1969 PLYMOUTH ROAD RUNNER

Cheap Fun

Basic American performance icons, such as the 1968–70 Road Runner, will slowly increase in value in the long run

VIN: RM21H9G188603

by Tom Glatch

- Rotisserie-restored to original condition
- 13,075 original miles
- Matching-numbers 383-ci V8 engine and 4-speed manual transmission

ACC Analysis *This car, Lot 355, sold for $32,450, including buyer's premium, at Barrett-Jackson's Palm Beach, FL, auction on April 12, 2019.*

In the early 1970s, many of my freshly licensed friends bought used 1969 Plymouth Road Runners. You could call Road Runners the Timex watches of the automotive world — they were inexpensive, they took a licking, and despite our best efforts, they kept on ticking.

When new, most American muscle cars required quite a sacrifice of funds at the dealership. The slick next-generation Pontiac GTO that debuted in 1968, the same year the Road Runner hit the showrooms, had a base price of $3,101. Add a few options and the sticker could cross $3,500.

Other similar-performance machines such as the Olds Cutlass 442 or Ford Torino GT cost even more.

But the '68 Road Runner started at $2,896 for the post coupe, $3,034 for the hard top, and options and amenities were minimal. Adjusted for inflation, the difference between the base GTO and the least-expensive Road Runner would be more like $2,200 today, which could be a deal-breaker at a time when the minimum wage was $1.60 per hour.

When they hit the used market in the 1970s, Road Runners were ideal for young car people with a need for performance. For as little as $800, you could buy something like our subject car. That was the beauty of the Road Runner: Whether new or used, it packed maximum punch for the dollar.

Priced right for success

The Road Runner was the smash hit of 1968, with Plymouth selling 44,599 of them. It was crude, but could deliver 0–60 in 7.1 seconds and blow through the quarter mile in 15.0 @ 96 mph, all while display-

ing minimalist swagger.

When the Road Runner won Motor Trend*'s Car of the Year award in 1969,* Motor Trend *Technical Editor Eric Dahlquist wrote, "The idea of an inexpensive, high-performance car was not completely original — other manufacturers had built them before. Plymouth's master stroke was the all-encompassing scope of their thrust — the cartoon character, beep-beep horn, decals, jackets, ad campaign, Sox & Martin drag clinics, all of it. It was the first time their company offered not just a car, but a mood: the Road Runner is in — the car to have if you feel or are young."*

There were many more options available in 1969, a convertible was added to the lineup, and 82,292 Road Runners were sold. This was the first time America's first muscle car, the GTO, was dethroned from the top of the sales list, as both the Chevelle SS and Road Runner surpassed the Pontiac.

Adjusted money

Fifty years later, you can't buy a '69 Road Runner for $2,800, but they are still a relative bargain for their style and fun factor.

The ACC 2019 Pocket Price Guide shows a $38,500 median price for a basic Road Runner coupe. As long as a potential buyer stays away from the rare Hemi Road Runners (median price: $80,500) or the ultra-performance A12 440 Six-Barrel Road Runners (median price: $100,000), Plymouth's performance master stroke can still be reasonably priced — but it's by no means the cheap buy it once was.

Mopar's excellence in execution, from marketing to pricing and performance in-period, drove these cars to icon status when they were new. Then, prices soared on the best examples as the demographic grew aged and enriched. But after the 2000s market boom and crash, these B-body Mopars — and most similar mass-market American muscle machines — have seen values sit relatively flat.

Until the generations after mine tire of their generic-looking sedans and discover the visceral thrills of driving a Q-machine like the Road Runner, I doubt the values of '60s muscle will change much.

Muscling in

There will never be more quality 383 Road Runners than there are right now, especially as more are turned into Hemi-powered "tributes" or Pro Touring cars.

I belong to the Original GTO Club in southeastern Wisconsin, and the number of young members who have recently joined — and the nice Pontiacs they have purchased — is instructive. Once someone experiences the roar of a big-block, the howl of a wide-open 4-barrel, and the satisfying joy of slamming a bulletproof 4-speed or automatic — all those lickings that Road Runners like our subject were so good at taking — the desire to be in the "in" crowd takes over.

That's why basic American performance icons, such as the 1968–70 Road Runner, will slowly increase in value in the long run — with the best-condition and best-documented examples leading.

Our featured Plymouth claims a nut-and-bolt rotisserie restoration and just 13,075 original miles, yet it sold for $5k less than the median at Barrett-Jackson.

Other similar muscle machines at this same auction sold at or above average prices, so I think buyers may have felt this particular undocumented 'Runner was just a little too good to be true.

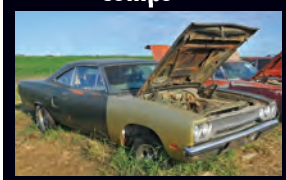
However, considering its condition, usability, the current market median and the long-term outlook for cars like this, I'd still call this Road Runner well bought.

(Introductory description courtesy of Barrett-Jackson.)

DETAILING

Years produced: 1968–70
Number produced: 82,292 (all variants, 1969)
Original list price: $3,083
Current ACC Median Valuation: $39,000
Tune-up/major service: $150
VIN location: Plate on top of instrument panel at base of windshield
Engine # location: Pad on right side of block to rear of engine mount
Alternatives: 1969 Dodge Coronet Super Bee, 1969 Pontiac GTO Judge, 1969 Chevrolet Chevelle SS 396.
ACC Investment Grade: C

Comps



1970 Plymouth Road Runner coupe
Lot 114M, VIN: RM21N0C153528
Condition: 5-
Sold at $6,825
VanDerBrink, Mansfield, SD, 6/9/2018
ACC# 6871949

1970 Plymouth Road Runner 2-dr hard top
Lot 1018, VIN: RM23N0A133434
Condition: 2
Sold at $55,000
W. Yoder Auctions, Wautoma, WI, 4/20/2018
ACC# 6868036

1969 Plymouth Road Runner 2-dr hard top
Lot ST0013, VIN: RM23H9G297905
Condition: 3+
Sold at $39,000
GAA, Greensboro, NC, 3/22/2018
ACC# 6863946