1999 PLYMOUTH Prowler

Early concept sketch

Courtesy of Mecum Auctions

Along with being the world's only factory-built hot rod, the Prowler may be the only production car offered with a matching trailer

Chassis number: 1P3EW65G7XV503308
Trailer number: 1A9UE0718VW294161

by Tom Glatch

Based on the 1993 concept car of the same name, Plymouth's Prowler was designed in the style of the all-American hot rod. Combining an advanced aluminum frame and body with a 3.5L/253-hp V6, independent suspension, power steering and 4-wheel power disc brakes gave the Prowler impressive performance and attracted heated competition between prospective buyers.

Driven a mere 837 miles, this 1999 Prowler roadster boasts a rare red-on-black color scheme, 18-inch front and 20-inch rear aluminum wheels, power windows, cruise control, CD player and chrome-tipped dual exhaust.

ACC Analysis *This 1999 Plymouth Prowler, Lot S112, sold for $41,800, including buyer's premium, at Mecum's auction of the Salmon Brothers Collection in North Little Rock, AR, on June 16, 2012.*

Don Sherman, writing in the October 1996 issue of Motor Trend, summed up the Prowler: "The Prowler is about to yank the Plymouth brand out of oblivion and into the liquid-nitrogen zone of coolness… Although the Prowler rides on a sophisticated sports car suspension, it's never going to threaten Corvette or Viper performance achievements. That isn't its job. The Prowler's assignment is to be a pleasant cruiser and a rolling center of attention."

A new Chrysler

After coming back from the brink of bankruptcy with everything from compacts to luxury cars to minivans built on the K-car platform, Chrysler of the early 1990s was a very different company. Agile and aggressive, and led by some of Detroit's finest gearheads, Chrysler of the post-Iacocca era was poised to produce some of the most interesting vehicles of the past few decades.

First came the 1992 Viper concept car, a modern interpretation of the classic Shelby Cobra that helped revive the Dodge brand. It caused such a stir that within a few years it would be in production. Next was the 1993 Prowler concept. Introduced at the 1993 North American International Auto Show, it created the same kind of reaction as the Viper.

Innovation and the new retro hot rod

The genesis of the Prowler came out of an idea-generating exercise at Chrysler's Pacifica Design Center in May 1990 with the words "hot rod-style retro car" written on a note card. That led to a one-fifth-scale model and a sketch of the concept, which caught the eye of Chrysler President Bob Lutz. Lutz ordered the building of a fully functional prototype, which was the car shown in Detroit. The reaction of the public was overwhelming.

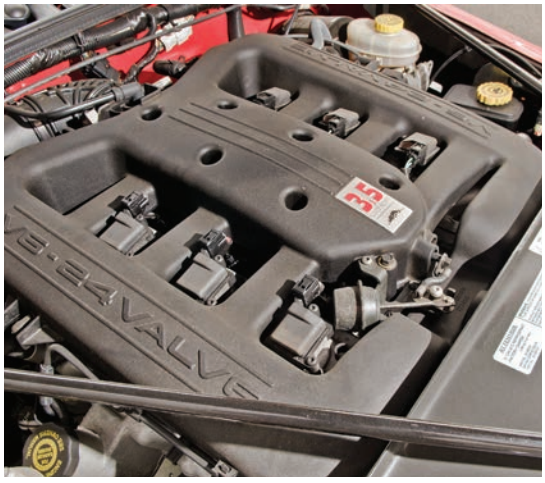
By September 1994, the green light was given to building the Prowler in limited numbers, with the goal of reviving the Plymouth brand as the Viper had done for Dodge. Corporate parts bins were raided for some of the Prowler's components, including the 3.5L SOHC V6 and 4-speed "AutoStick" automatic transaxle from the Chrysler LHS and 300M. But utilizing the drivetrain from a front-wheel-drive vehicle in the rear-drive Prowler required great innovation, with the transaxle being modified and mounted in the rear (like the C5 and C6 Corvettes) and turned by an engine-speed flexible driveshaft.

The Prowler foundation was an aluminum frame fabricated from the latest alloys. The body was also made of aluminum and sheet-formed plastic, joined together with a new compression fastening process. Suspension components were also aluminum, using a new forging process, and the front suspension was based on a Formula 1-like pushrod design that hid the coil-over shocks inside the body.

Although a 214-hp V6 seems very un-hot-rod-like, it propelled the 2,800-pound Prowler just fine (Motor Trend saw 0–60 in 7.1 seconds on a pre-production car). As Chrysler Chairman Bob Eaton said in telling the world that Chrysler would build the Prowler, "It's for real, and either you get it or you don't."

All that and a matching trailer

Along with claiming the title of the world's only factory-built hot rod, the Prowler may be the only production automobile offered with a matching trailer. Prowlers have only the smallest of trunk space, especially with the top lowered, and the $5,000 option offered much-needed room for longer trips — again following hot-rod tradition.



Built mostly by hand at the Connor Avenue Assembly Plant in Detroit (shared with Viper production) at a rate of 14 per day, the Plymouth Prowler hit dealer showrooms in 1997. Just 457 were made, all in Prowler Purple. Production of the 1999 model began in January 1998, so no '98 model was offered. But the '99 and later Prowlers featured a new aluminum 253-hp version of the 3.5L V6 for much better performance (0–60 in under six seconds), along with better fit, finish and ride qualities. Changes over the years were minor, but other paint colors and schemes were introduced. With the demise of the Plymouth brand, the Prowler became a Chrysler in January 2001.

What's it worth?

Shortly after the debut of the Prowler, auctions were selling them for twice sticker price to buyers who just had to be the first on the block to own one. It's not surprising that many were owned by celebrities such as baseball player Sammy Sosa, rock stars Gene Simmons and Alice Cooper, and each member of the boy band 'N SYNC. A highly customized KISS Prowler was sold by Barrett-Jackson in 2001 for $140,400 to the Petersen Museum.

But even lesser Prowlers have retained their value well. Still, many of the 11,702 Prowlers produced have been "personalized," which destroys their resale value (unless you are a member of KISS). But properly cared-for ultra-low-mile Prowlers have been sold in recent years for nearly their factory sticker price.

However, as is the case with many instant collectibles, miles and use can and do limit value. Decent #2 examples are currently valued at about $20k–$35k by the ACC Pocket Price Guide. Any premium in value beyond that comes from stunning showroom condition and lack of miles — and that limits what you can do with them.

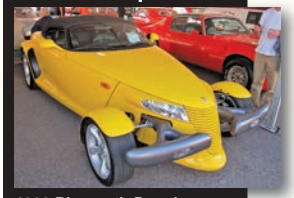
With just 834 miles, our feature car is literally like brand new, and came with the matching factory trailer. Original sticker on the pair would have been about $45k. We rarely get second chances in life, but if the owner of this Prowler missed out on buying one when they were new, he now has a showroom-condition Prowler at market-correct price. Well bought and sold.

(Introductory description courtesy of Mecum Auctions.)

Detailing

Years produced: 1997, 1999–2002
Number produced: 3,921 (in 1999)
Original list price: $39,300 plus $5,000 for matching trailer
Current ACC Valuation: $20,000–$35,000
Tune-up/major service: $300
Distributor cap: n/a
Chassis #: VIN plate behind windshield
Engine #: Front of passenger's side cylinder head
Club: Prowler Owners Association
More: www.prowleronline.com
Alternatives: 2001 Chevrolet Corvette Z06, 1993 Dodge Viper RT/10, Fiberglass 1932 Ford roadster replica
ACC Investment Grade: B

Comps



1999 Plymouth Prowler
Lot 1585, S/N 1P3EW65G2XV500977
Condition: 3-
Sold at $37,400
Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/15/2012
ACC# 192549

2001 Chrysler Prowler Mulholland Edition
Lot 156, S/N 1C3EW65G21V703539
Condition: 2-
Sold at $28,678
Artcurial, Paris, FRA, 10/30/2011
ACC# 187836

1999 Plymouth Prowler
Lot 799, S/N 1P3EW65G2XV505129
Condition: 2
Not sold at $24,000
Kruse International, Honolulu, HI, 2/8/2008
ACC# 51949