

Poor old Bob and Butch Summers, they did it all wrong. Sure, they broke the World's Land Speed Record* but they did it the hard way, shipping all those Chrysler engines out from Detroit to the Coast, assembling the car, then hauling all the stuff up to those god-forsaken Bonneville Salt Flats. Nice try fellas but that wasn't the plan. The brothers should have worked out of the factory in Detroit; it couldn't miss. Motown's got almost all the facilities in the world see, just short of Chevrolet, and a few miles away, right under the nose of the Canadian government, is one of the world's great paved race courses. And not a measly 15 miles long either. Fifty, 100, take as much as you need, just follow the 401 signs and the Michigan license plates.

I mean we really thought about it—running the Summers car here. It's a balmy summer evening, the last night in June, and we're coming back to Detroit from Niagara Falls, N.Y., the trick way, across Southern Ontario on the MacDonald-Cartier Freeway that reaches from Montreal to Windsor, Ontario, (across the river from Detroit). Everything's going to be all right, too, because we've got KYC Cleveland "soul" on the radio and the engine is dialed in and we're just finishing up the absolute first road test of the Barracuda MoPar 340. A what? A MoPar 340. At least that's what they were going to call it. Now, however, 'Cuda 340 has been decided upon.

But we digress. The posted speed limit along here is 60 mph and that must be all backwards because Michigan cars, bracketed in groups of four or five, are fading like you wouldn't believe. Seventy is no good, either. Or, 80. Or, even 90. It's too much, at the century mark, big wagons and 4-doors are loafing by. Now we know who buys all those weird 2.62 final-drive combinations and that if we ever get a Toyota 2000 GT or a Ferrari 330 GTS, this will be the place to slug it out with the American iron. We're not even sure we'd win.

People are wondering about our little '69, what kind of customized Barracuda it is anyway, and why the devil it hasn't expired or gotten airborne. No way, not in this car. First of all it's got Formula S-type suspension so it doesn't float at high speed; second of all, it's shod with those boss Goodyear F-70 x 14 Polyglas tires good for 140 mph maybe; and third of all, even with the 3.55:1 gear in the Sure-Grip differential at 80 the 4.04 x 3.31-inch mini-hemi is only grooving four grand, which is beautiful. Yeah, and just you wait for the first stoplight. That's where it all hits the fan. A few hours earlier we ran

*Record for piston-engined cars.

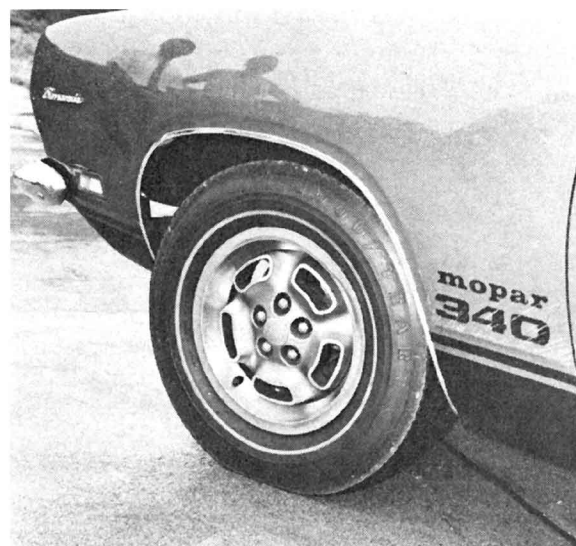
off a string of 0-60s at 6.3 seconds average with two people on board and that's almost as fast as a Cobra Jet Cyclone (MT, Aug., '68).

The 340 is something else, anyway. The nut the Chrysler engine guys had to crack with it was to duplicate or better the explosive potential of the now deceased 350 horse, 327-c.i.d. Chevy—which they did, handsomely. Interacting with a 3400-pound car like the Barracuda this jells as one of the best accelerating stockers of all time and with good balance, yet. Despite this, swoopy lines and a general utility none of the other sports-personal cars can come close to matching, Plymouth dealers have not been known to be trampled by a stampede of Barracuda customers. It really makes you wonder. Is it just that the buyer flat doesn't know what the 'Cuda has to offer, or, is it that he doesn't care. That not being shoehorned into a back seat doesn't matter because sports-personal backseats are supposed to be a shoe-horn fit just like the FIA Appendix J rule for trunk space is the size of attache cases in a GT 40 Ford. And who gives a damn if a fastback's rear seat folds flat and the trunk separator swings down and you suddenly have more cargo potential than some foreign station wagons? What could you put in an area approximately 7 x 3.5 feet (at its narrowest) anyway? Skis?

Surfboards? Two by fours? Luggage, maybe? It's not important, right? Buy another \$3500 car for that junk.

Plymouth's ad agency fumbled getting the message across. When was the last time you saw a Barracuda in one of those across-the-board unfair comparisons? What they did was try to sell the car the way all the other sporty cars are merchandised, with mod birds in tight threads and a hard rock band in the background. Bitchin', except the 'Cuda's not that kind of fish, exactly. It's a handler, and a goer and a toter, at least the fastback, and where the American public is concerned, you've got to tell 'em when you've got something unique—point-by-point. See Dick run and like that.

So what does Plymouth do for '69? They come up with a Road Runner concept package Barracuda. That means bogus hoodscoops, racy paint treatment, standard 340 engine, Hurst linkage on the 4-speed, redline E70 x 14 tires, sport suspension (Formula S) and bench seats. Plymouth calls it the 'Cuda 340. Beautiful. Like the Road Runner, it's what a kid would buy if he selected all the options—but now he gets it all in a single, recognizable package. Should you want a more expensive package, you can opt for a 383 engine, which is likely not much faster than the 340, bucket seats and bias-ply, Goodyear Polyglas tires.



Well, they started out calling it the 340 (left) anyway. But that's really beside the point, isn't it? The important thing is the car, see. Like the new mag-type wheels Chrysler is offering this year that look pretty darned good. And that's saying something because there are a jillion designs around. Barracuda styling (below), has not faded in two years on the scene and subtle '69 facelift will not destroy this. Like its brothers before, the 340 'Cuda is a handling fool — on asphalt or dirt (opposite page). Only dim spot in the picture is a somewhat vague power steering situation.



Only before the flat-black trim-paint dried, someone begins to get that vague, don't make waves, uneasy feeling in their solar-plexus and presto—the MoPar 340 is now the 'Cuda 340.

MoPar, as a name, wasn't quite right, understand? It didn't fit. People at the drags have been calling Plymouths MoPars for years so it's old, okay? We take the very first one (when it still is called the MoPar 340) on a thousand-mile jaunt through southern Canada and western New York 2½ months before the car is released and everybody thinks the whole idea is groovy. The way the trim is done, and the way Chrysler's new mag-type cast aluminum road wheels look, the machine seems almost as if a kid had built it

himself. You can't get much closer to ground zero than that. Then, in one magic moment, everyone we thought was really on our side is left out in the warm. Cop out.

Thank goodness the actual physical package was left alone. The '69 Barracuda is very little different from what you could get in '68 except for a very gentle peak in the hood, a subtle grille change and a reflective, silvery inset in the tail light section. Things, which, along with the MoPar idea, are supposed to bring the car alive in the public's heretofore glazed eyes. Who can say what it was, maybe the MoPar pizzaz, but more people did seem to recognize this Barracuda than any other we had driven since the new

style was first introduced back in 1967.

Most of the previous engineering has been carried over with the exception that a Hurst shifter replaces the Inland manufactured unit that many owners hated with a passion because of its predictable unwieldy nature. Curious, then, that the Hurst in our 'Cuda not only gave several of the drivers who tried it a slight hangup in the 1st to 2nd change at normal speeds, but had a rather long gate (for a Hurst) to boot. Hmmm. An adjustment problem, perhaps?

It rained a lot on the Eastern people this spring, ask anyone at Indy. Although we could have sworn seeing animals a-coming two-by-two, our trial Barracuda did not become an ambula-

DRIVING
THE
HOT
'69s

'Cuda 340

Road Test By Eric Dahlquist

Chrysler already had a great package in the 340 Barracuda but nobody bought it. So for '69, they've given it some of that good old pizzaz. Only the name has been changed to protect....well, something.



'CUDA 340 *continued*

tory Chinese water torture chamber and demonstrated amazing tractability in the flood. They tell us that these Polyglas tires are good for a 14% traction escalation on wet surfaces and we believe it, although the fuzz probably wouldn't. As a point of fact, launching rpm off the mark for the car was almost the same wet or dry.

We wouldn't feel secure with anything but the high-rate suspension on a rig like the 'Cuda 340 and neither would Chrysler. There are some pretty interesting 2-lane roads in this part of the country where the local duffs in their little foreign what-nots play catch me if you can with wallowing Motown dreadnaughts and they just weren't ready for the 'Cuda. They expect to be covered on the straights only to dart away like water bugs in the esses. They lost. Scott Harvey didn't just luck out and win the Shell 4000 Rallye in his slot-car 'Cuda, flathatters. That heavy-duty torsion-bar/leaf spring combination is plenty trick. If only the power-steering were as good. With 3.5 turns lock-to-lock, it's just about right but there is a vague enough feeling so that you overreact at the start of the first few tight bends. In this day and age you still shouldn't have to resort to manual steering — that's a remedy from 1956.

On our way back to Detroit on Sun-

day, we didn't have anything better to do so we turned in for a few passes at Niagara Dragway in the Falls. First thing in the early bright that morning, we had knocked off those instant 0-60s in the low 6s which, experience told us, would equate with quarter-mile elapsed times of 14.20s and speeds of 97-100 mph. Of course, like all tinkers, we out-scienced ourselves immediately. Instead of making a few blow-out-the-carbon shots, we stuck in a brand new set of Champion N-14Y spark plugs. Now, Niagara is admittedly not a super-low e.t. strip but 15.30s with a 340? No chance. A few more runs and the performance sank even lower. It was those darned plugs. They appeared to be identical to the original units in range number and reach but somehow were too cold, and the engine fell on its face. Finally, after a switch back to the original plugs, which were pretty much used up, the 'Cuda clicked a 14.82-94.05, still below par, due to a lack of traction and a 20 mph head wind that had come up. Definitely not satisfied, the car was re-run in Detroit a few days later and popped a 14.22 @ 99.10 mph, right on the money.

So here we are with Sunday night traffic on 401 competing in Canada's version of the Mille Miglia and not a Ferrari in sight. We had been with a '69 'Cuda 340 four days, driven it 1000 miles, averaged 14.4 mpg one isolated

time when we kept our foot up and discovered that the trunk separator rattled and the tires were noisy on certain road surfaces. The generally stout suspension disposition is great except you pay for it in a place like Buffalo, N.Y. where the frost heaved asphalt, chuck holes and omnipresent wash-board boulevards make the traveler wonder if Brahma bull riding is so tough after all. Cobbled, undulating roads and over soft optional bucket seats are not a heady mix so we found out what motoring "on rails" really meant — the track under the seats.

Well nobody's perfect and with a 2.76 optional rear end ratio, that will give us a 125-130 mph top speed, just adequate for 401. But we wish to hell they hadn't taken the MoPar name off the car, how are people going to tell us from the Summers Bros.?

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine: 340 ins. **Bore & Stroke:** 4.04 x 3.31 ins. **Displacement:** 340-c.i.d. **Hp:** 275 @ 5000 rpm. **Torque:** 340 lbs.-ft. @ 3200 rpm. **Compression Ratio:** 10.5:1. **Carburetion:** 1 Carter AVS. **Transmission:** 4-speed standard, 2.66 1st gear. **Final Drive Ratio:** 3.55:1. **Steering Type:** power. **Ratio:** 18.8:1. **Turning Diameter:** 40.5 ft. curb-to-curb, 3.5 turns, lock-to-lock. **Tires:** E 70 x 14 Goodyear Polyglas. **Brakes:** Disc front, drum rear. **Suspension:** Front: torsion bar. Rear: Parallel leaf spring. **Body/Frame Construction:** Unit construction. **Dimensions, Weights, Capacities:** Overall Length: 192.8 ins. Overall Width: 69.6 ins. Overall Height: NA. Wheelbase: 108 ins. Front Track: 57.5 ins. Rear Track: 55.6 ins. Curb Weight: 3400 lbs. Fuel capacity: 18 gals. Oil Capacity: 4 qts.

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration: (2 aboard)
0-30 mph 2.5 secs.
0-45 mph 4.4 secs.
0-60 mph 6.3 secs.
Standing Start 1/4-mile
99.10 mph 14.22 secs.

Stopping Distances:

from 30 mph 20.5 ft.
from 60 mph 107 ft.

Mileage.

Range 10.5-14.4 mpg
Average 12.9 mpg



You've got to put almost 90 more inches under your bonnet before you take on a 340 (left). Engine is compact and service is definitely not a hangup. Amongst other typical drag machinery (above), 'Cuda came off the winner not only on the run. And, as everybody knows, you can't fool the kids.

