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The opening pages of

Plymouth Cuda 1970

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1970 Plymouth Cuda

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1. Manufacturer History: Plymouth

Plymouth was created in 1928 by Walter P. Chrysler as his answer to Ford and Chevrolet: a low-priced car with engineering a step above its price class. The first Plymouth, the Model Q, carried hydraulic brakes at a time when its rivals still used mechanical brakes, and the brand's reputation for value engineering was set early. Through the Depression, Plymouth grew into America's number-three brand by selling honest, durable transportation.

The 1950s brought Virgil Exner's 'Forward Look' styling, tailfins, and torsion-bar front suspension ('Torsion-Aire'), which gave Plymouths handling their competitors could not match. The 1960s were Plymouth's performance decade: the Max Wedge Super Stock cars, the 1964 Barracuda (which beat the Ford Mustang to market by two weeks), the GTX, and the 1968 Road Runner — a back-to-basics muscle car that proved performance could be affordable.

Chrysler's engineering culture shaped every Plymouth of this era: the slant-six, the LA small-block V8 family, the B and RB big-blocks, the 426 Hemi, the TorqueFlite automatic (widely considered the best automatic of its day), and unit-body construction that made Mopars lighter and more rigid than their body-on-frame rivals. For the restorer, this is good news: mechanical parts interchange broadly across the corporation, and factory service manuals are unusually thorough.

The 1970s brought emissions controls, insurance surcharges, and the end of the high-compression era. Plymouth soldiered on with Volare, Horizon, and a string of rebadged Mitsubishis before the brand was discontinued in 2001. But the 1964-1973 performance cars — Barracuda, GTX, Road Runner, Duster 340, and the Superbird — remain the heart of the hobby, and factory-correct restoration of these cars is supported by one of the deepest reproduction ecosystems in the business.

2. Model History: Plymouth 'Cuda

The 'Cuda began as a 1969 A-body option package — Plymouth's answer to buyers who wanted the Barracuda's style with the biggest engines in the catalog. When the Barracuda moved to the E-body for 1970, the 'Cuda moved with it and became a full trim series of its own: the BS VIN prefix, its own standard and optional engines, heavy-duty suspension, and the boldest styling in the E-body lineup. The 'Cuda was no longer a package. It was the point.

The 1970-1971 'Cudas are the high-water mark of Plymouth performance. The standard engine was a 383 (1970) or 340 (1971) four-barrel, and the option sheet read like a fantasy: the 440 four-barrel, the 440 Six Barrel with its triple two-barrel carburetors, and the 426 Street Hemi — all available, all RESTORATIONESSENTIALS — 1970 Plymouth 'Cuda

documented, all factory-installed. The 1971 cars added the gilled quarter panels, billboard stripes, and the four-headlight grille that made them the visual icons of the line.

For 1972 the 'Cuda was rationalized along with the rest of the E-body: the big-blocks and the Hemi were gone, and the 340 small-block — now rated 240 net horsepower at 8.5:1 compression — became the standard and only engine. The 1972-1973 'Cudas are honest, well-balanced performance cars, but they are not the fire-breathers of 1970-1971, and the market prices them accordingly.

The 'Cuda ended with the E-body after 1974, a victim of the same forces that killed the muscle car everywhere: insurance surcharges, emissions standards, and the end of high-compression engines. Total 'Cuda production across all four years of this guide's coverage was under 60,000 cars — a fraction of Mustang or Camaro volume — which is why documented, numbers-matching 'Cudas



the prices they do.

For the restorer, the 'Cuda is the E-body where authentication matters most, because the financial incentive to fake one is the highest in the Mopar hobby. Base BH Barracudas are converted to BS 'Cudas with stripes, gills, scoops, and swapped drivetrains — sometimes well, sometimes fraudulently. The factory's own answer is the VIN: positions 1-2 must read BS. No BS prefix, no factory 'Cuda. The fender tag, the broadcast sheet, and the partial-VIN stampings on the drivetrain are the supporting evidence. On a 'Cuda, buy the documentation as carefully as you buy the car.

3. What Makes the 1970 Unique

The 1970 'Cuda is the debut of the BS performance series — the first year the 'Cuda was a model in its own right. The formula: the all-new E-body with every performance engine Chrysler built, from the standard 383 to the 426 Hemi.

The 1970 engine lineup is the broadest the 'Cuda ever offered. The standard 383 four-barrel (335 hp) was the baseline; above it sat the 440 four-barrel (375 hp), the 440 Six Barrel (390 hp, triple two-barrel carburetors on an aluminum intake), and the 426 Hemi (425 hp). Each step up the ladder cost real money in 1970 and commands a real multiple today — which is why the fifth character of the VIN (N, U, V, or R) is the second most valuable character on the car after the BS prefix.

The 1970 'Cuda's styling is the cleanest of the E-body performance cars: the 1970-only grille and taillights, the shaker hood available on the big engines, and the High Impact color palette (Plum Crazy, Limelight, Top Banana, Hemi Orange, Rallye Red) that the 'Cuda wore better than anything else on the road. The 1971 gills and billboards had not arrived yet — the 1970 car's aggression is all RESTORATIONESSENTIALS — 1970 Plymouth 'Cuda proportion and stance.

Production was 18,880 hardtops and 635 convertibles. The convertibles — particularly Hemi and Six Barrel convertibles — are among the most valuable Mopars ever built, and they are also the most faked. More '1970 Hemi 'Cuda convertibles' exist in the market's imagination than the factory ever built. On any premium 1970 'Cuda, the authentication standard is absolute: BS VIN prefix, correct engine-code character, fender tag, broadcast sheet, and matching partial-VIN stampings on the drivetrain.

Restoration notes specific to 1970: the 440 Six Barrel's triple-carburetor setup is year-specific in its details — restore it with 1970-correct components, not later service parts. The N96 Shaker hood assembly is reproduced but expensive; verify fit before paint. The 1970-only grille, taillights, and trim are one-year parts. And the Hemi cars deserve the dedicated Hemi torque table in this guide — the Street Hemi's fastener specifications differ from the B/RB big-block's.

'Cuda authentication starts and ends with the BS VIN prefix: the fifth character must match the engine in the car, and the fender tag and broadcast sheet should agree.

Values stratify by engine: Hemi and 440 Six Barrel cars are auction headliners; 383 cars are the enthusiast's entry point. The no-charge 340 option makes 1970 H-code 'Cudas the sleeper value — real 'Cuda VIN, real performance, rational money.

For the restorer, the 1970 'Cuda is the best-supported E-body in the aftermarket: stripes, emblems, and most sheet metal are reproduced. The trap is over-restoration — a 383 'Cuda restored to Hemi standards is still a 383 'Cuda at appraisal time.

Year-to-year changes at a glance.

- 'Cuda debuts as the BS performance series of the all-new E-body Barracuda line.
- Standard 383 Magnum (335 hp); options: 340 (no-charge), 440 4-bbl, 440 Six Barrel, 426 Hemi.
- Shaker hood (N96) available; billboard stripes and elastomeric bumpers new.