



PLYMOUTH'S 1957 STYLING FITS ITS WAGON SERIES EXCEPTIONALLY WELL. THIS IS THE TOP-PRICED SPORT SUBURBAN ROAD TEST CAR.

Plymouth Wagon Test

ENOUGH time has now passed to establish quite clearly that Plymouth has an exceptional line of passenger-bodied cars for 1957. As the public becomes more aware of the remarkable improvements in Plymouth, the degree of success will increase.

Not much has been learned until recently, however, about Plymouth's lineup of station wagons. These vehicles generally do not become available until somewhat later in the new-model seasons. It was known, obviously, that Plymouth—in common with the Chrysler Corporation's other wagons—had a number of rather radical features. Just how these were going to work out in actual practice could not be determined until extensive road testing settled the matter.

Plymouth calls all of its station wagons "suburbans" and the one used for this road test was the costliest of the lot, the Sport Suburban with the nine-passenger seating arrangement and the 301-cubic-inch Fury engine rated at 235 hp. Most of the normal optional extras were present, including the splendid-sounding new transistorized radio; power steering, windows, brakes and seat; the five-button three-speed automatic gear box, heater and the bellows-type windshield washer.

The wagon was tested in the Los Angeles-San Francisco area, with many miles spent in negotiating the very hilly sections of the latter city. The overall

gas mileage average for approximately 1700 miles covered was 14.5 mpg. This is about half a mile per gallon less than the average obtained several months ago in the test of the Plymouth Belvedere four-door sedan, using a similar engine and transmission.

No one expects any station wagon to be outstanding in performance, although some experts believe they are capable of higher top speeds due to better streamlining. But in the acceleration department, times generally run about one second slower than the lighter sedans and the Sport Suburban followed this pattern very closely right down the line. The 0-60 mph time, for instance, requires 12 seconds, compared with the 11.1 seconds obtained with the Belvedere sedan tested previously.

It very often happens that the styling of any car which has been developed for sedan bodies is not too successful when transferred to the boxier wagon layouts. In the case of the Plymouth, however, this has turned out very well indeed. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon to find a good many people who like the wagon styling better than the sedans. This remarkable achievement drew a considerable amount of favorable comment along the road from casual observers.

The material and assembly quality of the wagon was on approximately the same level as that found with Plymouth

sedans—by no means the best in the business but far better than anything offered by Plymouth in the recent past and a good cut above the competitive average. Wagons normally are noisier than sedans since there is no trunk compartment to help muffle road sounds; the Sport Suburban was typical in this respect, but the noise is not excessive.

On the roadability side, the new standard of excellence that Plymouth has set in 1957 is maintained beautifully by the wagon. Handling is very smooth, easy and sure. Turns and corners are flattened to a remarkable degree, body heel is at an all-time minimum. Where the wagon does yield to the sedans in this category, the difference is slight. The larger body box following the driver down the road has a psychological effect that creates a largely false impression of unwieldiness.

For 1957, the Plymouth wagon contains several very novel features. The spare tire, for instance, is now housed beneath the right rear fender, an improvement over any interior carrying position.

The rear window now lowers into the tailgate (electrically by a dash or a rear-seat switch on the nine-passenger wagons, manually on all others). There is no exterior door handle and the window must first be lowered from the inside or by the key switch in the tailgate. The principal advantage appears to be easy front seat control and better ventilation.



AMONG THE RADICALLY NEW FEATURES IS THE SPARE TIRE CLEVERLY CONCEALED INSIDE AND LOWERED FROM THE RIGHT REAR FENDER.

Something long needed in all wagons is a closed compartment for storing items out of sight. A rather small area is now provided beneath the third seat of the nine-passenger wagon when this seat is folded into its floor position. It's not big enough, but it is a help. On the six-passenger wagons, incidentally, this compartment not only is larger, but can also be locked.

The most revolutionary item, however, is the rear-facing seat, which is self-storing and folds into the compartment floor. For almost as many years as automobiles have been made, the idea has been advanced, chiefly for reasons of safety on impact. Plymouth has picked up the arrangement for several additional theoretical advantages. How it actually works out in practice is a compromise.

For those susceptible to motion sickness, the rear-facing seat is no place to ride, particularly on a winding road. While this is not the only disadvantage, it probably is the only one that really matters. The other minus factor is the conspicuous feeling the passengers have when they find themselves face-to-face with occupants of the following cars.

On the other hand, there are some points very much in favor of the new setup. Entrance to the rear seat via a bumper step and through the rear gate is easier than the usual squeeze past a jump seat from one of the side doors. And, in the conventional station wagon with the third seat facing forward, legroom is limited by the rear axle; in this

REAR-FACING SEAT allows easier entry to third seat and provides more legroom, plus a hidden compartment, but some passengers probably will find riding unpleasant.

case, no axle intrudes and a well in the floor allows more comfortable seating. Further the third-seat passengers can lower the window and enjoy unprecedented draft-free open motoring.

The Plymouth station wagon, as evidenced by the Sport Suburban series, not only features all the 1957 improvements the make has made, but carries a few extra to warrant classifying it as one of the outstanding cars of the year. A lot of new owners unquestionably will make it their choice and they will have chosen wisely and well. •

TEST DATA

Test Car: 1957 sport suburban series
Basic Price: \$2777
Engine: 301-cubic-inch V-8
Compression Ratio: 8.5-to-1
Horsepower: 235 @ 4400 rpm
Torque: 305 @ 2800
Dimensions: Length 211 inches, width 78, height 59, wheelbase 122
Curb Weight: 4055 lbs
Transmission: Three-speed Torqueflite
Acceleration: 0-30 mph 4.5 seconds, 0-45 mph 7.1, 0-60 mph 12
Gas Mileage: 14.5 mpg average
Speedo Corrections: Indicated 30, 45 and 60 mph are actual 27, 41 and 54 mph

