



CAR AND DRIVER ROAD TEST

PLYMOUTH BARRACUDA 383

They managed to get the big engine wedged into the car all right, but there wasn't any room for power steering.



PHOTOGRAPHY: AL FISHER

Among the mechanical changes for 1967, Plymouth widened the engine bay of the Barracuda two inches and reduced the width of the 318 cu. in. V-8 to that of the smaller 273. Aha! We reasoned that the 318 would replace the 273 as the largest engine available in the Barracuda. Plymouth probably figured likewise, but then—horrors!—came the news that Ford was going from 289 to 390 cu. in. as the largest Mustang engine. Curse you, Dearborn Baron!

So Plymouth pushed aside the 318 and set about wedging their big, fat 383 into the 'Cuda. Tight fit, but—whew!—they made it. Unfortunately, without room to spare. Without room, in fact, for a power steering pump (which normally fills up the space occupied by the 383's exhaust

headers). Meanwhile, back at the drawing board, a phalanx of crew-cut, rimless-glasses engineers are frantically designing a pencil-thin power steering system.

Until they're finished, buyers of the Barracuda 383 are confronted with two choices—neither one exactly ideal: standard-ratio manual steering or quick-ratio manual steering. The standard steering is slower than slow—you'd be better off with a J.C. Whitney suicide knob—and trying to park in a tight spot is like trying to dock the Queen Mary during a harbor pilots' strike. The quick steering, combined with the extra weight of the big-block 383, is so heavy as to be almost useless on anything but a race track.

The earliest that the power steer-

ing can be available, we are told, would be late this year—unless consumer demand pressures Plymouth into speeding up the program. We hope it happens soon, because the Barracuda 383 is otherwise an excellent car. Until then, the hot 'Cuda is going to spend its most rewarding moments at the drag strip. It will probably be classified in C/Stock, where it should be competitive.

Is the 383 enough? The drag racing fraternity is already asking, "Why not the 440?" Indeed, the 440 cu. in. block is essentially the same as the 383, so it would be a natural. For now, Plymouth is saying that a Barracuda 440 would be too much, but competition from other specialty builders might change their minds. The Shelby Mustang 428 already

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exists and other big-engined sporty cars are in the works—a Gurney Cougar 427, a Hurst-modified Firebird 428, and the various Camaro 427 conversions—and nearly all bolt right in.

With the 383, the Barracuda has more than enough punch. This is the same engine we have in the Boss Wagon (C/D, September '65), and, as we have often remarked, it's the nicest street engine Chrysler makes. In the Barracuda, it's rated at 280 horsepower, down from the Boss Wagon's 325 because of the 'Cuda's more restrictive exhaust system. The engine responds eagerly to the slightest change in throttle position, making its own express track when passing a line of slower cars. The 383's one fault is its high gas consumption, but with an engine like this, we couldn't help but drive it pretty hard.

Manually shifting the TorqueFlite automatic, we recorded quarter-mile times of 15.4 seconds, not only chopping better than a second off the Barracuda 273's time, but also putting the 383 on a par with the Mustang 390—which was the

whole point of the big engine option. (The 273 we tested in December was equipped with a four-speed stick shift.)

Braking performance is improved over the Barracuda 273 by a small margin. With about 100 lbs. more weight on the front end, the 383 stopped seven feet shorter than the 273, although directional stability was not as good. This is with front disc brakes—a mandatory option with the 383 engine.

The handling qualities were difficult to evaluate because of the car's slow steering. We weren't anxious to get into a situation where we might suddenly have to crank on a lot of corrective steering lock, so our initial impression was that the car had massive understeer. With the spatial freedom of the skid pad, however, we found that the understeer is mostly illusion; the steering characteristic is about as neutral as you'd expect for a car of this type.

The ride is solid—it was equipped with the mandatory Formula S suspension package—and could be unpleasant if the car was only driven around town. The harshness de-

creases as the speed increases, and on a fast, sweeping bend, the heavy-duty springs and shocks really keep it pinned to the road surface.

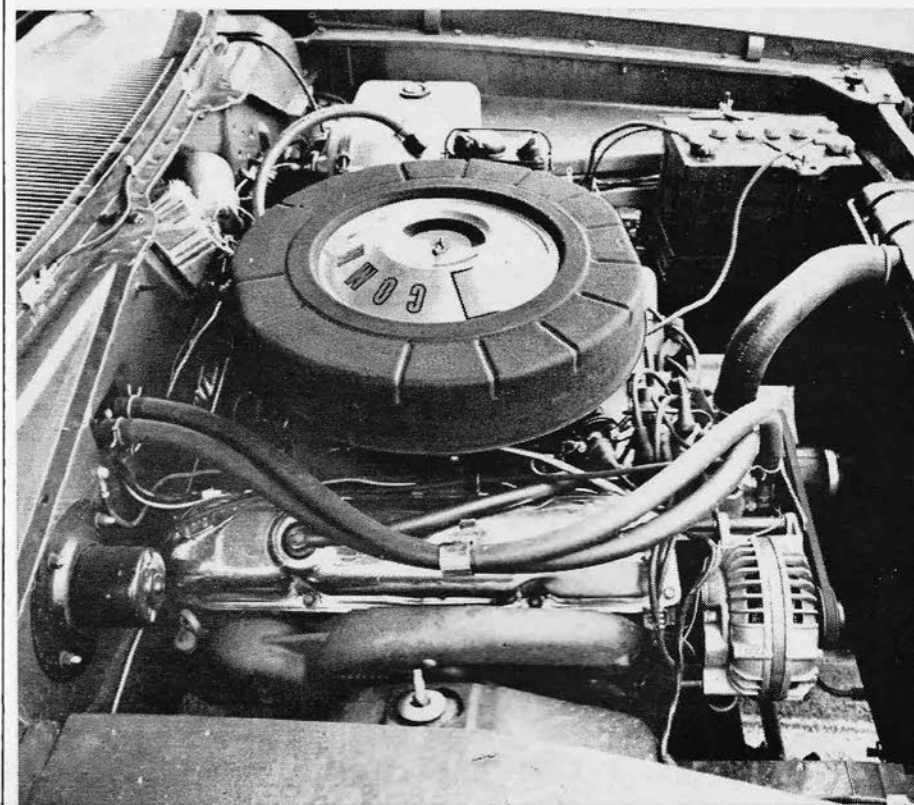
Mechanically, this is the extent of the differences between our test car and the 273-engined car we tested last December. For the 383 test, we chose the new notchback body style, which is about 100 lbs. lighter than the fastback (mainly in the tail), and about \$100 cheaper. We had one of the first run of 2000 notchbacks, all of which have faulty rear windows. The scene in the inside rear-view mirror is hideously distorted, making every car look like it's sitting 'way up high on its suspension like a drag racing "funny car." Plymouth officials told us that there would be no recall on this—it's an obvious defect, and the window will be replaced under warranty as a faulty part if the customer brings it to the dealer's attention.

Some critics have pointed out that the notchback looks like a cross between the Corvair's roof-line and the Pontiac Grand Prix rear window, but we like the overall effect. It isn't as eye-catching or sporty as

the fastback, but that can be an asset in heavily policed areas. The notchback's only real drawback is that it doesn't have the fastback's through-panel from the trunk to the interior.

The Barracuda 383 is one of the best examples of the new breed of sporty cars from Detroit. It combines two of the Chrysler Corporation's best components—the 383 and the TorqueFlite—with good handling and braking characteristics, wrapped up in Plymouth's best-looking sheet metal. It's got the performance to match its image. It's comfortable and well-made. However, it is unfortunate that Plymouth was so hasty in coming out with a competitor for the other big-engined sporty cars that there wasn't time to equip the car with the power steering it obviously needs. When Plymouth gets that problem licked, the Barracuda 383 will make an exciting yet practical car for our kind of enthusiast. In the meanwhile, the Barracuda 383 is something of an odd-ball, more at home on a drag strip or a turnpike than on a winding mountain road—but it's obviously headed in the right direction. **c/o**

Is the 383 enough? The 440 uses the same block, so it would bolt right in. Soon, super-engined sporty cars may be the order of the day.



PLYMOUTH BARRACUDA 383

Manufacturer: Chrysler-Plymouth Division
Chrysler Corporation
Detroit, Michigan

Number of dealers in U.S.: 4000

Vehicle type: Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive,
4-passenger sports sedan, all
steel integral body/chassis

Price as tested: \$3578.15
(Manufacturer's suggested retail price, plus
options listed below, Federal excise tax,
dealer preparation and delivery charges;
does not include state and local taxes, license
or freight charges)

Options on testcar: Formula S package (\$177.50
includes heavy duty suspension and shocks,
D70-14 tires, 14 x 5.5-in wheels, fender
medallion—mandatory), TorqueFlite trans-
mission (\$216.20), decor group (\$40.40);
rear arm rest, 150-mph speedometer, wood
grain appliqué on instrument and door
panels), limited-slip differential (\$41.45),
AM radio (\$57.35), power brakes (\$41.75),
disc brakes (\$69.50—mandatory), 383 en-
gine (\$52.30), console (\$48.10), glove box
lock (\$3.95), headrests (\$41.90), remote
control outside mirror (\$6.85), sill moldings
(\$17.45), full horn ring (\$5.25), tachometer
(\$48.70), undercoating (\$15.40), wheel covers
(\$51.10), bucket seats (\$32.35), sport
stripes (\$30.65).

ENGINE

Type: Water-cooled V-8, cast iron block and
head, 5 main bearings
Bore x stroke: 4.25 x 3.88 in, 108.0 x 98.5 mm
Displacement: 383 cu in, 6279 cc
Compression ratio: 10.0 to one
Carburetion: 1 x 4-bbl Carter AFB
Valve gear: Pushrod-operated overhead
valves, hydraulic lifters
Power (SAE): 280 bhp @ 4200 rpm
Torque (SAE): 400 lbs/ft @ 2400 rpm
Specific power output: 0.73 bhp/cu in,
44.5 bhp/liter
Max. recommended engine speed: 4800 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission: 3-speed automatic, plus torque
converter
Max. torque converter ratio: 2.00 to one
Final drive ratio: 3.23 to one

Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max. test speed

I	2.45	9.2	40 mph (4400 rpm)
II	1.45	15.5	68 mph (4400 rpm)
III	1.00	22.5	114 mph (5000 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase: 108.0 in
Track: F: 57.4 in, R: 55.6 in
Length: 192.8 in
Width: 71.6 in
Height: 53.4 in
Ground clearance: 5.5 in
Curb weight: 3299 lbs
Test weight: 3725 lbs
Weight distribution, F/R: 58.8/41.2%
Lbs/bhp (test weight): 13.3
Battery capacity: 12 volts, 59 amp/hr
Alternator capacity: 444 watts
Fuel capacity: 18.0 gal
Oil capacity: 5.0 qts
Water capacity: 17.0 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., unequal-length wishbones, torsion
bars, 0.88-in anti-sway bar
R: Rigid axle, asymmetrical semi-elliptic leaf
springs

STEERING

Type: Recirculating ball
Turns lock-to-lock: 5.3
Turning circle: 41 ft

BRAKES

F: Kelsey-Hayes 11.88-in vented discs
R: 10.0 x 1.75-in cast iron drums
Swept area: 314.7 sq in

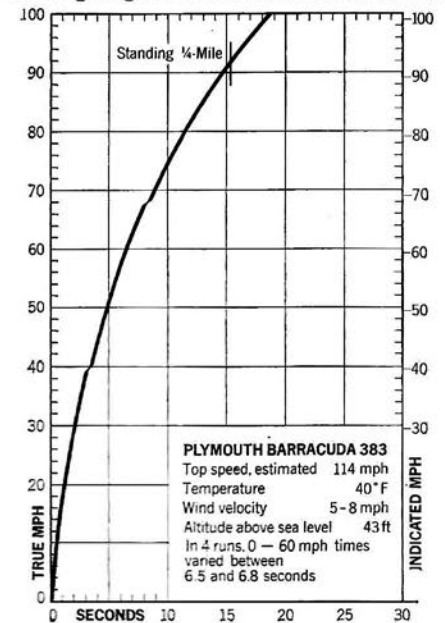
WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size and type: 5.5J x 14-in, pressed
steel disc, 5-bolt
Tire make, size and type: Firestone D70-14
Super Sports Wide Oval, 2-ply nylon tubeless
Test inflation pressures: F: 30 psi, R: 30 psi
Tire load rating: 1120 lbs per tire @ 24 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	2.0
40 mph	3.2
50 mph	4.8
60 mph	6.6
70 mph	8.9
80 mph	11.6
90 mph	14.8
100 mph	18.7

Standing 1/4-mile: 15.4 sec @ 92 mph
80-0 mph: 280 ft (76 G)
Fuel mileage: 10-12 mpg on premium fuel
Cruising range: 180-216 mi



CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting.....Good
Response.....Excellent
Vibration.....Very Good
Noise.....Fair

DRIVE TRAIN

Shift linkage.....Very Good
Shift smoothness.....Good
Drive train noise.....Very Good

STEERING

Effort.....Fair
Response.....Good
Road feel.....Fair
Kickback.....Fair

SUSPENSION

Ride comfort.....Fair
Roll resistance.....Good
Pitch control.....Very Good
Harshness control.....Fair

HANDLING

Directional control.....Fair
Predictability.....Fair
Evasive maneuverability.....Fair
Resistance to sidewinds.....Very Good

BRAKES

Pedal pressure.....Very Good
Response.....Very Good
Fade resistance.....Good
Directional stability.....Good

CONTROLS

Wheel position.....Very Good
Pedal position.....Excellent
Gearshift position.....Very Good
Relationship.....Very Good
Small controls.....Excellent

INTERIOR

Ease of entry/exit.....Very Good
Noise level (cruising).....Fair
Front seating comfort.....Very Good
Front leg room.....Very Good
Front head room.....Very Good
Front hip/shoulder room.....Good
Rear seating comfort.....Good
Rear leg room.....Poor
Rear head room.....Poor
Rear hip/shoulder room.....Good
Instrument comprehensiveness.....Very Good
Instrument legibility.....Very Good

VISION

Forward.....Very Good
Front quarter.....Very Good
Side.....Excellent
Rear quarter.....Good
Rear.....Poor

WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater/defroster.....Very Good
Ventilation.....Good
Weather sealing.....Good

CONSTRUCTION QUALITY

Sheet metal.....Very Good
Paint.....Excellent
Chrome.....Very Good
Upholstery.....Very Good
Padding.....Very Good
Hardware.....Very Good

GENERAL

Headlight illumination.....Very Good
Parking and signal lights.....Fair
Wiper effectiveness.....Very Good
Service accessibility.....Good
Trunk space.....Poor
Interior storage space.....Very Good
Bumper protection.....Good

