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The opening pages of

Plymouth Road Runner Satellite 1973

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1973 Plymouth Road Runner

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

Base engine

318 2-bbl, 170 net hp Options 340 4-bbl 240 net hp;
400 4-bbl 260 net hp; 440 4-bbl 280 net hp Road
Runner GTX The 440 option creates the Road
Runner...

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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 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 1973 Unique

The 1973 Road Runner is the model at its most rational: the 318 two-barrel (170 net hp) became the base engine, the 340 continued as the performance small-block, and the 400 and 440 remained as options — with the 440 creating the 'Road Runner GTX' (749 built, all automatic, per published figures). The 5-mph front bumper with its prominent guards is the visual identifier of the 1973 model year.

One published valuation reference describes the 1973 base 318 as a four-barrel engine — but detailed factory specifications confirm the base 318 was a two-barrel (170 net hp, 8.6:1 compression). This guide uses the two-barrel specification and discloses the disagreement rather than repeating the error. It is a small detail that illustrates a large principle: check specifications against factory data, not against valuation summaries.

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The 1973 engine program in full: 318 two-barrel (G, 170 net hp) standard; 340 four-barrel (H, 240 net hp, 8.5:1) optional; 400 four-barrel (P, 260 net hp, 8.2:1) optional; 440 four-barrel (U, 280 net hp, 8.2:1) optional, creating the Road Runner GTX. The 340 remained the enthusiast's choice — the best power-to-weight ratio in the lineup — while the 440 GTX cars are the collectibles.

Production rebounded to 15,929 cars — more than double 1972's 7,628 — as buyers embraced the simplified, affordable performance formula. The 1973 Road Runner is the most affordable entry into documented RM-series ownership, and complete cars remain findable. The 749 GTX cars (all automatic) are the year's blue-chip collectibles.

Restoration notes specific to 1973: the 5-mph front bumper system is 1973-only and must be preserved — do not 'backdate' it, because the VIN and fender tag will always identify the car as a 1973. Verify 1973-only bumper and trim part numbers before buying. The LA small-block and corrected B/RB torque tables cover the 1973 engines. Authentication is the RM prefix, the engine code, the fender tag, and the broadcast sheet.

The 1973's blockier restyle and 5-mph bumper make it visually distinct — authentication is easy (the VIN's year digit and the one-year front end), but restoration trim is 1973-only and thinly reproduced. The G-code 318, H-code 340, P-code 400, and U-code 440 each have their own following; verify the code, not the badges.

The market's last affordable big-block Road Runners: U-code 440 cars (the Road Runner GTX) are the collector's play, the 340 cars are the driver's play, and the 318 cars are honest transportation with a cartoon horn. Values are rational across the board — for now.

Mechanically, these are the most refined and reliable of the breed: electronic ignition, improved materials, and net-rated engines that run happily on modern fuel. A 1973 is the Road Runner to buy if you plan to actually drive it — which, the cartoon suggests, was the point all along.

Year-to-year changes at a glance.