



THE BARRACUDA 383

Baby:

Chicks like you were meant to be loved and dominated, so if you're looking for a car to impress your latest guy with your demure dependence, keep your distance from the Barracuda 383. Man digs your smooth and delicate arms that feel soft and tender when wrapped around him, but those arms won't be soft and tender for long if you try to tame this machine.

Barracuda set the sporty car world agog last fall when they came out with their pretty new fastback, then again with their pretty hardtop, besides the pretty convertible. Alas, looks changed, but performance on the standard versions left them behind the supercars for you girls to claim as cute but impotent objects of your maternal instincts and as innocent opportunities to shove your feet further inside the door of the man's world.

But things have changed. Plymouth took that pretty Barracuda and stuffed a whopping 383-cu.-in. engine with 400 lbs.-ft. of torque and the factory's suspiciously modest rating of 280 hp inside to give the 383 a minimum of 45 hp more than the standard V-8.

There's more. With the 383, that tight, anxious body sits on a taut Formula "S" suspension package with torsion bars and an anti-sway bar up front and a rigid axle at the rear. Power-assisted disc brakes put the damper on this combo but fast, and with those Firestone Wide Ovals rounding out the "S" set, female, beware. This is a Boss Wagon meant for the road.

Instead of the more popular 4-speed manual box, MT's test car packed an automatic. But don't think that's a concession to you or other softies. This automatic is a 3-speed TorqueFlite—

solid, direct and brandishing some of the best characteristics and quickest shifts of any automatic in the past 15 years. With a thumb and forefinger and about 90 seconds, you can adjust the shift points to satisfy a Gurney or a grandmother, but it would mean greasing up those false fingernails. And TorqueFlite is not vague. Step on it during a leisurely jaunt to the boutique and it will shift with a secure little belt in your pretty little behind.

But, here's what's important. The 383 engine eliminates air conditioning, and more important, power steering—and that additional 106 pounds of engine weight up front and 242 more pounds of car without mechanical assistance makes it a 2-fisted stormer meant for the slab-shouldered he-man who wants to know what's going on down there.

ATTN: All fair maidens who have considered leaving the kitchen to cook this fish on the Boulevard.

If it's empirical evidence you want, crank on those cubic inches. Just sitting there idling, with that cam stepping higher than a Nazi victory review and the exhaust belching out of twin 24-inch pipes, you'd swear its borborygmus is the rumbling of the world.

This car likes to exercise, and when it does, it has to loosen its collar and breathe. It needs gobs of air to feed that 4-bbl. Carter and 10:1 compression ratio. Tromp on it and it will sigh with sensual satisfaction, cave in the hood, suck your feet through the firewall and blast you to 60 mph in 7.8 seconds, to 75 in 11.2 seconds and through the quarter in 15.5 seconds at 92 mph. (On the strip, you soon learn to trust the transmission before you trust yourself, and find out exactly what they mean by *TorqueFlite*. Our best quarter-mile runs came by leaving it in Drive rather than going through the gears.)

Now, honey, we're not saying you have to stay behind the stove, but we can't see you harnessing this kind of energy just to handle your daily routine. You would use the Barracuda most often in the city, and that's no way to befriend it. It behaves well only because its heritage demands it—not because of personal preference—but it resists this kind of use in two ways, both designed to alienate your patience. Your posterior, inured as are too many of the Detroit generation's against the realities of mechanical

BY JULIAN SCHMIDT

function, will take umbrage at that firm suspension that makes no mistake in telegraphing to the driver exactly what's below. Secondly, the manual steering will speak for itself.

Take it to the hills, though, and things start to change. The male driver can feel the movement, and he thanks the hairy-armed brutes who conceived this combination. The entire road is transferred to the driver's "sensitive areas" through the seat and steering, not in the form of teeth-chattering vibrations through the floor and car body, and the ride is very good.

To achieve these results, compromises had to be made that will make you, young lady, think twice. With the extra weight of the car, steering self-centers so fast that a flower like you could burn her hands trying to stop it. Without power assistance, the ratio



(Opposite) At least there are instruments, vague as they may be. (Above) With the "S" package, it feels like it wants to be driven hard. This it does well on any road.

has been boosted to 24:1—a point where negotiating switchbacks gets you so involved with flailing arms that you have few chances to wring out that nice suspension. When you're not ready for them, quickies cause understeering protest from the tires, but they stick, and nearly any modest condition can be handled with the throttle to bring the rear end into position at will. Understeer is an understatement; a sustained drift takes plenty of positive lock—one task your tender palms won't tolerate—and if there's a crosswind you could swear you're winning the America's Cup hands down. The car may be pushing the horse in any corner, but lean those shoulders into that steering, plant the throttle and shove the car face first into a curve, and it grabs the road with tenacity and an appreciative male with a visceral twist way down deep. It makes him feel good.

The interior will put you out. It's designed for the driver, for the most part, with good basic materials and fine hardware, but you will find it stark in the rear compartment and you'll lament the lack of grand-suite softness throughout. You won't appreciate its function; seats are firm and they fit, except for lack of lateral support, and the craftsmanship of the vinyl upholstery bespeaks pride of the trade—only it's too bad the plastic slabs and carpeting that merely take up excess spaces, fall apart after only 1000 miles.

Instruments will drive you mad with all those meaningful gauges and no flashing red lights. Just like any woman, you would probably select one of those ridiculous "performance indicator" vacuum gauges like this car had, instead of a tach. Worse yet, you would probably take it seriously and believe that it actually *does* indicate economy instead of being an asinine extension of some promoter's wishful thinking. Example: at an actual 13 mpg average, the "thing" was reading constantly above "20" (whatever that means) in both city and freeway driving, and at the same time "indicating" better "mileage" at 3500 rpm than at 2000 rpm.

On the other hand, you'll love that outrageously large rear view mirror that lets you see more behind you than in front. But we agree, it's simply marvelous for checking your hairdo.

What's really important is that the 383 is tough and tight and hard to beat. So know your place, kid. You're better off letting the guy take control. When you're snuggled under his sinewy arm and he's behind the wheel, you and the 383 will get lots of looks. Your girlfriends will spot its red stripe tires, the smoothly hewn body and the huge, ostentatious racing-type gas cap hanging off its left rear flank and, betcha anything they'll sigh and say, "Golly, she's with a real man tonight!"

Possessively,

Your virile road test driver

PHOTOS BY PAT BROLLIER