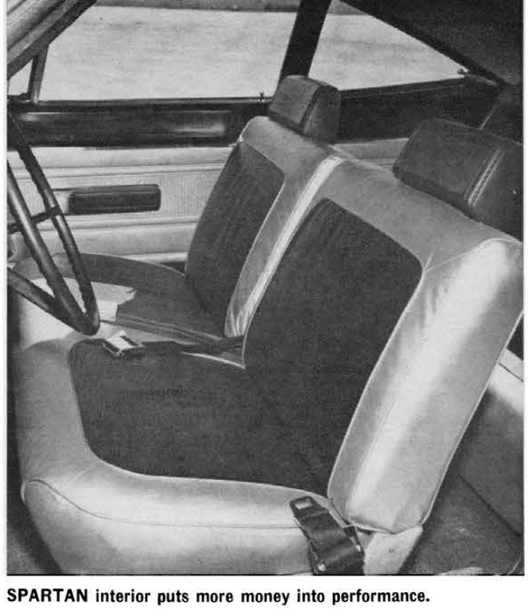
There's relatively little body roll with the H-D suspension. At speeds up to about 50 mph, the Road Runner rides much better than most cars with stiff handling packages. Over 50, though, a good deal of bobble and jostle comes through, and on long trips at sustained high speeds, this can become annoying to the occupants.

We found the Road Runner's driving position improvable. Its steering wheel stands too high for our taste (most Chrysler Corp. cars share this), so after a while our arms became tired as the blood drained to the shoulders. Seats are too low, and this impairs vision, particularly of objects near the front of the car.

We appreciate working gauges, but missed the one for oil pressure. It seems to us that a car like this needs one (of course, it's easy enough to add an aftermarket oil pressure gauge). The tach, which replaces the optional clock in other Belvederes, is so small and its range goes so high (to 8000) that it's difficult to read accurately at anything but 1000-rpm increments.

We did appreciate the Road Runner's excellent ventilation system. With vent control knobs at either side of the steering column, we could control incoming air on both sides of the car. This, along with good size front quarter panes and rear windows that swing outward, give better circulation than most cars nowadays. Another plus feature is the glovebox, which hinges from the top instead of from the bottom. Bottom-hinged boxes, we think, constitute a safety hazard. If the lid flops down in a crash, it can ▶

**TRUNK SPACE** is cavernous, and low sill means easy loading.



**SPARTAN** interior puts more money into performance.

become a blade-like instrument for slashing kneecaps.

For people who yearn for the ultimate in performance from the Road Runner, there's the street Hemi 426 offered optionally. While this adds at least $714 plus mandatory options to the price, it also adds a good deal to straight-line performance. With the 426, the Road Runner becomes *the* fastest stock machine in the strip, and it's even a tractable car on the street if it's kept in perfect tune. This engine, though, is extremely difficult to tune properly, so unless you can do it yourself, unless you live near one of the handful of dealers in the country who know how to tune it, and unless you're prepared to spoil the Road Runner's economy advantage both initial price and the long-range maintenance cost (the 426 makes this a $4000-plus automobile), by all means specify the 383 engine. ■

# 1968 PLYMOUTH
## ROAD RUNNER 2-DOOR

### DIMENSIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Wheelbase, in. | 116.0 |
| Track, f/r, in. | 59.5/59.2 |
| Overall length, in. | 202.7 |
| width | 76.4 |
| height | 54.7 |
| Front seat hip room, in. | 59.5 |
| shoulder room | 58.1 |
| head room | 37.3 |
| pedal-seatback, max. | 42.5 |
| Rear seat hip room, in. | 59.0 |
| shoulder room | 58.1 |
| leg room | 34.1 |
| head room | 36.7 |
| Door opening width, in. | 39.2 |
| Trunk liftover height, in. | 26.5 |

### PRICES

| | |
|---|---|
| List, FOB factory | $3034 |
| Equipped as tested | $3637 |

Options included: High-performance axle group, TorqueFlite, am radio, power steering, bumper guards, remote control mirror, chrome plated wheels, performance hood paint treatment.

### CAPACITIES

| | |
|---|---|
| No. of passengers | 6 |
| Luggage space, cu. ft. | n.a. |
| Fuel tank, gal. | 19.0 |
| Crankcase, qt. | 4 |
| Transmission/dif., pt. | 17.5/4.0 |
| Radiator coolant, qt. | 18 |

### CHASSIS/SUSPENSION

Frame type: Unitized.
Front suspension type: Independent by s.l.a., torsion bar springs, telescopic shock absorbers.
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. 130
antiroll bar dia., in. 0.94
Rear suspension type: Hotchkiss live axle, multileaf springs, telescopic shock absorbers.
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. 151
Steering system: Integral assist recirculating ball gear, parallelogram linkage behind front wheels.

| | |
|---|---|
| overall ratio | 18.8:1 |
| turns, lock to lock | 3.5 |
| turning circle, ft. curb-curb | 40.6 |
| Curb weight, lb. | 3650 |
| Test weight | 4020 |
| Distribution (driver), % f/r | 56.1/43.9 |

### BRAKES

Type: Cast iron duo-servo drums front and rear.

| | |
|---|---|
| Front drum, dia. x width, in. | 11.0 x 3.0 |
| Rear drum, dia. x width | 11.0 x 2.50 |
| total swept area, sq. in. | 380.1 |

Power assist: Integral vacuum.
line psi at 100 lb. pedal 800

### WHEELS/TIRES

| | |
|---|---|
| Wheel rim size | 14 x 5.5JK |
| optional size | 14 x 6.0JK |
| bolt no./circle dia. in. | 5/4.5 |
| Tires: Goodyear Speedway Wide Tread, size | F70-14 |
| normal inflation, psi f/r | 24/24 |
| Capacity @ p.s.i. | 5120 @ 24 |

### ENGINE

| | |
|---|---|
| Type, no. of cyl. | ohv 90° V-8 |
| Bore x stroke, in. | 4.25 x 3.38 |
| Displacement, cu. in. | 383 |
| Compression ratio | 10.0:1 |
| Fuel required | premium |
| Rated bhp @ rpm | 335 @ 5200 |
| equivalent mph | 122 |
| Rated torque @ rpm | 425 @ 3400 |
| equivalent mph | 80 |

Carburetion: Carter 1x4 AVS.

| | |
|---|---|
| throttle dia., pri./sec. | 1.44/1.69 |

Valve train: Hydraulic lifters, pushrods and overhead rocker arms.

| | |
|---|---|
| cam timing deg., int./exh. | 21-67/79-25 |
| duration, int./exh. | 268/284 |

Exhaust system: Dual, reverse-flow mufflers.

| | |
|---|---|
| pipe dia., exh./tail | 2.50/2.25 |
| Normal oil press. @ rpm | 55 @ 2000 |
| Electrical supply, V./amp | 12/37 |
| Battery, plates/amp. hr. | 66/59 |

### DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission type: Three-speed automatic with torque converter.

| | |
|---|---|
| Gear ratio 3rd (1.00:1) | 3.23:1 |
| 2nd (1.45:1) | 4.69:1 |
| 1st (2.45:1) | 7.92:1 |
| 1st x t.c. stall (2.10:1) | 16.60:1 |

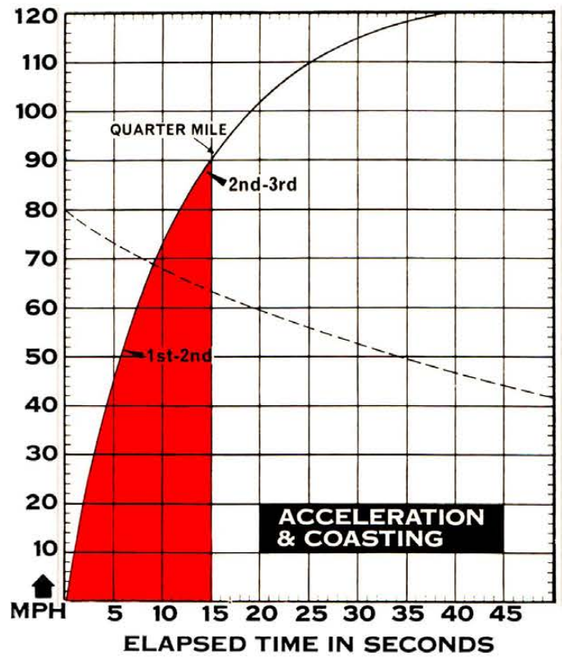
Shift lever location: Column.

| | |
|---|---|
| Differential type: Hypoid, limited slip. axle ratio | 3.23:1 |



**BRAKE TESTS** from 80 mph, recorded by decelerometer on windshield, were disappointing. All-drum system faded and lacked balance.

# CAR LIFE ROAD TEST




### CALCULATED DATA

| | |
|---|---|
| Lb./bhp (test weight) | 12.0 |
| Cu. ft./ton mile | 141.0 |
| Mph/1000 rpm (high gear) | 23.5 |
| Engine revs/mile (60 mph) | 2550 |
| Piston travel, ft./mile | 1437 |
| CAR LIFE wear index | 36.6 |
| Frontal area, sq. ft. | 23.2 |
| NHRA-AHRA class | E/SA-n.a. |

### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

| | |
|---|---|
| 30 mph, actual | 28.6 |
| 40 mph | 37.1 |
| 50 mph | 46.3 |
| 60 mph | 56.0 |
| 70 mph | 64.4 |
| 80 mph | 74.6 |
| 90 mph | 84.3 |

### MAINTENANCE

| | |
|---|---|
| Engine oil, miles/days | 4000/90 |
| oil filter, miles/days | 8000/180 |
| Chassis lubrication, miles | 36,000 |

Antismog servicing, type/miles: replace PCV valve/12,000, tune check/12,000

| | |
|---|---|
| Air cleaner, miles | replace/24,000 |
| Spark plugs: Champion J-11Y. gap, (in.) | 0.035 |
| Basic timing, deg./rpm | 5BTC/650 |
| max. cent. adv. deg./rpm | 24/4200 |
| max. vac adv., deg./in. Hg. | 19/15 |
| Ignition point gap, in. | 0.014 |
| cam dwell angle, deg. | 28 |
| arm tension, oz. | 17 |
| Tappet clearance, int./exh. | 0/0 |
| Fuel pressure at idle, psi | 3.5 |
| Radiator cap relief press., psi | 16 |

### PERFORMANCE

| | |
|---|---|
| Top speed (5200), mph | 122 |
| Test shift points (rpm) @ mph | |
| 2nd to 3rd (5400) | 88 |
| 1st to 2nd (5400) | 52 |

### ACCELERATION

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-30 mph, sec. | 3.1 |
| 0-40 mph | 4.3 |
| 0-50 mph | 5.7 |
| 0-60 mph | 7.3 |
| 0-70 mph | 9.3 |
| 0-80 mph | 12.0 |
| 0-90 mph | 15.0 |
| 0-100 mph | 19.0 |
| Standing ¼-mile, sec. | 15.37 |
| speed at end, mph | 91.4 |
| Passing, 30-70 mph, sec. | 6.2 |

### BRAKING

Max. deceleration rate from 80 mph ft./sec./sec. 20
No. of stops from 80 mph (60-sec. intervals) before 20% loss in deceleration rate 8-no loss
Control loss? Severe
Overall brake performance poor

### FUEL CONSUMPTION

| | |
|---|---|
| Test conditions, mpg | 10.8 |
| Normal cond., mpg | 11-16 |
| Cruising range, miles | 180-280 |

### DRAG FACTOR

| | |
|---|---|
| Total drag @ 60 mph, lb. | n.a. |