

1975 Plymouth Road Runner...OWNER DAVE EAMON

1975 Plymouth Road Runner

The Pontiac GTO was given the nod for being the car that gave us the definition of a muscle car; a deluxe coupe or convertible with a deluxe bucket seat interior, a big engine with a four barrel or multiple carburetion, dual exhausts and floor shifted transmission. Muscle cars were often loaded and had an Imperial like price tag that left profit loving dealers very happy, but left those cars out of reach of the younger people who were the ones who really wanted them. Every auto maker including Chrysler copied the definition, and by the mid to later '60s you could get a Coronet R/T, Charger R/T or Plymouth GTX that followed the formula exactly.

The Road Runner in 1968 was a new kind of muscle car. Chrysler recognized the high priced problem with the muscle car definition, and wanted to introduce a muscle car that would have a base price less than \$3,000 that just about anyone could afford. The Road Runner was the answer, and they sold very well. Chrysler expected to sell 2,500 in 1968, and sold 10 times that number. That number would nearly double for 1969, and Chrysler was obviously happy. So were muscle car buyers in general as other auto makers including Pontiac, scrambled to copy the Road Runner's definition. Chrysler wasn't quite so happy after 1969, but that's another story.

But part of that is that by 1972, the muscle car era was ending, and muscle cars starting dying like gnats on a hot August day. Chrysler would not give up on the Road Runner however, keeping the name on production cars through 1980.



So what is this car that you are looking at here? It's clearly a Road Runner, but hardly similar to the car that Chrysler introduced for 1968. Also, hard to understand the car you are

looking at here is not a beautiful original nor is it a stunning restoration. So why is it here? It is a rare example of the last of the B-body Road Runners. Chrysler unwilling to let the Road Runner die, decided to try to move it into the personal luxury class that was so very hot in the mid '70s. So, here is the one year only B-body '75 Road Runner. It is the last of the RM2s. It is based on the new for '75 Plymouth Fury, but it is a Road Runner with a genuine Road Runner VIN. The Fury name appears nowhere on the car. For '76, Chrysler originally planned to have two Road Runners, a B-body and a new F-body based Road Runner. As it turned out, the '76 Road Runner was an option package for the F-body, and there was no B-body Road Runner.



I factory ordered this car late in April of 1975. The date on the agreement between the dealer and me was May 5, 1975. The car was ordered shortly after or maybe the same day, but I don't remember exactly when. The build date on the fender tag is May 21st, and I picked the car up from the dealer Friday, June 13th, 1975. I have owned the car since, and it is amongst the last RM21s built. In fact, I wonder if it could be the last one. I suppose that it could be, but there is no way to know unless a lot of them turned up on a registry or something and mine had the highest VIN of all of those listed. Maybe we will all see some day. On the other hand, next year production does not start until August, so there could very well have been some cars built after May 21st. There were only 7,183 '75 Road Runners built. I also don't know when they shut down for new model change-over. The '75s and '76s were very similar, so that shut down could have been very brief. I remember some discussion at the time the car was ordered as to whether it would come through as a '75 or a '76. Obviously it is not a '76, but if it was, it would be one of none.

I ordered the car with a salesman named Jimmie Anderson at Renfrew Chrysler-Plymouth. My parents had been doing business with him for years, and they had purchased several Plym-





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ouths and Chryslers with him. He was an older guy. I'm guessing that he was well into his 70s at the time, and he's the only guy I have ever known who I saw wearing spats. Jimmie mostly sold Valiants and Chryslers and he had never sold a Road Runner before (or since, I'd bet). He tried to find a car in inventory somewhere, but he said there was nothing even close to what I wanted available, and the car would have to be factory ordered. The order would take 30 to 45 days to fill. When it came time to order the car, he just turned the option book around and said to select whatever I wanted.



The car arrived at the dealership about the Tuesday before the Friday that I picked it up. I had been watching the dealership but my dear old friend Mark saw it before I did and called me. Had I been to Renfrew that day? I had not, but when I got there, I was some excited to see the new car. I checked the car out in the service bays the next day or so after it arrived at the dealer. It was very dirty and there was no hint of new car smell. I always wondered if new car smell is some kind of spray stuff, and it did have a new car smell when I picked it up.

I daily drove the car into the spring of 1982, at which point I parked it. It had about 82,000 miles on the odometer at that time. My wife Heather got her driver's licence about that same time, and she got the new K-car that we had bought just before parking the Road Runner. At that point I pressed the car back into service for another three years. Interesting that car payments on the K-car were less (much less) than the cost of gas for the Road Runner. When I finally parked it in 1985, it had 109,000 miles on the odometer, and it has 110,000 now. At nine miles per gallon in the city, it burns way too much gas to drive it far or often, so it gets less than 100 miles per year driving now.

RM21P5G

Reading the VIN, the car is a mid-priced Plymouth Road Run-

ner two door sedan. In this case, two door sedan means that it is a hard top with fixed quarter windows. Call it a coupe if you like. Note that RM21 in the VIN makes it a genuine Road Runner, the last of an extinct breed. There were also RM23s, which were two-door hardtops. Oh yes, I know there were Road Runners after 1975, but they were an option package, not a separate model.

The P engine code is not listed in the shop manual, but it is the High Performance 400 - 4 bbl with non-catalytic dual exhausts. The car was built at the St. Louis plant. The dual exhaust '75 Road Runners are sometimes referred to as Cat Delete cars. They have an Air Injection Reaction (AIR) pump rather than a catalytic exhaust system. The exhaust system is two-and-a-quarter inch diameter as in the muscle car days.

Mechanical

I ordered Power Disc Brakes (B41). Power Steering was either standard on all or included with the 400 - 4 bbl.; I don't remember which. I ordered the hottest engine I could get which at the time was the 400 - 4 bbl. dual exhaust (E68). The dual exhaust of course meant deletion of the catalytic converter (Cat Delete) and the addition of the AIR pump (N38). There is a notation on the bottom of the Production Broadcast Sheet, "Delete Cat Convert". The engine option was priced at \$235 which at the time was quite significant. I read somewhere that if you ordered a cat delete engine you had to make a deposit that was at least 10% of the value of the car. I was asked upon ordering the car for a \$500 deposit. I never did pay the deposit, and I don't know whether the amount had anything to do with the price of the car (\$5,581 after discount, \$6,265.35 full retail). I paid the full \$5,581 when we picked the car up.

I was absolutely appalled at the time with how expensive this car was! That was a time of high inflation, and car prices were rising rapidly. With a base price of \$4,850 (\$4,850!?!), it seems like pennies now, but at the time it was like a ransom demand! Despite that, there were some other options that I should have ordered. It would have made relatively little difference to the price of the car, and very little difference to the equal monthlies. But, I was a kid then, and all I could see was how expensive the car was and keeping the price down.

If only I had known better #1

I should have bugged, cajoled, annoyed and generally made a pain of myself until they special ordered a police spec 440 for me. I think it would have made this car a one of none. I read somewhere that Chrysler ran off a batch of so equipped '75 Road Runners. That's an interesting notion, but I'll believe it when I see one. I have only seen that notion once, and there was nothing there to back it up. That's the kind of rumour that gets started by wishful thinking. If such a car was built, the seventh character in the VIN would be "U" for special order V-8 engine.

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In the US, 318 powered Road Runners were standard equipped with a three speed manual. In Canada, all intermediate Plymouths were standard equipped with Torqueflite. In this case, the transmission is the heavy duty A-727 (D34). The duals were two-and-a-quarter inch pipes with mufflers mounted below the back seat (the usual place), and cylindrical shaped resonators mounted between the frame rails and the gas tank. The car sounded like all '70s B-bodies before it, but much quieter. The bright exhaust tips (N42) are the same as those used on the Challenger R/T and Rallye. I have read that earlier cars got the same exhaust tips as the '74 Road Runner, but I don't know if that's correct or not. I have never seen one. The rear-end is the new for '75, 9 ¼ inch ring gear axle assembly. I suppose that was supposed to be a real heavy duty rear-end, but it howls some now.



If only I had known better #2

I should have ordered Sure-Grip which would have made the car a lot easier to handle in the winter, and it would have been sexy now. If I remember right, it was all of \$65 for the option at the time. Even in contemporary dollars, that's not all that expensive, and it would have made less than a few dollars difference to the equal monthlies. The standard axle ratio is 3.23:1. The (only) lower optional ratio was 3.54:1. That would have made the car feel faster and it would have been great for burn-outs, but the car would have quaffed even more high-octane gasoline. That ratio was only available with the 8 ¾ ring gear axle however, which would have eliminated the new 9 ¼ axle that's under my car. I was smart enough to order the 500 Amp Long Life battery (F27) which got me a Group 27 battery. As a Road Runner, heavy duty suspension (S13) was standard, but for sure I would have ordered it if not standard.

The Interior

I ordered the Sundance option with bucket seats (B5KW) in order to get cloth seats. In the

-35 degree winter weather that was common in the day, cloth seats were essential! There is precious little colder than sitting on vinyl chairs on a -35 degree January morning. A centre seat with fold down centre armrest (C21) was included, but I did not order a console and floor shift in order to help keep the price down, and to allow for extra seating. Now, according to the dealership option book, the centre seat was optional. I don't remember ordering it, and I'm pretty sure it was included and in any event, my car has it.

The Sundance interior was available with either buckets or a bench seat. I indeed wanted the buckets (C56) and I got them, although a bench seat would have been a rare and unusual option. I have only ever seen two other Sundance cars, and both of those had buckets. The interior is deluxe and includes the deluxe three spoke steering wheel, deep pile carpeting both on the floor and on the lower portion of the door panels, and door pull straps on the deluxe upper door panels. That was pretty nice stuff in 1975!

If only I had known better #3

I should have ordered a Tuff steering wheel. That was another cheap option that would now cost a small fortune to replicate. However in about 1982 I added a tilt steering column that I took out of a wrecked Magnum, and a Tuff wheel would not work with that column. The tilt column was red and I simply painted it semi-gloss black. It looks as it should. I also found a black tilt steering wheel, in a mid '70s Monaco (full-size). It's unusual in that it has no centre medallion. If I were brave enough, I would drill a small hole in the metal backing of the spoke's padding and install an early '70s Road Runner steering wheel emblem. Someday, maybe. A leather wrap would be in no way correct, but it would be nice.

By the way, this was an excellent running winter car. It never failed to start even when not plugged in, and no matter how cold it got. It has a great heater; it warms up quickly and it seems that the colder it gets the better the car runs. Winter traction was impossible however; I seemed to be constantly stuck! Geez, I should have ordered that Sure-Grip...

The car came with Upper Level Ventilation (H41) and I ordered an Inside Hood Release (J52). I also ordered a two watt Music Master radio (AM only) (R11) and the Light Package (A01). That included the Fender Mounted Turn Signal Indicators (L31) that I particularly wanted and still value. I wish current cars offered something similar.

If only I had known better #4

I should have ordered the AM 8-track stereo radio. Yeah, yeah don't laugh. It was entirely reasonable at the time. It would have saved me getting an after-market tape player. Ordering an FM radio would have made no sense however, because we had no FM stations then, although as it turned out, we had a few a couple of

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years later. I wish I had had the foresight to see that coming.

If only I had known better #5

I should also have ordered a rear-window defroster. That would have worked a lot better than the blower type rear defogger that I did buy and it would have included a 100 Amp. Leece-Neville alternator. I should also have ordered the Rallye Gauges with a tach. I added it in about 1981 no doubt at considerably greater cost than it would have been at the time as an option. If I remember right, that too was about a \$65 option. Would I ever like to find an original price list now!

If only I had known better #6

A console and floor shift would also have been cool, but I didn't want it then and the lack of it now is different and unusual. I also added an aftermarket digital clock, but I ditched that at some point. I think I still have it...whatever. The ditch occurred when I had to replace the dash pad which split. I found a nice one in a thrown away Cordoba, and the Cordoba dash insert works in the Road Runner after a little painting. Even the holes for the nameplate are in the same place (Anybody need a nice used Cordoba nameplate?).



I did buy a high end aftermarket 8-track player. Yeah, yeah don't laugh. That was entirely reasonable at the time, and I'll put it back in the car as part of the restoration. I'll also put the original AM radio back in at that time. Another choice would be to put new guts into the original radio and have a very nice sound system.

The body

Aztec Gold, Spinnaker White and Formal Black were the only colours available with the Sundance package. I was originally going to order the car in white. "That's boring" my wife Heather said, and after some discussion, we ended up with Aztec Gold

(JL6). Of the other two Sundance cars I have seen, one was white with gold stripes as in the '75 catalogue picture and the other was gold with a full white vinyl roof and no stripes. I have never seen a black one. Our car came with white up-and-over tape stripes. I ordered the Tunnel Deck Stripe (K9W). One of the nick names for these cars is "Tunnel Car" which is a reference to the deck stripe that appears as though you are looking into a tunnel. I also ordered the performance hood treatment (V21) which means that the raised portion of the hood was painted flat black trimmed with a black quarter inch wide black stripe. I also ordered the remote left side mirror (G52).

If only I had known better #7

I should have ordered Dual Remote Sport Mirrors. It would have been a nice addition and a cheap option. I added them later, but I don't remember how much they cost; not that much I guess, because I don't remember. I'm sure they would cost like crazy now. I ordered those as painted mirrors, and they came in black primer. I never painted them and that tied into the flat black hood treatment. If I had factory ordered them, they would have had to be chrome because painted mirrors were not available in Aztec Gold.

The car came with Rallye Wheels with no trim rings (W41). I have always liked Rallye wheels so the optional Road Wheels were out, and the optional hideous plastic wheel cover thingies were all the way out. The Rallye Wheels and optional Road Wheels were only available in 14 inch, so the optional 15 inch radials were also out. The car came with G-70x14 Goodyear Polyglas GT raised white letters, like you would have seen on early '70s muscle. Ordering the 15 inch radials automatically got you the hideous plastic wheel cover thingies and there is no way that I could tolerate that. I wanted a tinted windshield but again trying to save money, I ordered the Tinted Windshield Only (G15) rather than full tinted glass. Full tinted glass would have cost just a few dollars more. If I had to replace glass now, I would probably be lucky now to find non-tinted glass. Now come to think of it, I would probably be lucky to find glass at all!

Driving this Car

This car is pretty typical of a mid-'70s car. It's pretty soft and mushy, but far less so than cars of five years prior. It has a heavy duty suspension and so the ride is a little choppy, but the car is quite smooth and quiet. Like all cars of the time, the roof line is very low. In fact the car is less than 53 inches high, so your legs are pretty much stretched out flat as you sit in the low front seats. The tower backed and somewhat bolstered buckets are quite comfortable. The steering wheel is way too high, hence the purchase of the tilt column from the wrecked Magnum. The front end is long, but easy to place as it is entirely visible from the driver's seat. The rear end is short and entirely visible through the back-lite. It's really not a hard car to drive. The 400 produces

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nowhere near the power of five years earlier, but it's no slouch either with an ability to smoke the rear tires (or tire, there's that missing Sure-Grip again). All-in-all it's a satisfying ride.



Today

This story will continue as the car's restoration continues. So far, I have replaced the carburetor and all tune up parts. The car runs quite smoothly despite its age and miles. It has a loping idle which is not surprising since the cam still has the same specs that were in place in 1972. The brakes have been completely replaced, and some suspension replacements were also in order. The car can now be driven with peace of mind regarding safety and reliability. Nice... The exhaust system is next. Can you say "Calgary Muffler"?

There should be lots of trials and tribulations associated with the restoration. An inspection on a hoist reveals some details. Like all Mopar Uni-body cars, the undercarriage is coated in dove-grey primer, and there are remnants of body colour over-spray along the outside edges of the chassis. That's typical.

The car has some rust which is also typical, and that will be the worst thing to deal with. The lower portion of the quarter panels behind the wheel wells is rusted considerably. There is some rust over the rear wheel wells too. The trunk floor is also quite rusted behind the rear wheel wells. The trunk floor is the only place where I have found a hole in the under carriage. The rear wheel wells look okay, but will no doubt be gone. The structural portion of the left door is gone, so it will have to be replaced. Finally, the deck lid is rusted along the lower trailing edge which too is typical, so it will have to be replaced. The rest of car including the floors appears to be intact. Fortunately, the chassis is in great shape. Of course, there are always surprises as you disassemble a car.

It was suggested to me that a re-body would be the easiest and least expensive way to deal with the restoration. I found a beautiful '78 Dodge Monaco Brougham (same body) in the US for sale for some \$13,000 USD. If I bought that car for \$10,000 USD, I expect it would be some \$20,000 Canadian by the time it got here. The car is very nice and would be more than a bit of a shame to cut. I also found a '76 Charger Sport (same body) for some \$4,000 USD. That car was not so nice but appears to be sound in the pictures, and would not be so much of a shame to cut. It would likely be about \$10,000 Canadian by the time it got here. I really need to find such a car in Canada. That is exemplified by the fact that repro parts are non-existent and good used parts are virtually impossible to find for this not so popular one year only car.

Another problem is the Sundance interior which has faded considerably. The good news is that I found NOS upholstery material (both cloth and vinyl) at a place called SMS in Oregon. I can't believe I found that material! I bought the material and put it in a cool dark place wrapped in brown paper, until needed. I suppose it will cost a small fortune to have the seat upholstery re-sewn, but so be it. The rest of the interior is in good condition. There is a hole in the carpet just forward of the driver's seat, but I think the best process would be to sew it back together rather than replacing the carpet. I am in no way confident that replacement carpet would be correct. The carpets will have to be re-dyed.

The saga continues...

I factory ordered this car. It is my car. It has belonged to no one but me. There is huge value to me in restoring it. I recognize that it will never be worth more than the cost of the resto, but when it is done there will be no other car like it. That too is of great value. What to do with it? My niece put dibs on it. That's a great end-of-days disposition. I like that. Stay tuned...

