

1970 Plymouth Hemi 'Cuda



A fast fish with sharp teeth

by Thomas Glatch

photography by the author

In 1970 thunder was heard in America as Plymouth unleashed the unforgettable Hemi 'Cuda. Other versions were offered — 340, 383, 440 and 440 Six-Pack — but the Hemi 'Cuda simultaneously brought the ponycar and musclecar to a climax.

From day one the Barracuda had been Plymouth's sporty car. Introduced in 1964, the Barracuda was America's first ponycar. Grafting a stylish fastback top onto the Valiant, Plymouth engineers introduced their ponycar on April 1, 1964, 16 days before the first Mustang hit the showrooms. The uniquely styled Mustang sold millions, the Barracuda did not.

Still Plymouth continued to upgrade the Barracuda. It received all-new styling and a 383 big-block option in 1967, shedding its Valiant-derived looks. More muscle came on line in 1969, with 'Cuda 340 or 'Cuda 383 option and a

monster 440 motor which barely fit the narrow engine compartment. What about the Hemi? Except for a few race cars built by Hurst, the Hemi was just too huge to install in the A-body platform on a production basis. But for Barracuda, a new age was about to dawn.

John Herlitz, who played a major role in the design and styling of the new E-body Barracuda, told *Musclecar Review* (September 1990): "We were to share certain components — front floor pan and cowl structure — with the B-body, which was the 1966 Belvedere. So we designed the envelope of the car, width-wise, around that (B-body) in order to use the firewall structure and front floor pan. Then, as the program developed, engineering, for other reasons, abandoned sharing, but we still ended up with a car that was as wide as an intermediate. And as long as a ponycar! We wanted the short deck and the long hood, but what was also very important was that we wanted to especially maximize the power statement of what the Hemi was doing at the drag strip because the 426 was going to be offered, we knew, in the E-body cars, and they were platformed to take that engine and powertrain."

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Hemi 'Cuda Specifications

Base Price	\$3,164
Hemi Option	\$871.45
Current value (est.)	\$85,000-\$100,000

Production

1970 'Cuda Total Production	
Coupe	18,880
Convertible	635
Hemi 'Cuda Coupe Total	
Four-speed	652
Automatic	284
Automatic	
Convertible Total	14
Four-speed	5
Automatic	9

Performance*

0-30 mph	3.0 sec.
0-45 mph	4.4 sec.
0-60 mph	6.9 sec.
0-75 mph	9.4 sec.
Quarter-mile	13.70/101.2

*Motor Trend, Sept. 1969

Engine

Type	Cast iron V-8 OHV
	90-degree Hemi head
Bore and stroke	4.25 x 3.75
Displacement	426 cid
Compression ratio	10.25:1
Horsepower	425 @ 5000 rpm
Torque	490 @ 4000 rpm
Carburetion	Two Carter AFB four-barrels
Camshaft	490 in. lift intake,
	481 in. lift ex., hydraulic lifters
Valve size	2.25 intake/1.94 exhaust

Drivetrain

Transmission	A833 four-speed
Axle	Dana 60
Ratio	3.54:1 Sure Grip

Suspension

Front	Torsion bar, 0.92-inch dia.
Rear	Leaf: six leaves left,
	5 leaves and 2 half-leaves right
Steering	Manual 24:1 Power: 15.7:1
Brakes	11 x 3-inch drums front,
	11 x 2.5-inch rear
Tires	F60 x 15

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1970 Hemi 'Cuda
Owner: Larry Haveman
Zeeland, MI

And what a power statement. Still delivering a conservatively rated 425 horsepower and an earth-shaking 490 lbs.-ft. of torque, the street Hemi fit its new E-body home like a hand in a glove, and with hydraulic lifters introduced in 1970, the Hemi kept its performance edge with less owner attention. Said Chrysler staff engineer Larry Shepard, "There is practically nothing, outside of keeping it in standard recommended tune, that can be done to increase the performance of the street Hemi for street use." All this for \$871 extra.

Delivering that "elephant" power to the Dana 60 Sure Grip rearend were two transmission options — a Torqueflite automatic with Mopar's new "slick shift" ratchet shifter, or an A833 18-spline four-speed with a new "strip grip" pistol-grip shift handle. All Hemi 'Cudas came with a .88-inch front sway bar, .92-inch front torsion bars, special rear leaf springs, 11-inch heavy-duty drum brakes (front discs optional), and the largest, widest tires available at the time, F60x15 fiberglass belted Goodyears on 7-inch rims.

Four performance axle packages were offered, the top of the line being the Super Track Pak (code A34), consisting of a Sure Grip differential and 4.10:1 gears in a tough Dana 60 rearend, backed up by a 7-blade torque drive fan, 26-inch radiator with fan shroud and power disc brakes for \$235.65.

How did the legend perform? *Motorcade* magazine (November 1969) reported: "It's about as far as Plymouth people can go with their thunderous street Hemi engine, putting it in the revamped Barracuda ponycar, and they've turned it loose in the animal preserve this year. Taking deep breaths through its twin four-barrel carburetors, the Hemi 'Cuda can leap long dragstrips in a single bound — at speeds that'll have the SS/B competition gasping like asthmatics." *Motor Trend* tested a Hemi 'Cuda prototype for its September 1969 issue and discovered tire technology was no match for Hemi power: "With the new 'Cuda a quarter-mile goes by so fast you hardly know you started. Even though our car had the widest optional F60x15 tires, we still experienced considerable wheel spin which cut ETS." A few months later (May 1970), they tested another automatic-



equipped Hemi 'Cuda and again reported, "The Hemi had to be babied 'til it was well on its way down the strip, as it could really spin the tires. Shifts were made at 6200 rpm and the car was very consistent, 14.0s at 102 mph.

The Hemi 'Cuda may have represented the swan song of the musclecar era, but what a sweet song!

On October 6, 1969, this breathtaking Hemi 'Cuda rolled down the Hamtramck, Michigan, assembly line, picking up a "strip-grip" shifted A833 four-speed, 3.54:1 Sure Grip Dana 60, deluxe Black vinyl interior, Rallye instrument cluster, AM radio, and woodgrain steering wheel to make it at home on both the drag strip and the main drag. Dressed in EV2 Tor Red high-impact paint, argent silver shaker hood, black hockey stick side stripes, and a set of Rallye wheels, the 'Cuda was also ready to make a power statement even before a wheel was turned.

Larry Haveman owns it today, glowing from a ground-up restoration by Muscle Cars Unlimited in Ferrysberg, Michigan. In its first showing, Larry's 'Cuda earned first place in the E-body Original Class at the 1990 Mopar Nationals.

The temptation to drive this awesome beast is irresistible. Twisting the key, then pushing the "strip-grip" into gear, Larry eases down on the loud pedal. This is what Rapid Transit is all about!

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