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1971 Plymouth Duster 340 Restoration Guide

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1971 Plymouth Duster 340

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

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About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1971 Plymouth Duster 340 — one model, one year, nothing else. Every specification in this guide was checked against marque references, factory literature excerpts, and enthusiast documentation before it was written.

Our operating ethic is simple: we don't lie and we don't steal, we offer value. That means three things for this guide. First, no invented specifications — every number has a source. Second, where reputable sources disagree, the disagreement is disclosed in the text and in the Sources, Conflicts & Omissions section rather than papered over. Third, where a detail could not be verified, it is omitted and the omission is recorded — an honest gap beats a confident fabrication.

How to use this guide: start with the VIN and fender-tag (or door data plate) decoding sections to establish exactly what your car was when it left the factory. Use the engine, transmission, axle, paint, and casting sections to verify that what is on the car today matches what should be there. Use the rust and restoration-sequence sections to plan the work. And keep this guide in the shop — it is a working document, not a coffee-table book.

A final note: these cars are sixty years old. Parts have been swapped, tags have been lost, and memories have faded. Trust

the metal — casting numbers, date codes, and stampings — over stories. When in doubt, photograph everything and verify

against the factory service manual for your year.

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 Duster 340

The Plymouth Duster arrived for 1970 as the fastback-coupe version of the Valiant — Plymouth's answer



and Maverick, a compact with style. But the Duster 340 was something else entirely: the 275 cubic-inch small-block (275 hp) in a lightweight A-body coupe, with Rallye suspension, hood scoops, and striping. It was the spiritual successor to the Formula S Barracuda, and at 24,817 cars in its first year, it was an instant hit.

The formula was brilliantly simple. The 340 was Chrysler's performance small-block — big bore (4.04 inches), high-winding, and underrated at 275 horsepower. In the Duster's light body it delivered genuine big-block-chasing performance with small-block weight and handling. The Duster 340 cost hundreds less than a Road Runner and ran with the big cars.

For 1971 the Duster 340 got the shark-tooth grille, the Carter ThermoQuad carburetor (replacing the AVS), 10.3:1 compression, and the optional dual-scoop hood with the '340 Wedge' graphic. For 1972 the 340 was re-rated at 240 net horsepower under the new SAE system (the engine was essentially unchanged in output), with revised scoop treatment. For 1973 the Duster got a revised front end with the 5-mph bumper treatment and new taillights, while the 340 continued at 240 net hp.

The Duster 340's four-year run (1970-1973) coincided exactly with the end of the high-compression era, which makes these cars a fascinating study: the 1970-1971 cars are the full-strength originals, the 1972-1973 cars the net-rated survivors. All four years are collectible, with the 1970-1971 cars carrying the premium for their gross ratings and the 1973 cars valued as the last of the breed.

For the restorer, the Duster 340 is one of the friendliest performance Mopars: full A-body parts interchange, deep reproduction support, the bulletproof 340/A833/A727/8-3/4 drivetrain, and straightforward VIN and fender-tag decoding — VL29H for the Duster 340 (V = Valiant series, 29 = fastback coupe, H = 340).

3. What Makes the 1971 Unique

The 1971 Duster 340 is the refined second-year car — and the last full-strength 340 before the net-rating era. Changes for 1971, documented by Hagerty: compression adjusted to 10.3:1, the Carter ThermoQuad replaced the AVS four-barrel, the new shark-tooth grille distinguished the front end, and buyers could order the optional dual-scoop hood with the '340 Wedge' graphic.

The 1971 cars are distinguished from 1970s by the shark-tooth grille, the ThermoQuad carburetor, the revised graphics, and detail trim changes. They are distinguished from 1972s by the gross horsepower rating (275 hp gross; also cited at 235 hp net — the industry was beginning the transition to net ratings)

1971 Plymouth Duster 340

and the pre-1972 scoop treatment.

A note on the 1971 rating: the 340 is reported at 275 hp gross and 235 hp net for 1971. Both figures are correct — they measure different things (gross without accessories, net as installed). This guide reports both with their contexts, because the gross-vs-net transition is the defining technical story of 1971-1972. Production fell to 12,886 — nearly half the 1970 figure — as insurance surcharges bit and the market shifted. The 1971 Duster 340's lower production makes it rarer than the 1970, and the one-year details (shark-tooth grille, ThermoQuad introduction, Wedge graphics) give it a distinct identity.

Restoration notes specific to 1971: the Carter ThermoQuad (not the AVS) is the 1971-correct carburetor — a detail judges check. The shark-tooth grille is 1971-only. The dual-scoop hood and '340 Wedge' graphic, if equipped, are valuable options to verify on the tag. The H-code VIN (VL29H1B) and 340 equipment carry over from 1970.

Year-to-year changes at a glance.

- New shark-tooth grille; Carter ThermoQuad replaced the AVS.
- Compression 10.3:1; optional dual-scoop hood with '340 Wedge' graphic.
- Rated 275 hp gross (also cited 235 hp net — the transition year).