

1969 PLYMOUTH BARRACUDA FORMULA S FASTBACK

Plymouth's balanced pony



Courtesy of Barrett-Jackson

With only a few tweaks, Ronnie Sox sent a 4-speed 340 through the lights at a big-block-killing 13.33 seconds at 106.5 mph

VIN: BH29P9B199722

by Tom Glatch

- Rare, matching-numbers 1969 Barracuda Formula S
- 340-ci engine with rare 4-speed manual transmission
- Fresh restoration with 500 test miles
- In storage for 30 years before show-winning restoration
- Built with high-quality original and reproduction parts. Only deviations from stock are the addition of an Edelbrock carburetor with electric choke and Mopar performance electronic ignition, along with March pulley set
- Trunk and cargo area house an Alpine amplifier and Infinity speakers to allow music via iPod hookup hidden under dash

ACC Analysis This car, Lot 131, sold for \$47,300, including buyer's premium, at Barrett-Jackson's Las Vegas auction on September 26, 2013.

On April 1, 1964, a new kind of automobile was introduced to the American public. It had a sporty look, yet had room for five passengers and plenty of cargo. V8 power was available, too. *Car Life* magazine reported, "Few cars we have driven for our continuing

series of road tests have stirred up so much interest among the motorists encountered during the period of the test." The revolutionary 1964½ Mustang? No, that would be revealed 16 days later.

In what must be the worst timing of any automobile launch, the Plymouth Barracuda was actually the first "pony car" announced. Both new cars were similar in concept — the Barracuda was built off the compact Valiant, while the Mustang came from the Falcon. But that is where the similarities stopped.

Off on the wrong foot

Ford hid the Falcon in a long-hood/short-tail body that was the essence of sportiness. Along with the smashing style went enough performance options to keep most buyers happy, at least at first.

The Barracuda, on the other hand, looked like a Valiant with a fastback top grafted on, which, in fact, it was. Even the official name, "Plymouth Valiant Barracuda," and the plethora of "Valiant" badges tacked on it did nothing to hide this fact.

The Barracuda was actually a pretty good car, but first impressions are hard to change. The result was the 1964½ Mustang is still the most successful new automobile in history. In comparison, the Barracuda was merely a footnote.

Formula S

Things improved in 1965, when the Formula S option was added to the Barracuda lineup. With the help of Chrysler engineer/rally racer Scott Harvey, the addition of stiffer suspension, stronger brakes and a more powerful 273-ci V8 made the Formula S the car the Barracuda should have been right from the start. But by the end of the 1966 model year, 126,058 Barracudas had been built, versus 1,288,557 Mustangs.

But Plymouth didn't give up, and big changes were made to the Barracuda in 1967 — most notably new sheet metal that completely distanced it from the Darts and Valiants that shared the A-body platform. Now it was available in hard top and convertible form, as well as the original fastback.

Performance was also increased, with the addition of an optional 383 B-block V8 later that year, and a 440 version of the same engine in 1969. It was a true shoehorn job to get this large engine in the A-body engine compartment, and items such as power steering, power disc brakes, and air conditioning no longer fit.

But another performance option became available in 1969: Chrysler's high-winding new 340 small block, conservatively rated at 275 hp (the NHRA factored it at 310 hp). Whether mated to the Formula S model or to the similar 'Cuda 340 model, this became, in many ways, the ideal all-around Barracuda.

Best in balance

Car Life magazine wrote, "In choosing between the 'Cuda 340 and the 'Cuda 440 then, it depends on what the buyer is looking for. If he wants acceleration and performance alone, the 440 will deliver, thank you. But for a 'complete' car, one not so fast, but one that handles and stops, the obvious choice is the 340. Indeed, there are such obvious discrepancies between the superb way the 'Cuda 440 goes, and the way it does other things (like, for example, stop) that in many ways it is a disturbing automobile.... As it stands now, the 440 is not a good, or complete, package. Everything it does, except for dragstrip performance,



the smaller 340 'Cuda does better."

But Hot Rod magazine found that the 340 was even better than the 440 on the strip. In what was one of the all-time great road-test coups, Ronnie Sox just happened to be doing some development of a 340 Barracuda for Plymouth the day the Hot Rod editors were to pick up their test car. That's right, the late, legendary "Mr. 4-Speed" of Sox and Martin fame.


He agreed to help Hot Rod get the most out of their track test, and with only the addition of a Holley carb, Edelbrock manifold, and Hooker fenderwell headers, Sox sent the 4-speed 340 through the lights at a big-block-killing 13.33 seconds at 106.5 mph.

Even running through mufflers, he consistently turned 13.70 times. Hot Rod's conclusion? "We agree with Ronnie Sox's opinion that the 'Cuda 340 held more interest and pleasure value than many other super-cars. This little runner is a super-car, without any doubt attached. It is also a "pony-car," a compact, a work-horse, and a sizeable threat on the drag strip. The price isn't all bad either."

Small-block power, big-block money

Buyers of American performance often believe in "bigger is better" — the larger the engine's displacement, the better the automobile, and the higher the price they are willing to spend. This '69 Barracuda buyer bucked that trend. He must have listened to Ronnie Sox.

In the modern market, sales of these cars are surprisingly uncommon, but Mecum sold a nice '67 383 fastback in May 2013 for \$32,100 (ACC# 224005), while Barrett-Jackson sold a similar '69 'Cuda 440 in 2010 for \$48,400 (ACC# 155052). That makes this sale look especially strong.

Granted, our feature car is very original, beautifully restored, and has been mildly "restified" to make it an even better driver, but few small blocks of any kind sell for big-block money. This 340 Formula S was very well sold, but considering the overall bang for the buck of this package, I think the price was still a great value for the buyer. 

(Introductory description courtesy of Barrett-Jackson.)



Detailing

Years produced: 1967–69
Number produced: 1,431
 (1969 Formula S 340 fastback)
Original list price: \$2,999
Current ACC Valuation: \$18,000–\$35,000
Tune-up/major service: \$150
Distributor cap: \$12.97
Chassis #: VIN plate on the driver's side instrument panel behind windshield
Engine #: Pad located on the right side of the block to the rear of the engine mount
Club: Walter P. Chrysler Club
More: www.chryslerclub.org
Alternatives: 1969 Ford Mustang 351, 1969 Chevrolet Camaro 350, 1969 Pontiac Firebird 350
ACC Investment Grade: C

Comps



1966 Plymouth Barracuda Formula S
 Lot T302, VIN: BP29D62673640
 Condition: 2-
 Sold at \$15,635
 Mecum Auctions, Indianapolis, IN, 5/19/2010
 ACC# 162749



1968 Plymouth Barracuda Formula S 383
 Lot S99, VIN: BH23H8B175622
 Condition: 1-
 Not sold at \$55,000
 Mecum Auctions, Kansas City, MO, 4/9/2010
 ACC# 160291



1968 Plymouth Barracuda Formula S 383
 Lot SP37, VIN: BH23H8B153436
 Condition: 2+
 Sold at \$41,800
 RM Auctions, Novi, MI, 4/25/2009
 ACC# 120358