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The opening pages of

1970 Plymouth Duster Restoration Guide

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RESTORATION ESSENTIALS

1970 Plymouth Duster

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Single-year guide · Model year 1970 only · Standard Duster and Duster 340

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1970 only. The Duster debuted for 1970; this guide does not cover 1971–1976 except where differences from 1970 are explicitly noted.
- **Body style:** 2-door semi-fastback sports hardtop only. No sedan, no convertible, no wagon.
- **Platform:** Chrysler A-body, 108.0-inch wheelbase, 188.4 inches overall length. Valiant from the cowl forward; all-new sheet metal, roof, and rear body from the cowl back.
- **VIN model codes:** VL29 (standard Duster), VS29 (Duster 340). The "29" denotes a 2-door sports hardtop.
- **Engines (1970):** 198 cu in Slant Six (125 hp), 225 cu in Slant Six (145 hp), 318 cu in LA V8 (230 hp), 340 cu in LA V8 (275 hp, Duster 340 only).
- **Transmissions:** 3-speed manual (column or floor shift), A-833 4-speed manual (V8 and heavy-duty applications), TorqueFlite 3-speed automatic (A-904 behind sixes and 318; A-727 behind the 340).
- **1970 production:** 217,192 total — 192,375 standard Dusters and 24,817 Duster 340s.
- **Base prices:** \$2,172 (standard Duster), \$2,547 (Duster 340). Shipping weights: 2,830 lb (standard), 3,110 lb (340).
- **Assembly plants:** Hamtramck, Michigan — VIN code B (Dodge Main plant); Los Angeles, California — VIN code E.
- **Key 1970-only features:** small "Valiant" badge on the front fenders above the Duster badge; "Plymouth" logotype in the grille; 1970-only grille design; 1970-only upholstery and door-panel patterns; flat decklid with no center crease; Carter AVS four-barrel and breaker-point ignition on the 340 (both changed for 1971); manual (non-power-assist) front disc brakes standard on the Duster 340; turned-down exhaust tips with no bright tips; 340 stripes in the 1970-only V6X/V8X style.
- **Mid-1970 addition:** the Gold Duster trim package (gold badging and stripes, wall-to-wall carpeting, pleated all-vinyl seats, whitewalls, wheel covers, deluxe insulation, canopy vinyl roof).

1. Manufacturer history: Plymouth

Plymouth was created by Walter P. Chrysler in 1928 as Chrysler Corporation's entry in the low-priced field against Ford and Chevrolet. The brand took its name from Plymouth binder twine, a symbol of New England craftsmanship — the Mayflower ship on the early emblem reinforced the association. The first Plymouth, the 1929 Model Q, was unveiled on July 7, 1928, and notably offered hydraulic brakes when competitors still used mechanical brakes, a value-and-engineering positioning the division held for decades.

Plymouth survived the Great Depression on low prices and solid engineering, and by the 1950s it was a full-line make riding Virgil Exner's "Forward Look" styling. The 1960s transformed Plymouth's image: the compact Valiant (1960) gave the division a strong small-car base, and the performance era brought the GTX (1967), the Road Runner (1968) — a back-to-basics muscle car that won Motor Trend Car of the Year — and the rapid-fire "Rapid Transit System" marketing campaign that grouped Plymouth's performance models under one banner. The Duster 340 joined that system in 1970 as its entry-level member.

The Duster's debut year was a high-water mark: Plymouth finished third in U.S. industry sales for 1970, its best showing since 1959, powered overwhelmingly by the new coupe. The 1970s brought tightening emissions rules, the end of the first muscle-car era, and a slow decline that ended with Plymouth's discontinuation in 2001. For the restorer, this history matters because 1970 sits at the peak: maximum performance hardware, pre-emissions-restriction compression ratios, and the one-year-only details that make a factory-correct 1970 restoration both demanding and rewarding.

2. Model history: the Duster

The Duster was born from a modest assignment. Plymouth product planners were given roughly \$15 million to freshen the dowdy Valiant compact for 1970 — not enough for a clean-sheet car. Designers Milt Antonick and Neil Walling, working under the constraint of reusing the Valiant's cowl, doors, front clip, and 108-inch-wheelbase A-body platform, drew an all-new semi-fastback roof with a steeply raked windshield, extended C-pillars, pronounced tumblehome in the side glass (which required a new door-glass regulator mechanism), and fresh rear sheet metal with a special rear valance. The result looked like a clean-sheet coupe for a fraction of the cost — contemporary accounts called it resourceful "junkyard styling," and the buying public loved it.

Introduced in the fall of 1969 for the 1970 model year, the Duster was offered in two models: the standard Duster and the performance-oriented Duster 340. Engine choices spanned the 198 and 225 Slant Sixes and the 318 and 340 LA-series V8s. The standard car started at \$2,172 — \$11 bought the V8 upgrade to a 318, and the 340 added \$375 to the base price. At midyear, Plymouth added the Gold Duster trim package: gold badging, gold side and rear stripes, wall-to-wall carpeting, pleated all-vinyl seats, whitewalls, wheel covers, a deluxe insulation package, and a canopy vinyl roof. The Gold Duster package continued through 1975.

The Duster 340 was the performance flagship of the line and a charter member of Plymouth's Rapid Transit System. Conceived under the internal codename "CK" (for Clark Kent — mild-mannered looks, superhero performance), it packed the 275-horsepower 340 small-block into a 3,110-pound package for \$2,547. Car and Driver's March 1970 test recorded 0–60 mph in 6.2 seconds and a 14.72-second quarter mile — quicker than any stock 'Cuda the magazine had tested — with a 120-mph top speed. The 24,817 Duster 340s built for 1970 outsold the Barracuda line's 19,515 units, and the Duster 340 outsold the 'Cuda 340/383 in every subsequent model year by healthy margins.

The Duster was such a hit that Dodge demanded its own version, which arrived for 1971 as the Demon; Plymouth in turn received the Scamp, a Valiant-based hardtop counterpart to the Dart Swinger. The Duster ran through 1976 (with the 340 replaced by the 360 for 1974), totaling 1,324,833 units including 69,115 Duster 340s — but 1970 remains the purest expression: the only year with the Valiant fender badges, the highest compression ratios, and the launch-year details covered in this guide.

3. What is unique about the 1970 Duster

A factory-correct 1970 restoration must honor the one-year-only details. The items below are verified 1970-specific features; 1971-and-later parts are incorrect on a 1970 car.

Exterior identification — 1970 only:

- A small "Valiant" badge on each front fender, mounted just above the "Duster" badge. Management was hedging its bets on the new nameplate; the Valiant badges were permanently deleted for 1971.
- A "Plymouth" logotype in the grille. It was deleted for 1971.
- The 1970-only grille design (often called the "generic" grille in hobby shorthand). For 1971 the Duster 340 received a new "sharktooth" grille.
- 1970-only upholstery patterns and interior door-panel designs. The patterns were revised for 1971.
- A flat decklid with no center high-point crease. The crease appeared on 1972-and-later lids; a 1972+ decklid on a 1970 car is a visible error.
- Twin horizontal taillights set into a special rear valance with no bezels. Note: the inset lamp pockets are a documented rust trap — inspect carefully (see Section 4.12).
- Duster 340 striping in the 1970 style: dual black longitudinal side stripes (V6X) that widen slightly to echo the swelled rear quarters, plus two wide black transverse stripes (V8X) connecting the taillights. The stripe designs changed for 1971, when bolder "340" decal lettering also appeared on the rear quarters and front fenders.

Duster 340 mechanical equipment — 1970 only:

- Carter AVS four-barrel carburetor. For 1971 the 340 switched to the Carter Thermo-Quad.
- Breaker-point ignition. Electronic ignition arrived on the 340 for 1971.
- Manual (non-power-assist) front disc brakes as standard equipment. Power assist was not standard in 1970.
- Turned-down exhaust tips with no bright exhaust tips. Bright tips (N42) appear on later cars.
- 10.5:1 compression ratio. The 340 dropped to 10.3:1 for 1971 and 8.5:1 for 1972.

1970 vs. 1971–1973 — what did NOT change (common misconceptions):

- The 1970 and 1971 Dusters use the same basic body shell; the differences are trim, grille, badges, stripes, and upholstery — not sheet metal.
- The Duster 340 remained its own VIN model (VS29) through the 1973 model year; it was not folded into an option package until the 340 was replaced by the 360 for 1974.
- Taillights and side marker lights are the same for 1970 and 1971.

1970-only context for judging: because the 1970 was the launch year, early-production cars (built fall 1969) may show running-change details. Document the scheduled build date on the fender tag (Section 4.2) and photograph everything before disassembly.

4. Technical restoration data — 1970 Plymouth Duster

4.1 VIN decoding (1970)

The 1970 VIN is stamped on the dash-mounted VIN plate (visible through the windshield) and repeated as a partial stamping on the engine block and transmission. Format: 13 characters.

Example: VS29H0B123456