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The opening pages of

Plymouth Road Runner Satellite 1971

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1971 Plymouth Road Runner

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

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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 Mitsubishi's 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 Road Runner

The Plymouth Road Runner arrived in 1968 and rewrote the muscle-car formula: take a mid-size Belvedere coupe, install the biggest standard engine in the class (the 383 four-barrel, 335 hp), add heavy-duty suspension and brakes, strip out the luxury, and price it at \$2,896 — within reach of the young buyers the muscle car was built for. Plymouth paid Warner Bros. \$50,000 for the cartoon bird's name and likeness, plus \$10,000 for the 'beep-beep' horn, and Motor Trend named the Road Runner its 1969 Car of the Year. The back-to-basics performance car was a phenomenon.

The 1969 Road Runner was the peak: over 80,000 cars built, the new A12 option (440 Six Barrel, lift-off fiberglass hood, Dana 60 axle — the ultimate factory drag package), and the 'beep-beep' horn

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as standard equipment. The Road Runner had done what the GTX could not — it made Plymouth the youth-performance brand, and it outsold its upscale sibling by multiples.

For 1970 the Road Runner wore the B-body's one-year loop-bumper restyle and shared its showroom with the most radical Plymouth ever built: the Road Runner Superbird, the winged NASCAR homologation special. The standard 383 continued, the 440 Six Barrel and 426 Hemi remained on the option sheet, and the convertible — 824 built per Hemmings, in conflict with other sources — became an instant collectible. This guide covers the standard 1970 Road Runner; the Superbird has its own dedicated guide.

The 1971 Road Runner moved to the fuselage-styled B-body — the rounded, aircraft-inspired generation — and the engine program began its long retreat: the 383 dropped to 300 hp, the 440 to 370, the Six Barrel to 385. For 1972-1973 the big-block era effectively ended for the standard Road



the 340 (1972) and then the 318 (1973) became the base engines, with the 400 and 440 as options — and ordering the 440 created the 'Road Runner GTX,' the GTX name living on as a package rather than a model.

For the restorer, the Road Runner is the volume Mopar performance car: reproduction support is excellent, parts interchange across the huge B-body family, and the cars' values support serious investment. The authentication standard is the RM VIN prefix (1968-1971) — with the engine code as the fifth character — and the fender tag and broadcast sheet as supporting evidence. The 1972-1973 cars' 'Road Runner GTX' package is documented by the U (440) engine code, not by a separate model prefix.

3. What Makes the 1971 Unique

The 1971 Road Runner moved to the fuselage-styled B-body — the rounded, aircraft-inspired generation — and into the detuning era. The standard 383 dropped from 335 to 300 hp (8.5:1 compression), the 440 four-barrel from 375 to 370, the Six Barrel from 390 to 385; only the Hemi held at 425. The 1971 car is the hinge of the Road Runner's history: still offering the full performance menu, but with the retreat already underway.

1971 was the last year for the Hemi Road Runner and the last year the big-block Road Runner could be ordered in its classic form. The fuselage styling — the rounded body sides, the loop-type front bumper treatment, the new interior — gave the car its most distinctive shape, and the 1971-only details are one-year parts. Verify part numbers: 1972-1973 fuselage cosmetics differ.

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The 1971 production total is reported as 14,218 cars, with a competing figure of 13,664 — a disagreement this guide reports rather than resolves. Either way, 1971 production was roughly a third of 1970's, reflecting the insurance surcharges and market shifts that were shrinking the muscle-car market in real time.

The 1971 High Impact palette — Plum Crazy, Green Go, Top Banana, Hemi Orange, Curious Yellow — continued on the Road Runner. A documented High Impact 1971, particularly a Six Barrel or Hemi car from the final year of both, is a blue-chip Mopar. Verify the paint code on the fender tag.

Restoration notes specific to 1971: the fuselage-specific trim and the 1971-only details are the parts challenge — mechanical parts interchange across the B-body family, but 1971 cosmetics are one-year items. The B/RB torque table uses the corrected 70 ft-lb iron-head figure; Hemi cars use the dedicated Hemi table. Authentication is the RM prefix, the engine code (N, U, V, or R), the fender tag, and the broadcast sheet.

Fuselage authentication: RM VIN, N/U/V/R engine codes, and the 1971-only front-end details. The big-block cars (U, V, R) deserve extra scrutiny — verify the engine stamp, the fender tag, and the broadcast sheet, because the premiums are large enough to attract fabrication.

The fuselage styling was polarizing when new and is celebrated now — the market has come around, and 1971 big-block cars have been appreciating. The 383 cars remain affordable; the 440-6 and Hemi cars are the investments. Condition and documentation drive everything.

The 1971-only front clip is the restoration's challenge: loop bumper, grille, and related trim are unique and increasingly scarce. Mechanicals are standard B-body and fully supported. Buy the most complete fuselage car you can find — missing front-end parts are the budget-killer.

Year-to-year changes at a glance.

- Fuselage redesign: longer, lower, loop front bumper.
- 383 detuned to 300 hp (standard); 440 4-bbl, 440 Six Barrel, and Hemi optional.
- First year of dual gross/net published ratings.