SPORT FURY

Plymouth's HOT ONE!

BY RAY BROCK

With a whole new crop of Detroit automobiles making their debuts these fall months of the year, we are once more slipping behind the steering wheel of some of the livelier versions to report what you, the reader, can expect for 1959. Our first '59 model test took us to Miami, Florida, for the recent press showing of the new Chrysler Corporation cars. We had made advance preparations through Plymouth's Public Relations department to test their hottest '59 model and soon after our arrival, we were zipping along the runways of an inactive Navy air field behind the wheel of a 1959 Plymouth Sport Fury.

Model designations for the '59 Plymouth line have been changed around a bit from the previous few years so our first move will be to define these changes. Previously, the model names starting with the low priced models, were Plaza, Savoy, Belvedere and Fury. In all but the Fury line, a wide selection of body styles were available but the Fury was strictly a one body style and one paint color special performance model. For 1959, the Plaza has been dropped and the model lines are Savoy, Belvedere, Fury and Sport Fury. The wide selection of body styles are available in Savoy, Belvedere and Fury lines but the Sport Fury has been retained as a distinctive version except that it is available both as a hardtop coupe and a convertible coupe. Wide color and interior choices are also available in the Sport Fury line instead of being restricted to the former beige paint with matching interior.

In exterior dimensions, the '59 Sport Fury differs very little from the comparable model of 1958. The same basic body shell is retained for '59 and only sheet metal paneling, trim, etc., has undergone a styling change. Our Sport Fury test car was 54 inches high with its design load of five passengers and had just over 5 inches of ground clearance at the frame side rails with the design load. Bumper to bumper length is 208 inches or 17 feet, 4 inches. Overall width is 78 inches or 6 feet, 6 inches. All of this is on a 118 inch wheelbase with a front wheel tread of 60.9 inches and a tread of 59.7 inches at the rear.

Interior dimensions are changed little but a newly designed instrument panel, steering wheel and front seat combine with the new modernistic interior fabrics to make the Sport Fury very attractive. Transmission selector pushbuttons are arranged in a vertically slanted row along the left side of the instrument cluster and pushbutton heater and ventilation controls are similarly arranged along the right side to present a neat appearance. Only fuel level and temperature gauges are used in the cluster with oil pressure and generator operating red warning lights to indicate when a dangerous condition exists.

The front seat of the '59 Sport Fury is divided into three sections. The outer sections for driver and passenger will "swivel" to the side when a lever is tripped and permit easier entry and exit for front seat occupants. The center section is stationary but does have a back section which can be folded down to make an arm rest for two front seat occupants. With the arm rest folded up, a third passenger can be accommodated in the front seat but the narrow section and lesser padding would not make this a very comfortable location for a passenger on long trips. We wondered when testing the car if this was just merely another "gimmick" with little actual merit. We tried the swivel seat and discovered that it is actually practical. When leaving the front seat, a small lever on the side of the seat cushion is tripped and the seat will then swivel 40° to the side allowing both feet to be placed on the ground at the same time. It is then an easy matter to stand up just as if rising from a kitchen chair. The inconvenience of entering the low slung seats in the modern car which require quite a bit of twisting and squirming to get settled is also effectively solved

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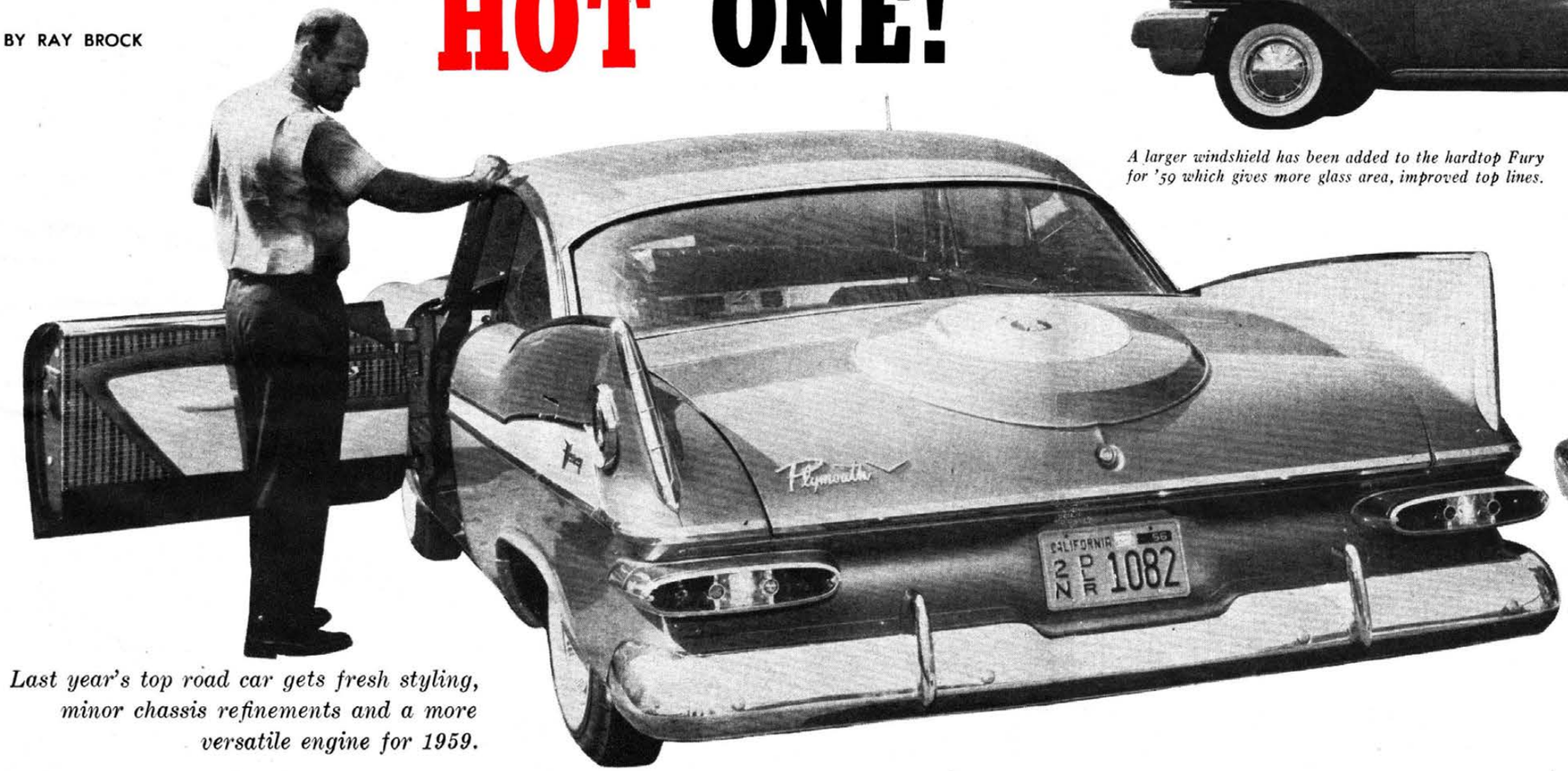
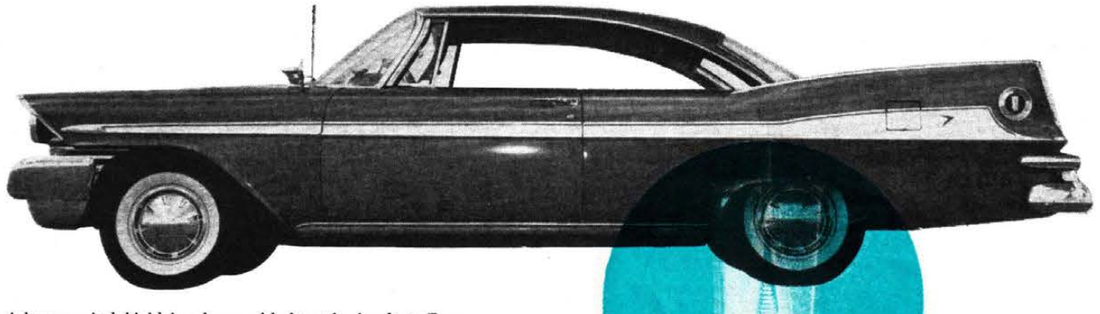


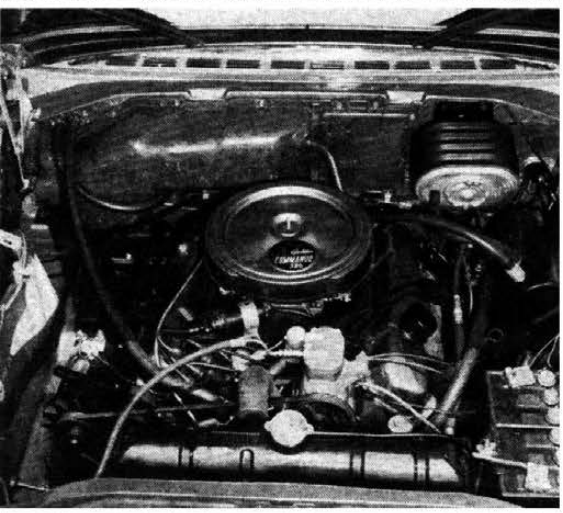
Last year's top road car gets fresh styling, minor chassis refinements and a more versatile engine for 1959.

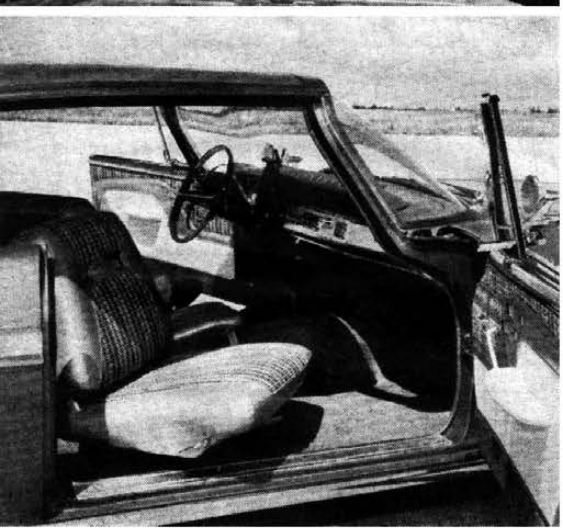


A larger windshield has been added to the hardtop Fury for '59 which gives more glass area, improved top lines.

ABOVE—New front end styling for '59 includes a massive bumper, egg crate grille, fender top crease and under bumper air scoop. Turn and parking lights wrap around grille sides.

LEFT—Plymouth fins for '59 have been raised and also lengthened. The imitation spare tire cover is a styling feature only, is standard on the Sports Fury, optional on the other cars.





TOP—The small air compressor being inspected by HRM's Ray Brock supplies the necessary pressure for optional air leveling. Compressor is lubricated by engine oil. CENTER—Optional Golden Commando V8 has 361 inch displacement, hydraulic lifters, single four-barrel carburetor. The engine is rated 305 hp and 395 lbs. torque. BOTTOM—Front seats of Sport Fury swivel 40° to permit easier exit and entry. The center portion of the front seat is stationary but has a fold-down arm rest.

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continued

although you still have to pick up your feet and swing the seat back into the forward position. The seat will swivel only when the door is open and a simple latch prevents accidental movement. The swivel seat is a standard item in the Sport Fury only and not available in other Plymouth models.

Driver and passenger vision in the Plymouth hardtop coupes has been better than average since Chrysler's "Forward Look" was introduced in 1957 but it has been improved even more for 1959. Side and rear window area is unchanged but the windshield has been increased 150 square inches in area by use of a compound curved glass. The windshield still wraps around the sides as before but also has a curved section on top to give more vertical vision.

Looking at the chassis on the '59 Sport Fury, we found that a number of minor changes had been made but none were revolutionary. The front suspension has u equal length control arms with torsion bars hooked to the lower control arm. The torsion bars have been shortened about 2 inches with the rear anchor moved forward a like amount to give better front seat passenger foot room. Their spring "rate" is unchanged with 145 pounds of pressure needed to deflect the front wheel one inch. Neoprene seals around the bars at the rear anchor have been added to eliminate noise from dirt and corrosion.

Front wheel alignment is no longer accomplished by stacking steel shims behind the upper control arm anchors. For 1959, a pair of eccentric cam bushings are used at the two pivot points of the upper control arm and give variable adjustments for front wheel caster and camber settings. A stabilizer bar has also been added for '59 with the outer ends clamped to the lower control arm lateral brace and the cross portion of the bar linked to brackets on the frame side rails. Spindle support ball joints are new but of the same basic design and are anchored to both control arms and spindle as before.

At the rear, the parallel longitudinal leaf springs used the past two years have been retained. The short, stiff section in front of the axle resists spring wrap due to torque or braking forces and the longer, more flexible rear section supplies the larger part of the spring deflection. An optional item available for the first time this year is an air spring leveling device for the rear of the car. Primarily designed for the station wagon models, the air leveling is also available throughout the Plymouth line for cars that are subject to frequent heavy loads.

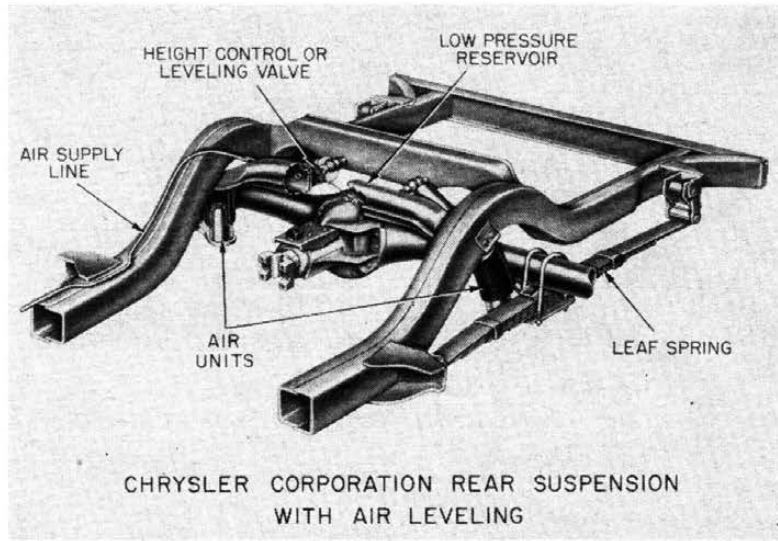
The air leveling device consists of a tubular member which fastens across the frame rails just forward of the rear axle with a rubber air spring on each end. A steel piston bolts directly to the spring clip plate on each side of the car and this piston telescopes into the rubber air spring bellows. The tubular cross member acts as a low pressure air reservoir and balance passage between the air units. A small belt-driven air compressor mounted on top of the engine supplies high pressure air to a reservoir tank beneath the right front fender and a steel supply line routes the high air pressure to a leveling valve on the low pressure crossmember. As the car body drops over the axle due to load being added, a lever fastened to the differential housing opens the leveling valve and permits air from the high pressure reservoir to flow into the low pressure reservoir and the air units. This additional air then raises the rear of the car back up to the level pre-set in the leveling valve regardless of load placed in the car. As load is removed, the leveling valve exhausts air from the low pressure system into the atmosphere and adjusts the rear of the car to the proper level.

As designed, these air units are to keep the car level despite load conditions and are not primarily used as spring replacements. Two leaves of the six leaf spring are removed when the air leveling option is installed so that the air units do actually share part of the load even when the car is unloaded. Should there be a failure in air pressure, however, the leaf springs would continue to support the rear of the car in a nearly normal attitude as long as there is no heavy load. Larger shock absorbers are also used on cars with the air unit to better control the rebound of a heavily loaded car.

A change has been made in the brake department of the '59 Plymouth although not of major proportions. The general brake design and appearance is exactly the same as it was in 1958 but a lot of experimentation went into the brake lining selected for '59. The result is that the resistance to heat has been greatly improved and repeated high speed stops do not cause the brakes to "fade" or become erratic nearly as soon as in the '58's. The brake drums are still 11 inches in diameter, with a total of 184 square inches of lining area and are average as American cars go today in their stopping ability. With 14 inch wheels and wide cross sectional tires, a more satisfactory means of dissipating the heat generated while stopping will have to be devised before the brakes on most of our large American cars can be termed excellent.

Steering the '59 Sport Fury is an easy chore when it is equipped with Chrysler's "Full Time" power steering and just average when equipped with the standard steering unit. Overall ratio between the steering wheel and the front wheels is 26.8 to 1 on the standard unit with nearly 5 full turns needed to turn from lock-to-

Air leveling unit has steel piston which bolts to the spring bottom clip plate and telescopes into the fabric-reinforced bellows. This is normal position.



CHRYSLER CORPORATION REAR SUSPENSION WITH AIR LEVELING

Low pressure reservoir is actually a tubular crossmember which bolts across frame rails with air bags on each end. Leveling valve on reservoir admits air as car is loaded, exhausts air when lightened, keeping height constant.

lock. With the power steering, the ratio is 19.1 to 1 and only 3.5 turns are needed from lock-to-lock. A 42½ foot turning circle is needed for the Sport Fury.

Two engines are available for the '59 Sport Fury. A 318 cubic inch V8 of the "polysphere" design is standard equipment for the car. It is the same basic engine introduced in 1955 but with more inches added and a few changes in compression, camshaft design and carburetion. For 1959, it has a 3.91 inch bore, 3.31 inch stroke, 9 to 1 compression, a four-barrel carburetor and is rated 260 horsepower at 4400 rpm with 345 pounds/feet of torque at 2800 rpm. The "Golden Commando" optional engine is the one we are interested in however, and here are the facts on this engine.

The Commando V8 for 1959 is a revised version of the Golden Commando introduced for the first time last year with a wedge shaped combustion chamber. In 1958, the engine had 350 cubic inches displacement, 10 to 1 compression and dual four-barrel carburetion. For 1959, the engine has been bored .060 inch more to 4.12 inches, has the same 3.38 inch stroke, 361 cubic inches, 10 to 1 compression, a newly designed camshaft, a single four-barrel carburetor and a new intake manifold. The engine is rated 305 horsepower at 4600 rpm and 395 pounds/feet of torque at 3000 rpm. The additional 11 cubic inches and redesigned camshaft cancel out the loss of the extra four-barrel carburetor and provide the '59 engine with much better torque than it had last year. In '58, the engine had 370 pounds/feet at 3600 rpm while this year the engine has 25 pounds/feet more at 600 fewer rpm. Horsepower figures for '58 and '59 are the same, 305, but where the '58 engine peaked at 5000 rpm, the '59 engine reaches its maximum at a more suitable 4600 rpm. Hydraulic valve lifters are used but the engine will rev to better than 5200 rpm without valve float.

Engineering claims are that this new 361-inch engine will not only provide the '59 Sport Fury with better acceleration than it had last year but will also increase mileage potential. We did not have the opportunity to check mileage since we were restricted to an airport course where the public could not get a premature look at the '59 Plymouth but we did try the car for acceleration. More about that later.

Transmissions for the Sport Fury are the same as those offered last year in the Fury series. The standard transmission has gear ratios of 2.31 in low, 1.55 in second

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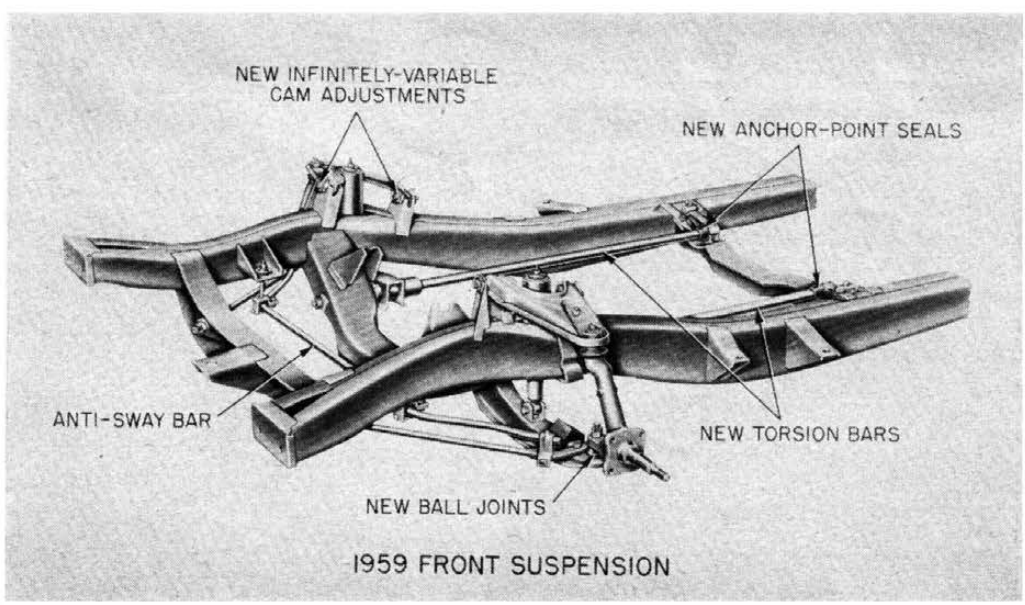

1959 FRONT SUSPENSION

Plymouth's very successful Torsion-Level front suspension has been revised slightly for '59 with shorter bars, new alignment adjustments, new ball joints and a stabilizing bar between wheels.

Photos by Pat Brollier

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and direct in third. An eleven inch Borg and Beck clutch is used with the Golden Commando engine and has 123.7 square inches of lining area and 2104 pounds of spring loading in the pressure plate. The optional TorqueFlite three speed automatic transmission has ratios of 2.45 in first, 1.45 in second and direct in drive. The torque converter has a stall multiplication ratio of 2.2 to 1. Overdrive is not available with the Golden Commando engine but can be purchased with the 318 inch V8.

Rear axle ratios for the '59 Sport Fury are 3.31 with either the standard transmission or the TorqueFlite but a 2.93 ratio is optional with the automatic at no extra cost. The "Sure-Grip" limited slip differential is also available at extra cost for those who anticipate off-the-road travel or wish to compete at the ¼-mile drag races. Ratios available with the Sure-Grip have not been announced as we go to press. There are many optional lower gear ratios available for Plymouth cars through dealers and a large number of these will probably be made available with or without the Sure-Grip.

We had the opportunity to drive two new Sport Furys on the airport at Miami, one with the standard 318 engine and the other with the optional Golden Commando engine. Neither of the cars had more than 150 miles on the odometer and were still in the "stiff" part of the break-in period but we did get a pretty good indication of what to expect from these cars. As you might expect, the Golden Commando engine far outclassed the smaller V8, much more so than the 305 versus 260 horsepower ratings would indicate.

The Commando equipped Sport Fury had a Sure-Grip differential with a 3.31 axle ratio, power steering, power brakes, TorqueFlite and the air level suspension on the rear. With the limited slip differential and the low factory recommended tire pressures, the car would hardly "squeal" a tire on the asphalt runway surface under full throttle acceleration trials. We had no measured ¼-mile stretch or means to check the speedometer on the cars so could make no accurately timed acceleration checks. The speedometer appeared to be on the "fast" side so by allowing 10% for error which our '58 test Fury speedometer had, we consistently registered 8 seconds flat from 0 to an indicated 66 miles per hour. The Fury tested last year had covered the 0 to 60 test in 8 seconds so in view of the increased torque, we would estimate the '59 Sport Fury to be easily capable of bettering 8 seconds when thoroughly broken in and accurately clocked. Quarter mile elapsed times should be very close to 90 mph.

Driving the '59 test Plymouth was an effortless chore with the power brake and steering assists. Our own preference in power steering has changed somewhat in recent years and we became accustomed to the full-time power steering quite readily on the '59 Plymouth. There are indications that some of the assist type power steering options offered by other manufacturers are gradually becoming full-power units also, so it would appear that perhaps the full-time power steering is the answer.

Ride and handling were excellent on both the test cars, one with the air level system and the other standard. Plymouth's combination of torsion bars up front with the leaf springs at the rear and the Oriflow shock absorbers continue to give a limousine ride to a car designated as one of the "low priced three." Cornering qualities of the Plymouth also deserve an "excellent" rating when compared to anything other than a full-fledged sports car. By sports car, we do not include European economy models either, for the Plymouth will outperform them all with ease in everything but the economy angle.

As with any of the American cars placed on the market today, there are a host of extras which can be added to the '59 Plymouths if the customer wishes. In the Sport Fury model, a number of "extras" are standard equipment. These include air foam seats front and rear, electric clock, padded dash, swivel front seats, dual exhaust system and large chrome wheel discs. Of course the Sport Fury also has a special distinctive upholstery scheme. An extra we would recommend for the buyer who does a lot of high speed driving is the "Firm-Ride" option which includes heavier front torsion bars, stronger rear springs and heavy duty shock absorbers on all four wheels. This option must be factory installed.

There are no engine extras for the Sport Fury other than the 361 inch Commando engine. The dual-quad carburetion of '58 is no longer available and the stock hydraulic camshaft is all that is offered. For the first time in nearly ten years, horsepower has not been bumped with the introduction of a new model. We have also heard rumors that many of the other '59 cars yet to be introduced will have little or no increase in advertised horsepower either. Maybe the horsepower race is finally slowing down.

The new model year is under way now and we have had our first taste of the new product. We liked the flavor. Some of the competition will undoubtedly make more radical styling changes and others might put out engines with higher horsepower ratings but we doubt if the Sport Fury will take a back seat to any of them in the final overall analysis based on performance, ride, handling, economy and workmanship. It's quite a package!