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The opening pages of

Plymouth Cuda 1972

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1972 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 — 1972 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 1972 Unique

The 1972 'Cuda is the E-body performance car after the great rationalization. The big-blocks and the Hemi were gone from the E-body, and the lineup narrowed to two small-blocks: the 318 V8 (150 net hp) as the standard 'Cuda engine and the 340 (240 net hp at 8.5:1 compression) as the performance option. It is a different kind of performance car than the 1970-1971 'Cudas: lighter, better balanced, and honest about what the era allowed.

The net horsepower rating is the number that confuses buyers. The 1972 340's 240 net hp is not directly comparable to the 1971 340's 275 gross hp — the rating system changed, and the engine was also detuned with lower compression and emissions equipment. But the 1972 'Cuda's power-to-weight ratio and handling balance make it a genuinely enjoyable driver, and the market's discount relative to the big-block cars is the opportunity: the 1972 'Cuda is the most affordable entry into documented BS-series ownership.

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What makes the 1972 'Cuda distinctive as a restoration subject is its transitional specification. Electronic ignition became standard in 1972 — preserve it; it is a factory reliability improvement, not a deviation to 'correct.' The 8.5:1-compression 340 uses different pistons, cam timing, and tuning than the 1970-1971 10.5:1 engines — parts do not interchange blindly across the compression change, and the torque table in this guide covers the LA small-block family correctly for both.

The 1972-only grille and taillight treatments are one-year parts, and the simplified option structure means fewer configuration traps than the 1970-1971 cars. Production was 7,828 hardtops — no convertible was offered — and the cars sold steadily to buyers who wanted the 'Cuda's looks and handling without the insurance punishment of the big engines.

Restoration notes specific to 1972: verify 1972-only trim part numbers before buying; confirm the electronic ignition system is intact and functional; and authenticate with the same rigor as any 'Cuda — the BS VIN prefix, the fender tag, the broadcast sheet. A 1972 'Cuda will never be a 1970 Hemi car, but a documented, correctly restored 1972 is a car the market increasingly respects.

The 1972 'Cuda restorer works in a kinder market: small-block parts are plentiful and affordable, the 1970-style grille is reproduced, and there is no six-figure clone industry distorting the parts supply. The authentication burden is lighter too — but the BS VIN check is still non-negotiable.

Values have been climbing as buyers priced out of 1970-71 discover the 1972's virtues: real 'Cuda VIN, the 340's honest performance, and E-body looks for a fraction of the money. Documented 340 4-speed cars are the collector's choice; 318 automatics are drivers — buy accordingly.

The 1972-only details to know: the revised grille and four round taillights, the net-rated engines, and the simplified option sheet. These cars respond beautifully to period-correct performance upgrades — but keep every original part, because survivor-grade originality is where the market is heading. Year-to-year changes at a glance.

■ Net ratings adopted; big-blocks and Hemi gone from the E-body.

■ 318 V8 (150 net hp) becomes the standard 'Cuda engine; 340 (240 net hp) the performance option.