

FEW CARS of major importance have ever undergone, from one model year to the next, as complete a change as the 1957 Plymouth. The car is *different*, it is *new*—in styling, quality, performance and roadability. Its makers have risked a radical and abrupt break with the past. And, fortunately, they've done their job well.

Two cars were driven for this road test. Both were four-door sedans of the top Belvedere series. They were identically equipped, from the hotter 235-hp engine under the hood, to various optional items, paint and trim.

At the time of the test, virtually no one met along the road had seen a 1957 Plymouth. Few immediately recognized the make—most identifying it as one of the higher-priced Chrysler Corporation cars, and others less often as costlier models from rival companies. Not only was the reaction to the styling unusually good, but it was evident that Plymouth for '57 does not have a "low-priced" look.

There is no question but what the overall styling is pleasing and makes some of Plymouth's competition appear out-of-date. When it comes to specific details, however, a longer fin line on the rear fenders might have been more effective, while the use of vertical bars on the bottom side of the grille could have been eliminated.

The interior arrangement is a major improvement for Plymouth. Instruments and controls, previously spread across the dash, have been brought together in front of the driver in a functional layout. Only feature that could stand some correction is the large glass surface over the cluster that catches too many reflections. The steering wheel is now slightly dished, the dash and sun visors are padded, and the pushbutton automatic transmission selector is in its same handy location. The too-small glove box is at the far right, however, a long reach for the driver. On the other hand, the designers have placed the two radio knobs on the driver's side of the dial—a neat solution.

The lowness of the Plymouth adds to its looks and seems to leave entry and exit as easy as in the past. But the higher tunnel over the driveline does limit comfortable three-abreast

seating—a situation which will persist until front-wheel drive or rear-engined cars appear. Otherwise, the seating of the Plymouth is one of its finest features, low-slung, yet upright. And the seat adjustment operates so easily that a powered unit would be unnecessary.

From behind the wheel, the driver can easily look over the smaller and lower steering wheel, the lower dash, cowl and hoodline—even the shortest person should never have to peer around an eye-level steering rim. The Plymouth's greater glass area, with corner posts moved further back, eliminates the feeling of looking through a narrow, slot-like opening. Instead, there is a sensation of closeness to the road and far better-than-normal visibility.

The windshield glass, tinted slightly at the top, is free of distortion on the near side, but is rather badly distorted on the opposite corners. The ventilator windows are preposterously small, but their size does not seem to prevent them from doing as good a job as before. The rear-view mirror now mounted atop the dash is subject to vibration; nor does it give as good a view to the rear (practically none at all when anyone sits in the middle, either in front or in back). This, however, is common in cars with lowered roof line, the current fashion. Finally, Plymouth has, quite literally, provided defrosters with a new twist; the units swivel atop the dash so heated air may be directed as desired.

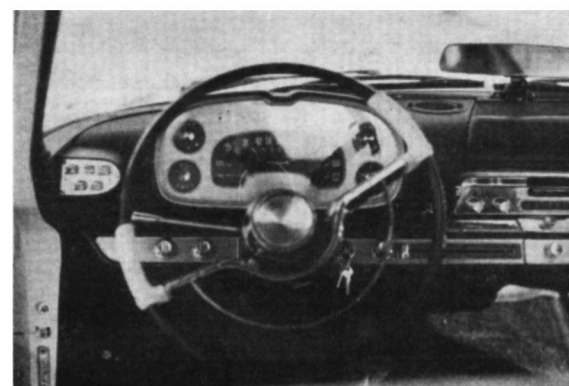
While the V-8 engine, with output upped considerably, is the same as last year, a major change in the power train is an optional three-speed torque converter, introduced on the Imperial in 1956. This unit has brought with it one revision in the pushbutton selector, which now has a second-gear button added to the former low and drive choices.

There is performance in the 1957 Plymouth to match the rest of the improvements. The best test times were obtained by holding first gear until near 50 mph, then pressing the second gear button to upshift to a true 60. This took just a hair over 11 seconds in the fastest run. It is quite probable that with more mileage on a model in good tune, the 235-hp-engined Plymouth could enter the hot class by cracking the 10-second



Hard turns are now flatter. As Detroit concentrates upon cornering, standards go up each year. But Plymouth is a good notch above the new average for 1957.

Seating and vision are unsurpassed. Wheel, dash and cowl are low, with dials and controls handily grouped. Cluster has too much glass, however, with reflections.



PLYMOUTH ROAD TEST



Changes in '57 Plymouths have been so many and so great that the car's basic character has been completely altered. While overall styling, which is not very closely related to for-

mer Plymouths, will get most attention, the improvements in roadability, quality and performance are equally outstanding and worthwhile. Belvedere four-door was one of two test cars.

PLYMOUTH TEST DATA

Test Car: Belvedere series four-door sedan
 Basic Price: \$2130
 Engine: 301-cubic-inch ohv V-8
 Compression Ratio: 8.5-to-1
 Horsepower: 235 @ 4400 rpm
 Torque: 305 @ 2800
 Dimensions: Length 204 inches, width 78, height 57, tread 60, wheelbase 118
 Curb Weight: 345 lbs
 Transmission: Three-speed Torqueflite torque converter
 Acceleration: 0-30 mph 3.5 seconds, 0-45 mph 6.1, 0-60 mph 11.1
 Gas Mileage: 15 mpg average
 Speedometer Corrections: Indicated 30, 45 and 60 mph are actual 27, 41 and 54 mph

Note: Engine was the optional version, which includes the power pack with four-barrel carburetor



Rear end is massive, but otherwise neat and clean. The sharp up-sweep in Plymouth's fins probably will not be too popular. The trunk area is very spacious, extends all the way into sides of the fenders.