

# 1969 Plymouth Roadrunner...OWNER: CAL LAWTON

When I was 12 years old, my uncle bought a brand new red 1969 Road Runner. It was the coolest car I had ever seen. By the time I was 16 I knew a lot more about cars and I still thought the 1969 Road Runner was the greatest car ever. Busy working two jobs and playing team sports, I saved for the car of my dreams. Finally with the help of my Mom, I located and purchased my dream car, a Sunfire Blue Fire Metallic (B5 Blue) 1969



Road Runner for \$1,750; the year was 1973. It was a 383 4-speed with standard steering, standard brake, and a black interior. The HEMI would have been my first choice but they were hard to find and more than I could afford. It was, however, a pretty epic car for a kid in grade 10. I remember one girlfriend claiming that I loved my car more than her (I didn't respond because it was true). It took some work and a clutch replacement but I never lost to any Mustang, Torino or a Camaro.

The 1969½ Road Runner had a 440 that I wanted because it could be easily modified to increase horsepower to the output I wanted, so in 1979 I bought a 440 cid from



a 1969 police car just like the moonshiners did. With the help of a proficient engine builder I ordered pistons, rods, cam, intake, headers, carb, scatter shield, clutch, vertical gate Hurst shifter, and the list goes on. A friend of mine was a painter at a car dealer body shop and for the cost of the paint the car was re-painted a dark blue.

Years later and a different camshaft and a few other parts the car was dyno tested at 510HP and 580 ft-lb torque. Mission accomplished! My Road Runner had evolved into a pretty fast car and there was never a short-



age of things to spend money on. It came with 3:23 non-posi rear differential. I changed it to a 489 sure grip with 3:55's, a ratio that is not good for street or strip. There were no decent 5 or 6 speed manual transmissions available so I installed a Gear Vendors Overdrive unit (0.78) and changed the differential to 4:10 c/w a 4" aluminum drive shaft. Now I had both street and strip.

I added front disc brakes, line lock, and re-chromed anything I could until the only thing left to upgrade was the 40 year old all original body. It was in good shape except around the rear fender wells and like most Mopars of that vintage the paint was starting to bubble in a few places.

It still looked pretty good and I had placed 1st, 3rd and 1st in "1969 B body modified" at the local car shows. In early April 2010 the unthinkable happened, I crested a







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hill to discover a car stopped crossways in my lane trying to turn from out of a shopping center leaving me nowhere to go. She almost made the turn when I hit her clipping her rear bumper and smashing my driver's fender, bumper, hood and grill.

I was fortunate to have Terry Levair with Investment Vehicle Restorations (IVR) stop by and do the insurance appraisal -- \$13,000 in damage that the other drivers insurance covered. I knew this was the time for a



complete restoration and Terry said he had a spot for me if I could get the car apart in 6 weeks. With my son and daughter helping me we had it apart in 4 weeks. Terry dropped by and picked the car up, or what was left of it, and away it went. My work had only just begun. With Terry's guidance every nut, bolt, and bracket was either replaced or sandblasted and painted. This was a great learning experience as I had always wanted to restore a car and what better than my own.

As the car was being sandblasted, fitted with new rear quarters, trunk extensions, wheel tubs, torque boxes and frame rail connectors, I cleaned and prepped everything for assembly. The engine was stripped and made ready for repainting to "Hemi Orange" with a high temp gloss finish. I had stopped by IVR during the body restoration a few times and felt both shocked and happy to see it in various states of panel replacement. When pictures were emailed to me of the car freshly painted and wheeled outside to take in the soothing rays of the hot sun I knew assembly time was not far off. Finally the day came for

the engine to be installed - the correct way, from the bottom. I loaded up the assembled K-member, scatter shield, transmission, bell housing, engine and rear differential and headed for the car. We had the engine in by noon and the rest of the parts by 3:00 pm. Two weeks later the car was delivered, a welcome sight on a sunny September day.

Assembly was slow but steady. I made many phone calls to Terry for assembly tips and guidance. Larry Gammon, Northern Mopar's Car Club President, has a beautiful 1969 GTX and I stopped by numerous times to take pictures of how the cars parts should look when assembled and how to assemble them. I had a new headliner installed to compliment the "mostly" stock interior (the seats had been recovered and new carpet had been installed in the past). It was starting to look like a car again. I trailered the car down through the heart of Calgary to get a wheel alignment so it would be ready to drive...too bad it was the middle of winter!

World of Wheels takes place in mid-February and the car would never look better, so I entered the show as



part of the IVR display. I took second in my class and won "Best Overall Street." The Camaro that beat me was nice but.....I finally lost to a Camaro. The accident happened April 4th, the car was delivered back to me on September 18th and ready to show just before Christmas, eight and a half months of sadness and joy. What fun. My son is 15 and now wants to build his own car. Have I heard this somewhere before?