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THE DEFINITIVE ALL-AMERICAN COLLECTOR-CAR MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 2015 #133



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Fury OF THE '50s

PLYMOUTH's UPSCALE PERFORMANCE CAR



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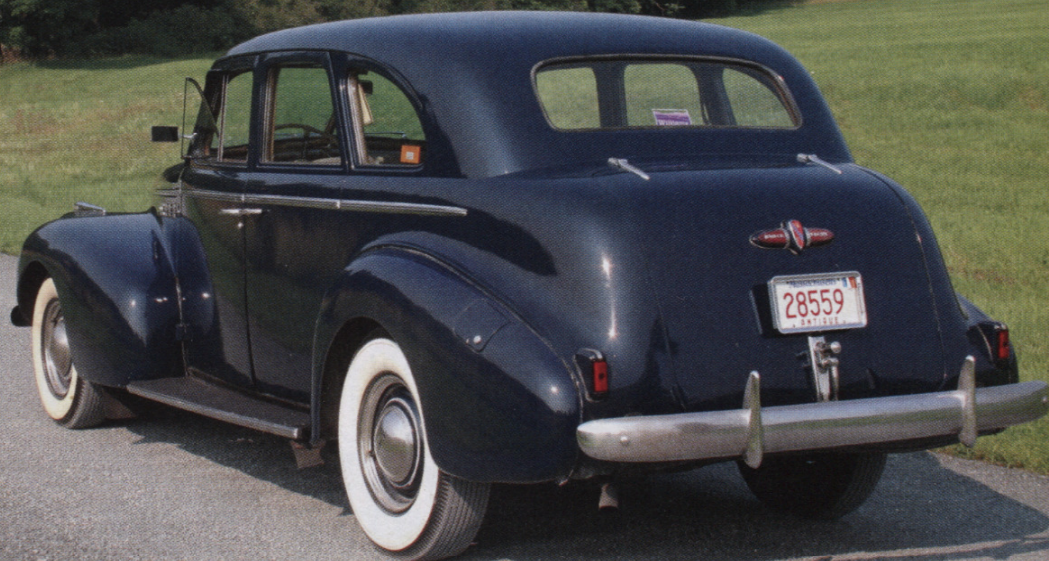


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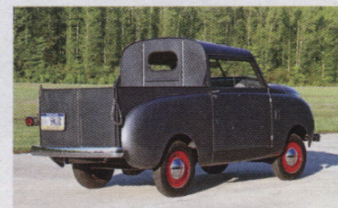
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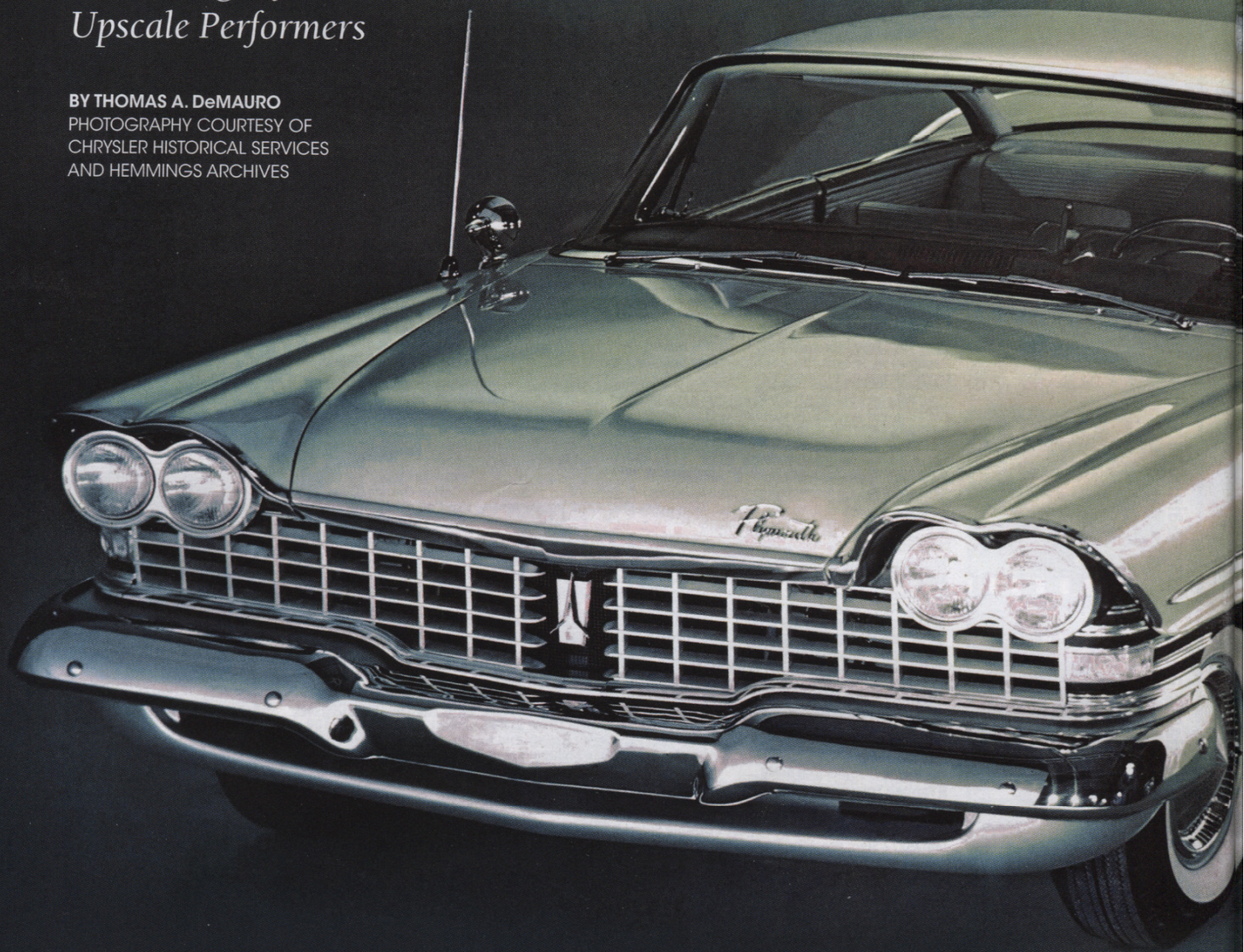
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Forward Look Furys of the '50s

Examining Plymouth's 1956 to 1959

Upscale Performers

BY THOMAS A. DeMAURO
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF
CHRYSLER HISTORICAL SERVICES
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1956



1959

A poor sales year for most automakers, 1956 was especially disappointing for Chrysler following the success of Virgil Exner's Forward Look 1955 models. Having slid from its third-place spot in industry sales a few years before, Plymouth, Chrysler's top-selling division, was intent on regaining it.

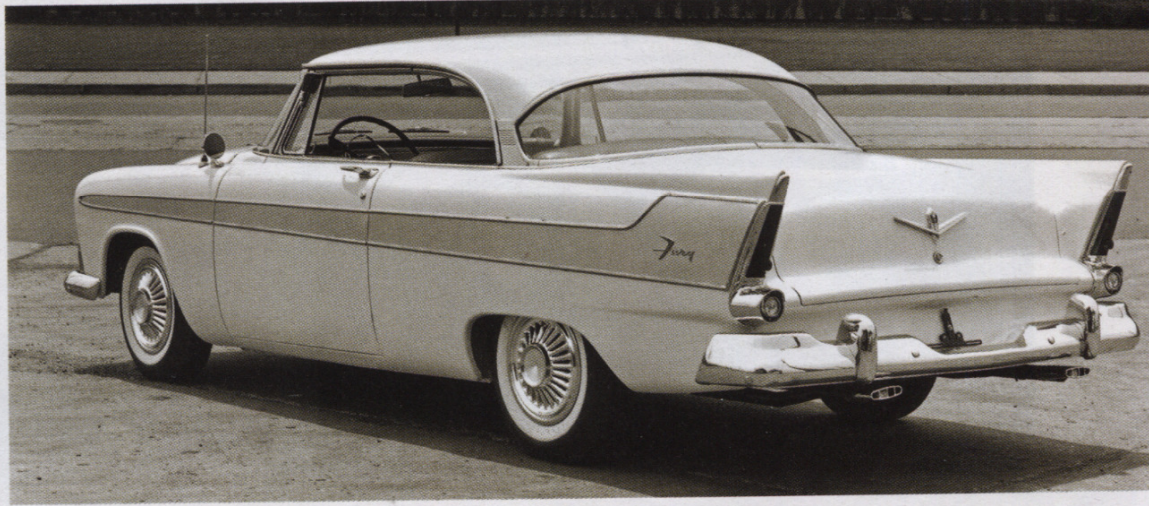
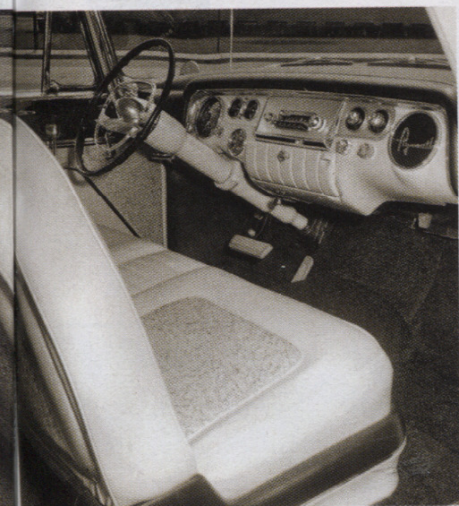
For 1956, "Flight-Sweep" styling showed consumers that Plymouth was more than just a manufacturer of low-priced models. The mid-season introduction of the Fury would further cultivate a new image aimed at buyers who were "Young in Heart," as the ad copy read.

The diligent effort to field its own luxury/performance limited-edition model, despite corporate resistance, finally came to fruition, and in January of 1956 the Fury was introduced at the Chicago Auto Show. Offered in a single paint color and with gold side trim and grille, a special V-8 engine from Canadian Chryslers, heavy-duty suspension, dual exhaust and a standard in-dash tach, the Fury was a statement for this builder of normally conservative cars.

Also in January, a Fury broke the U.S. "flying mile" speed record for its displacement class at Daytona, running 124.01 MPH under NASCAR supervision. Though during its abbreviated inaugural model year just 4,485 Furys were built, positive press and buyer acceptance paved the way for the next.

"Suddenly, its 1960!" was the 1957 Plymouth tagline, and the division certainly appeared to have broken the time barrier when its models were compared to its taller, boxier competition. Exner's Forward Look really hit its stride with heavily revised lower, longer and wider models. The fins grew, and the company maintained that those "Directional Stabilizers" aided stability at highway speeds.

Chrysler redesigned its bodies and introduced Torsion-Aire ride and the three-speed automatic TorqueFlite (Imperials got it





not to mention premature rust problems. The damage to its reputation haunted Chrysler for the next few years. Overall market share dipped to near 14 percent, and though Plymouth retained third place, its sales pace was off by over 300,000 units. Fury sales dipped to just 5,303 cars.

To close out the decade, the Fury became its own line in 1959, with a two-door and four-door hardtop and a four-door sedan offered. High horsepower and distinctive styling were

in the latter part of the 1956 sales season), and the gamble paid off—initially. Road testers gushed over the styling, handling and sure-shifting optional transmission, and GM designers hurried to revamp their 1959 proposals.

Chrysler's first-quarter earnings were its highest ever, and overall market share rebounded to over 18 percent for 1957, its highest since the early 1950s, while GM receded to its lowest in the last few years. Plymouth recaptured third place, and with the benefit of a full sales season and its styling and engineering upgrades, Fury production rose to 7,438 units.

The rejoicing didn't last long, however. Most automakers' sales suffered in 1958, but Chrysler's reversal of fortune was both swift and decisive. According to a 1958 *Fortune* magazine article, the automaker's first-quarter earnings were the lowest in company history. In the span of one year, it had its record-setting best and worst quarters.

An economic recession was partly to blame, but the rush to market with so many innovations resulted in build-quality issues,

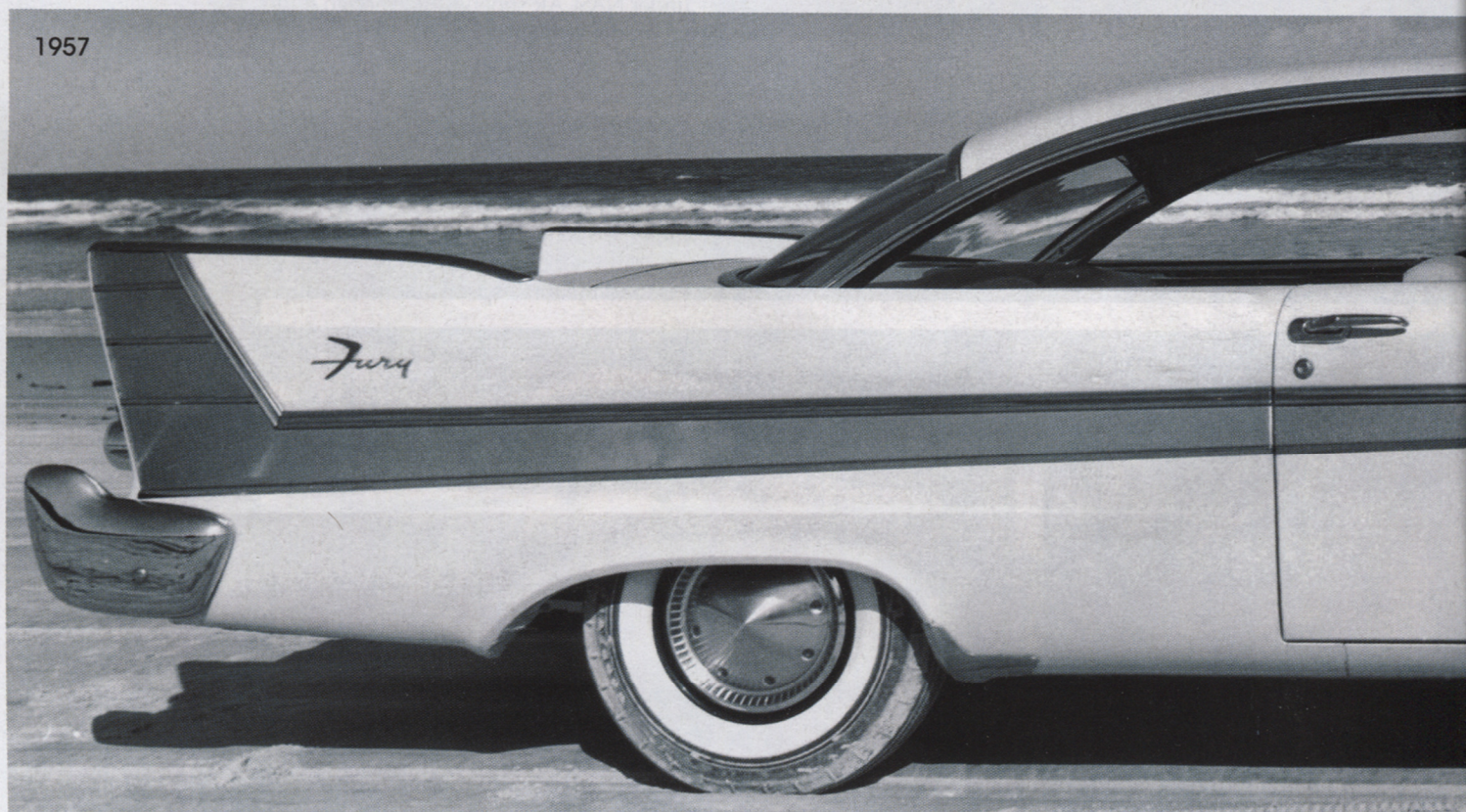
maintained in the new Sport Fury in the familiar two-door hardtop and a new convertible—the first since the 1956 introduction. By model-year end, Chrysler's overall market share hovered in the low teens, Plymouth held onto third place in sales, and the Sport Fury exceeded 23,800 in sales.

Now let's take a closer look at what Furys of the Fifties had to offer.

1956

With a then-premium price for Plymouth of \$2,866, the upscale Belvedere-based Fury was only offered in Eggshell White, and unique exterior visual cues included a gold anodized aluminum color-sweep along each side and a gold accent in the grille.

Plymouth mostly retained the frontal appearance of the highly successful 1955 models. The 1956 incarnations had a new hood ornament, and "Plymouth" block lettering was added to the leading edge of the hood. The center of the grille area now featured a small rectangular grille with a box pattern in gold and a "V" emblem to denote V-8. Though there was a subtle hint of tailfins for 1955, for 1956 they



became more pronounced with a distinct upward sweep. Tail-lamps grew taller and thinner, and backup lamps were larger. The new Fury was 204.8-inches long, 74.6 inches wide and 58.8-inches high—about an inch lower than other Plymouths.

The 303-cu.in. displacement V-8 employed polyspherical combustion chambers that realized some of the benefits of the hemispherical design offered in the Imperials, Chryslers, De Sotos and Dodges, but instead employed a single rocker shaft on each cylinder head to allay the higher production cost and weight of the hemi's dual rocker-shaft valvetrain.

The 303 featured 9.25:1 compression, a 3.81/3.31-inch bore/stroke, domed pistons, a high-performance solid-lifter cam and heavy-duty valve springs. Fuel was provided by a Carter WCFB four-barrel carburetor, dual-breaker distributor and a low-restriction dual-exhaust system. The result was 240hp at 4,800 RPM and 310-lb.ft. of torque at 2,800 RPM.

Later, a dealer-installed package became available for the 303 that added dual four-barrel carburetors, new air cleaners, an aluminum intake manifold and a hot camshaft. Output was boosted to 270 hp.

The remainder of the drivetrain consisted of a heavy-duty clutch for the standard three-speed manual transmission and an optional PowerFlite two-speed automatic transmission with new pushbutton actuation. The rear end housed 3.73 gears and other ratios were optional.

Built on a 115-inch wheelbase and featuring a 58.8-inch front and 58.9-inch rear track, the Fury was developed for "superior handling at all speeds and in cornering." It had heavy-duty front coil and rear leaf springs and a "high-rate" front anti-roll bar. Beefy 11-inch "Safe-Guard" drum brakes, which employed two wheel cylinders in each drum up front, were paired with conventional single-wheel-cylinder brakes at the rear, and 15x5.5-inch Safety-Rim wheels with 7.10x15 nylon cord tires.

Though oddly placed just to the right and above the steering column but low in the instrument panel, a 6,000 RPM tachometer with "Fury" and cross-flags on its face was standard. Since it

claimed the real estate for the ignition switch, it was moved to the left, thereby displacing the wiper switch, which was relocated...to the passenger side!

Foam rubber seat and back cushions were treated to "woven luxury fabrics." Beige bolsters were upholstered in "breathable"-grained vinyl and the carpet was black. Tan and black cloth panels with gold metallic thread adorned the seats and door panels and the armrests were integrated into the latter.

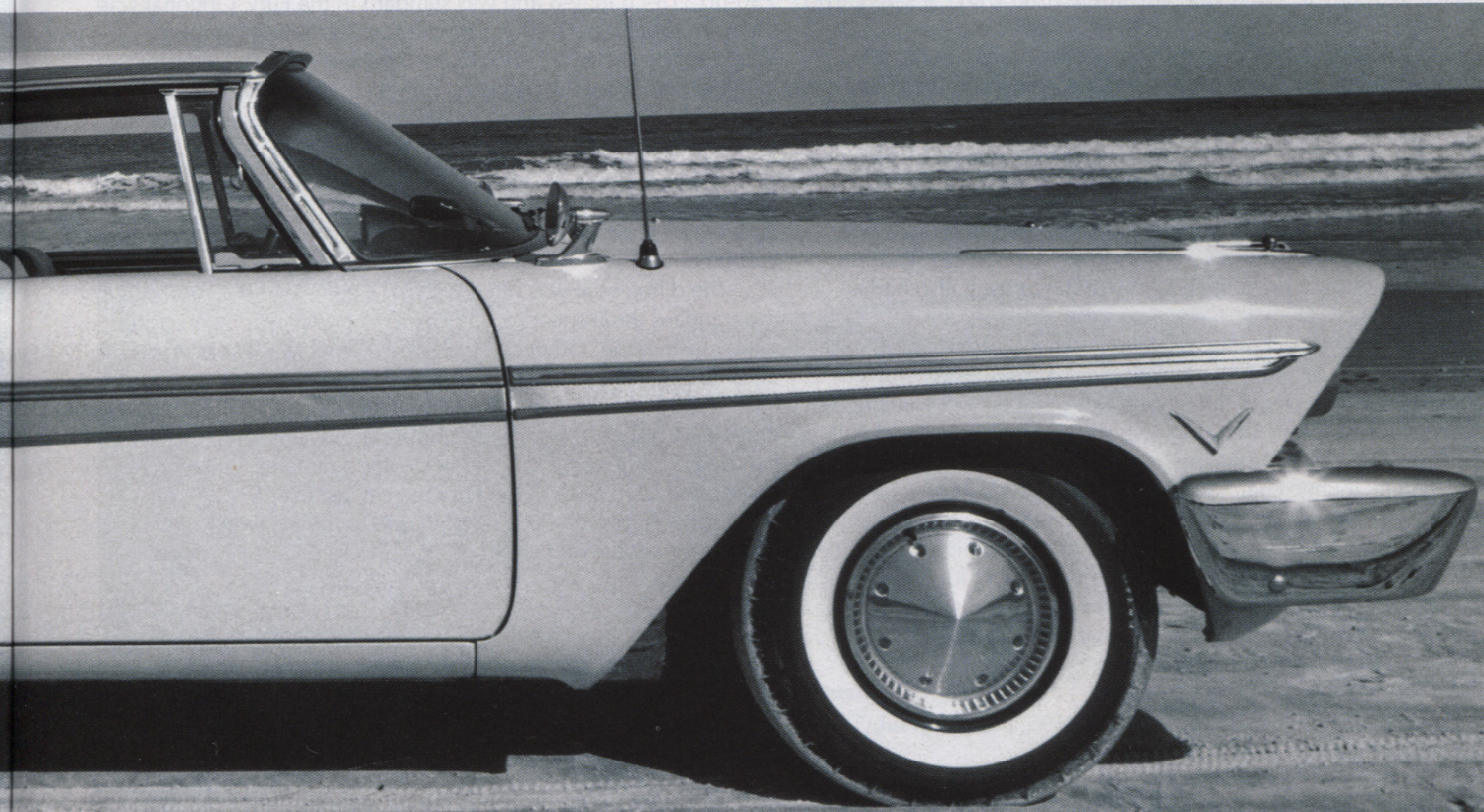
Rounding out the Fury's comprehensive standard-equipment list of body, interior, engine and chassis enhancements came backup lamps; variable-speed windshield wipers; rain shields; rear bumper guards; bright drip moldings; dual exhaust deflectors; windshield washer; prismatic-type rearview mirror and dual outside rearview mirrors. Power steering, brakes, seat and windows comprised some of the available options.

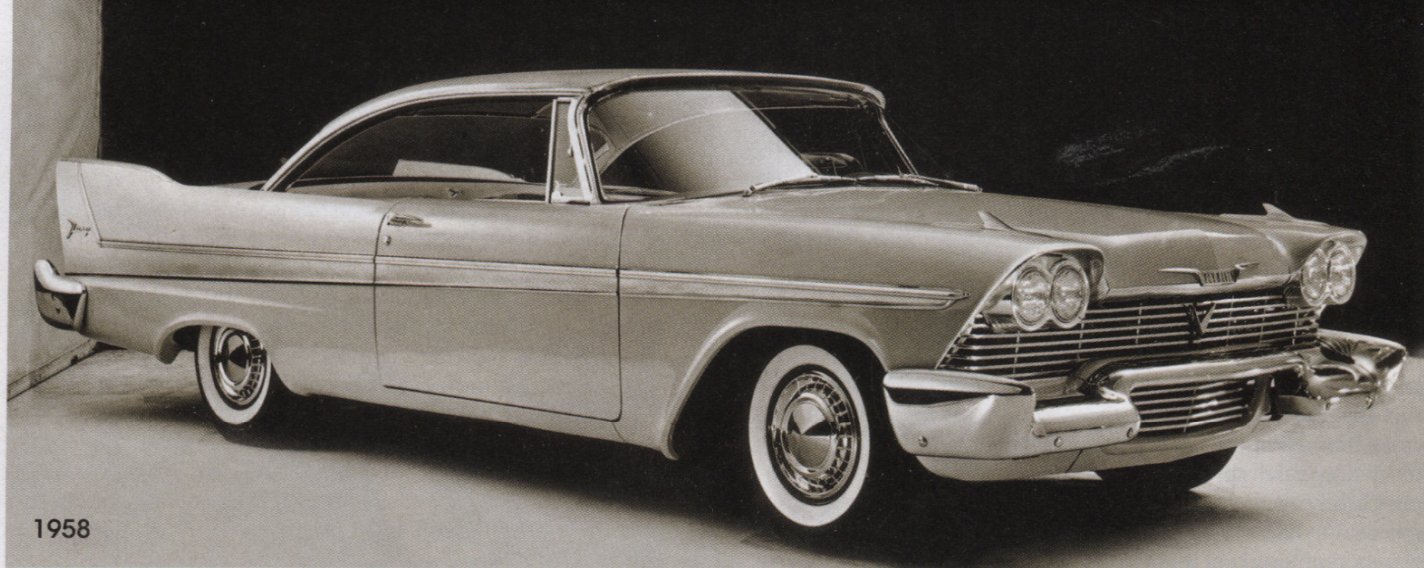
1957

This year, the Forward Look took the lower, longer, wider philosophy to the extreme and the public adored it. The Fury's all-new body was longer at 206 inches, nearly 5 inches wider at 79.4 inches and over 5 inches lower at 53.5 inches, and it rode on a 3-inch longer wheelbase at 118 inches.

Sand Dune White was the only color choice, and revised versions of the familiar anodized gold grille and aluminum side sweeps returned. Hooded "Double Header" lights provided the impression of quad headlamps, but the inners were parking lamps/turn signals. The horizontal-bar grille ran completely across the front end and wrapped into the front fenders. The bumper kicked up in the middle and also at either end with "wing guards." The valance beneath it featured vertical air intakes. An emblem was centered in the grille, "Plymouth" block letters embellished the hood, and bright ornaments rode atop the fenders. The heavy brow, raised bumper center and wide grille gave the Fury an angry scowl, which implied that it was prepared for all competitors.

A "V" on the front fenders denoted V-8, the graceful wheelwells were revised. Flight-Sweep styling, with its continuous line





from the forward-angled nose to the upswept larger fins, remained evident. The Fury's side trim accentuated the lowness of the body, but also the height of the rear. Its roofline was simple and elegant with thin A- and C-pillars that provided "Control Tower visibility" with 29 percent more glass area.

"Fury" script returned to each rear quarter panel, and though the taillamps were similar in shape, filling those fins made them larger than those of 1956. Backup lamps were mounted in chrome housings beneath them. Somewhat like the rakish roof, the deck lid descended in a gentle slope to meet the concave rear panel. Like the front bumper on Furies, the wing guards on the outer ends of the rear bumper were standard. The center of the bumper dipped down to accommodate the license plate, and that area was decorated with vertical lines.

The Fury's new 318 cu.in. V-8 featured 9.25:1 compression, Poly cylinder heads, high-performance camshaft, two four-barrel Carter carbs, dual-breaker distributor and 290hp at 5,400 RPM and 325-lb.ft. of torque at 4,000 RPM. The famed TorqueFlite three-speed automatic transmission became an option and connected to 3.36 rear gears, but 3.54s were used with the standard three-speed manual. Other ratios were optional.

The new "Safety Power" boxed-steel perimeter frame was stronger and wider. Tread width was increased to 60.9 inches and 59.6 inches (and would remain the same through 1959). Torsion-Aire suspension replaced the front coil springs. Control arms, torsion bars, ball-joints and an anti-roll bar comprised the system in front. New "outrigger mounted" rear leaf springs also located the rear end more toward the front of the springs to reduce axle hop. The revised suspension was designed to decrease squat on launching, dive on braking and sway in the turns. It also had a lower center of gravity.

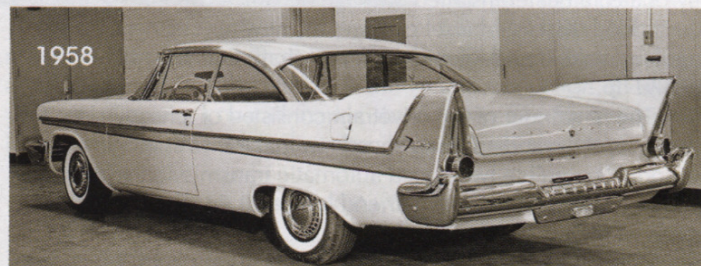
Overall steering ratio was 26.8:1, with 4.8 turns to lock but was reduced to 19.8 and 3.5 turns to lock with optional power steering. The diameter of the wheels was reduced to 14-inches, but widened 1/2-inch with 14x6-inch wheels becoming standard with 8.00x14-inch Nylon 4-ply tires.

Wider "lounge chair" seats were upholstered in new patterns, and the instrument panel was revised. Along with all the standard Fury items from 1956, except for the tachometer, this year's model added the two-tone steering wheel, safety padding for instrument panel, padded sun visors and "sweep-second self-regulating watch." The base price for all this Mopar was just under \$3,000.

1958

Buckskin Beige and trimmed in gold, the 1958 Fury was subtly revised visually.

Actual quad headlamps were introduced, and the parking lamps were incorporated into the turn signals above the head-



lamps. The "V" moved to the center of the grille, an emblem replaced the hood letters and the fender-top embellishments were revised. The lower valance air-intake insert resembled the grille.

Rear quarter-panel "Fury" script moved into the aluminum panel and replaced the three bright trim lines of 1957. Taillamps became smaller and round, but they protruded far enough to be seen from the side as well. Plymouth lettering replaced the decklid emblem, and the backup lamp was moved to the bumper.

The Dual Fury V-800 engine was last year's two-four-barrel 290-hp 318-cu.in. V-8 and was standard in the Fury. Optional was the new 350-cu.in. Golden Commando V-8, which featured a deep-skirt block, 4.062 x 3.375-inch bore/stroke, wedge chamber cylinder heads, a 10:1 compression ratio, a high-performance hydraulic lifter cam and two four-barrel carbs. It developed 305hp at 5,000 RPM and 370-lb.ft. of torque at 3,600 RPM. A 315-hp version of the 350 with Bendix Electrojector fuel injection was a \$500 option. It was offered briefly, few were built, and they were later recalled. Most of the fuel-injection units were replaced with carburetors.

The differential was fitted with 3.73 gears when paired with the standard three-speed manual and 3.31 gears with the Torque-Flite transmission. Other ratios were optional, as was the new Sure-Grip differential.

In the cabin, the speedometer was updated for 150 MPH, and a new star pattern was used on its bright surround. Interior featured multi-tone brown and beige appointments with a brown carpet. The base price of the Fury rose to just over \$3,000. The 1958 models regained notoriety, thanks to the Stephen King novel and the movie *Christine* both of which were released in 1983.

1959

For 1959, the Fury was expanded to its own line, so the new Sport Fury perpetuated the traditional luxury/sport model in a two-door hardtop and a new convertible. For the first time, the Fury and now the new Sport Fury were available in a variety of single and two-tone color combinations.

The revised anodized aluminum grille now had an egg crate-like pattern that was split via a new emblem floating on a black

background. It featured a rendering of the Mayflower to depict Plymouth's tradition with a stylized missile above it to represent its "pace setting styling and engineering."

New "double-barrel" fenders featured contouring around the headlamps that gave the subtle impression of shotgun barrels. The shape of the front wheelwells was also revised, thanks to the wraparound grille with parking/turn signal lamps that were now visible from the side as well. A new "airscoop" front bumper and lower valance provided a jet air-intake effect according to Plymouth. Identifying script on the driver-side of the hood replaced the central Plymouth lettering and emblem of the previous year.

The Fury had double full-length side molding, with the lower portion wrapping around the back of the car. Optional Sportone added an anodized aluminum panel between the two trim pieces, and a contrasting color could be had on the roof if desired.

The Sport Fury trim differed from the Fury. Its revised side spear (now silver anodized instead of the previous years' gold) widened and curved upward at the rear quarter panels to follow the airfoil fin line, but it did wrap around the rear like the Fury. A Forward Look medallion was also added to each rear quarter panel of the Sport Fury.

Recontoured rear quarter panels featured "airfoil" fins that were thinner, more upright, had a somewhat gentler upsweep, were laid back and dressed with fluted molding. Chrome-housed "Ovalight" clusters featuring the taillamp, brake lamp and backup lamp (optional) were set into a concave rear panel. The decklid and bumper were completely different, and the former now carried the central ridge of the hood to the rear, while the latter was thinner and included twin vertical guards. "Plymouth" script adorned the driver's side of the decklid in place of the previous year's central block letters. A gold "V" denoted V-8 power.

The sport decklid tire-cover stamping was standard on the Sport Fury and optional on other models. And buyers of Sport Fury convertibles had a choice of top colors: blue, green, white or black.

Now that the Fury became its own model line, its standard V-8 was the 230-hp, two-barrel, single-exhaust version of the Fury V-800 318-cu.in. engine. The standard Sport Fury engine was the dual-exhaust, 9:1 compression 318, now with a single four-barrel

and 260hp at 4,400 RPM and 345 lb-ft of torque at 2,800 RPM, down from the 290hp dual-four-barrel version of the previous year.

Though the standard engine took a step back in power, the optional 361-cu.in. Golden Commando 395, the further development of the 1958 350 wedge-type cylinder head engine, moved forward. It maintained the 305hp rating of 1958, but achieved it at a lower 4,600 RPM. Torque increased to 395-lb.ft. at 3,000 RPM—hence its name, and it did it with new camshaft timing and single four-barrel carburetor.

The two-speed PowerFlite transmission was offered optionally for the base V-800 318 engine; the TorqueFlite was matched to 2.93 or 3.31 rear gears; and cars equipped with the standard manual transmission had 3.54 gears.

Torsion bars were shortened about 2 inches, and the anchor points moved forward for 1959, which helped increase passenger foot space. An eccentric adjusting cam replaced shims for dialing in front-end alignment and the balljoints were revised.

Swivel front seats were new for 1959 and came standard on the Sport Fury, as did the deluxe two-tone padded steering wheel. A new instrument cluster was employed, and various revised interior colors and textures were available. The Sport Fury also featured a dash nameplate mounted on the glovebox door on which the owner's name would be engraved. It said "Sport Fury Built Especially For --- By Plymouth."

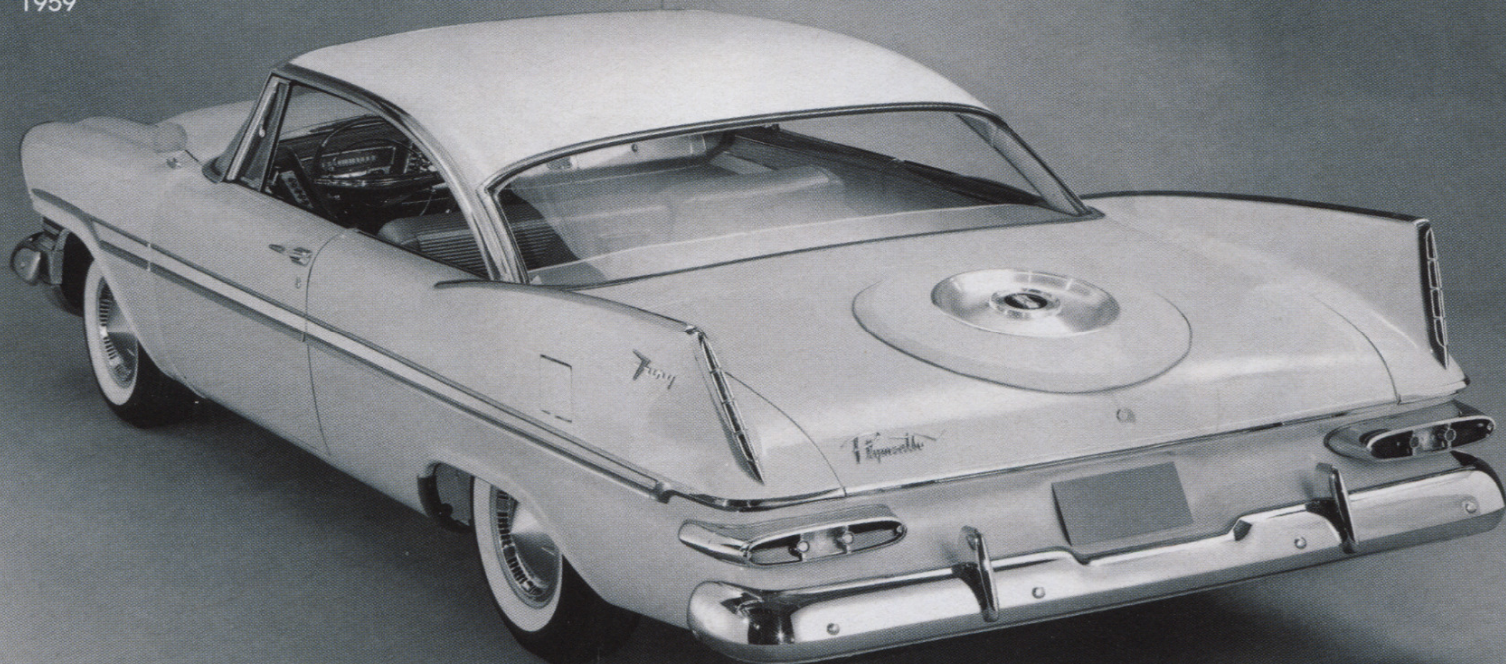
To keep the car level with heavy loads, optional Constant Level Torsion-Aire augmented the rear leaf springs with rubberized nylon air springs, a low-pressure reservoir and height control valve added to the rear suspension. The air springs were inflated via an engine-driven compressor through a high-pressure reservoir in the engine bay. It could only be ordered on V-8 automatic transmission-equipped Plymouths.

The optional Mirromatic rearview mirror dimmed when it picked up the bright lights of cars in the rear, and the automatic beam changer dimmed the headlamps when oncoming headlamps were detected.

The Fury two-door hardtop was priced at \$2,714, Sport Fury two-door hardtop at \$2,927 and the Sport Fury convertible at \$3,125.

The dawn of the 1960s would bring unit body construction and dramatic styling changes to the Fury, but that's another story for another time. 🚗

1959



Sport Fury Sensation

*The Forward Look beauty
of the 1959 Plymouth Sport Fury*

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY RICHARD LENTINELLO



They had an air of freshness about them unlike any automobile design that came before it. They were long and low and had bright cabins, due to their slim C-pillars and large expanse of glass. And they were given the most sensational-looking tailfins ever created. These were the Forward Look models by Chrysler.

Introduced for the 1955 model year, and ending with the 1961 models (although the 1962 models looked about the same), the Forward Look designs were a huge hit with the public, especially when the very modern 1957 models were released. In fact, it was the striking 1957 cars that caused such a stir within General Motors that all five divisions scrambled to redesign their entire lineup of cars with a similar Forward Look style, with the resulting outcome being the equally long, low and wide 1959 GM models.

But nothing could compare to the contemporary extravagance of the Forward Look designs.

Under the direction of creative genius and father of the Forward Look, Virgil Exner, one of the best-looking Plymouths of all time was the 1959 Fury. It embodied all the advance styling features of the Forward Look fashion without being over the top. It was advanced by design, yet somewhat conservative in style, especially when compared to the more flamboyant 1959 Dodge.



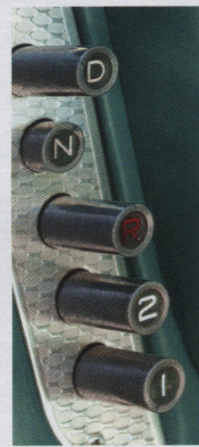
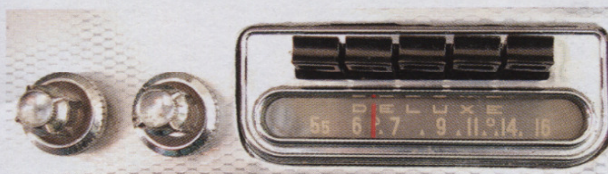
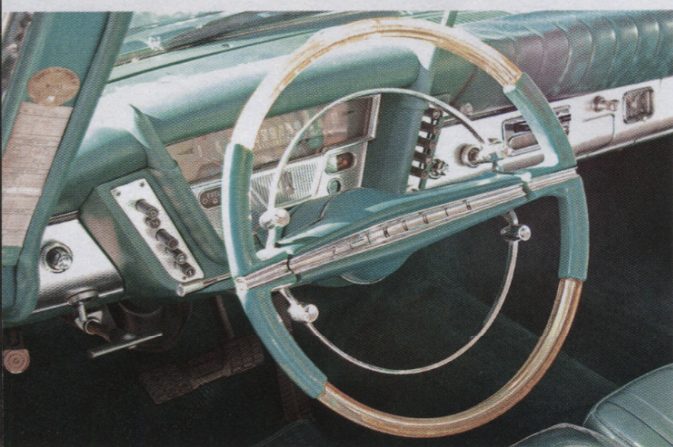
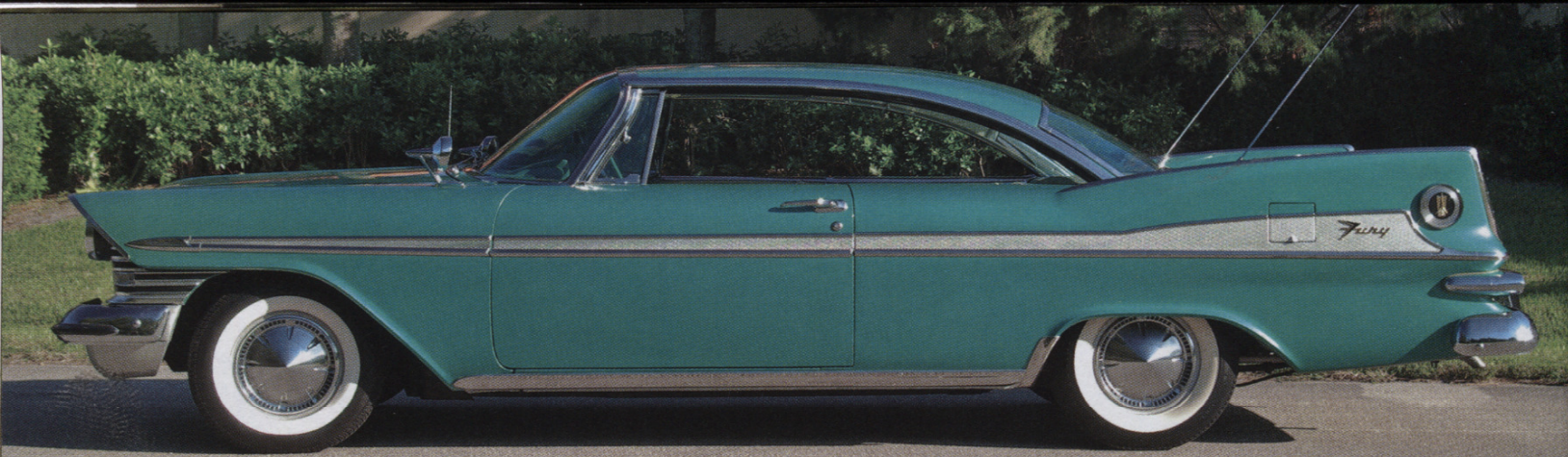
Like the other 1957 Chrysler, De Soto and Dodge models, the equally contemporary looking Plymouths helped propel Chrysler's star of the low-priced field back into the number-three overall sales slot, a position it held firmly from 1932 to 1954. The 1959 models strengthened Plymouth's number-three ranking, with a total production of 458,261 automobiles; no doubt that sales figure was aided by their elaborate yet clean, cutting-edge shape.

Another component of Plymouth's sales increase for the 1959 model year was the introduction of a new model, the Sport Fury. This was now Plymouth's top-level model and was available in only two distinct body styles: a two-door hardtop and a convertible. By the end of that year's production cycle, some 17,867 Sport Fury hardtops were produced, and 5,990 convertibles. Plymouth clearly had another winner on its hands, as many buyers felt it was worth it to pay the \$213 premium to drive around in a Plymouth that was embellished with additional

trim and a powerful V-8 engine.

The Sport Fury's engine choices were either a 317.6-cu.in. V-8 (commonly referred to as the "318") or the Golden Commando 395. The 318 had a 3.91-inch bore and a 3.31-inch stroke, which helped it develop 260 horsepower. The 395 (better known as the "361") displaced 360.8 cubic inches due to its larger 4.12-inch bore and longer 3.38-inch stroke, which resulted in a mighty 305 horsepower. Its name is derived from its torque rating of 395-pound feet of twisting muscle. The 395 is known as a Mopar B-series, or "Wedge," engine, due to the wedge shape of its combustion chambers. Both engines were equipped with single Carter AFB four-barrel carburetors and higher lift camshafts; however, the Golden Commando 395 was also fitted with a dual-breaker distributor, super-strong forged connecting rods, forged camshaft and a deep-skirted block for added strength.

One enthusiast who always loved the Forward Look Plym-



The Sport Fury for 1959 was outfitted with several distinct features, including the unique upswept exterior side trim and the half-padded steering wheel. Besides the Deluxe radio, pushbuttons were also used to engage the three-speed TorqueFlite automatic transmission.

mouths is Richard Koch of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. We featured the restoration of Richard's 1959 Belvedere in HCC #128 and #129. In addition to the Belvedere, he also owns a red-and-white 1959 Sport Fury and a 1960 De Soto Adventurer four-door sedan. As we said, Richard loves '59 Plymouths. "I like all the finned cars designed by Virgil Exner," Richard enthuses. "Their low profile and Forward Look have always intrigued me. And with the 1959 Sport Fury, I have a special fondness for its swivel seat, the Sport Deck trunk lid and the power of the 361-cu.in. engine."

Riding on a 118-inch wheelbase, the Sport Fury hardtop hit the scales at 3,475 pounds. Its suspension featured Chrysler's excellent-riding torsion bar system up front and a solid axle in the

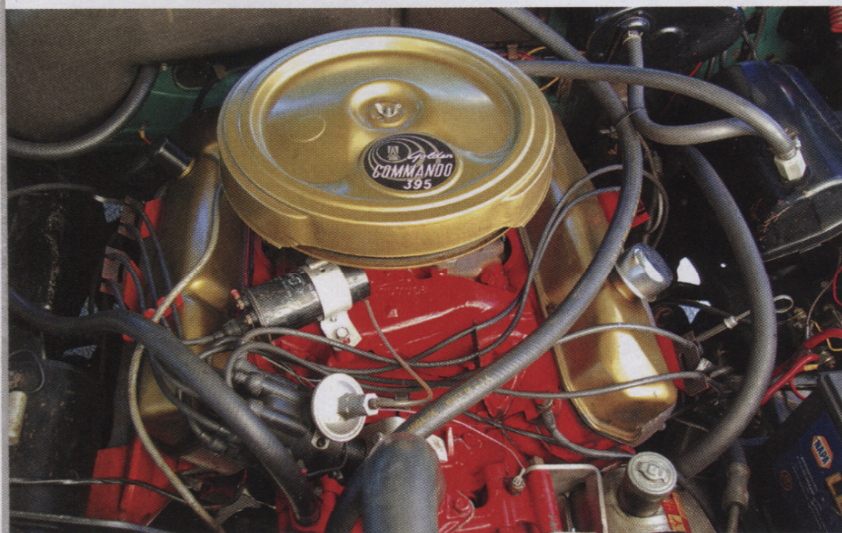
rear, suspended via leaf springs. For the 1959 models, Chrysler engineers shortened the length of the torsion bars, which resulted in better handling and flatter cornering. There was also the option of an air suspension system fitted to the rear only; called Constant-Level, it cost an extra \$88.

Of course, one of the Plymouth's most interesting mechanical components, one that fascinates onlookers today more than ever, is the pushbutton control for the transmission. Although a three-speed manual was standard, the original owner who ordered this car paid an extra \$227 and went with the bulletproof three-speed TorqueFlite transmission.

So just what makes a Sport Fury look different from a standard Fury? Well, truth be told, not much. The Sport Fury did not have any special "Sport Fury" emblem or stylized script badging; only its distinctive and larger side trim made it stand apart from a standard Fury. Perhaps the best way of knowing if a car is a Fury or a Sport Fury is by its VIN tag. The Sport Fury's official factory code was "MP2P," with the letter "P" indicating that it was a premium model. The standard Fury model was an "MP2H," with the "H" signifying it as a high-line model. This model designation is stamped on the VIN tag under the word "MODEL."

When looking at the 1959 Plymouth from the rear, the addition of the Sport Deck, which is nothing more than a fake spare tire cover in the center of the trunk lid, really adds to the car's distinctive character, which is why it featured prominently in Plymouth promotional material. They wrote: "Rear Sport Deck is another fine car feature entirely new to low-priced cars! This is but one of many advances that distinguish the new, youthful Plymouth for '59. Modern Fury styling emphasizes the longer, lower look and gives every '59 Plymouth a dash and distinction never before seen in cars priced down in the low-priced field!"

All of Chrysler's Forward Look models are held in high regard today, not only because of their striking shapes but because



Equipped with the Golden Commando 395, this 360.8-cu.in. V-8, with its wedge-shaped combustion chambers, produces 305hp.

there are so few of them remaining when compared to GM and Fords of the same years. Yet, what makes our feature car extra special is the fact that it's mostly original, and had been very well preserved by its previous owners. Yes, that gleaming Emerald Green Poly paint—code "FF"—is the very same paint that the Plymouth painters applied to the car when it was being built.

Our feature Plymouth came out of the dry climate of Fort Worth, Texas, where Richard bought it back in 2005. He proudly tells us: "It's an excellent rust-free survivor, a very nice #3 condition car. But besides this Plymouth's well-preserved condition, it had been driven only 43,000 miles, and had originally been built in California. I already owned a 1959 Sport Fury with the 318 engine, so this was a great opportunity to have a very nice original car with the 361 engine."

The only really negative aspect of this car when Richard bought it was the condition of the interior upholstery. "When I first got the car the green cloth fabric on the seats and door panels had turned an ugly dark brown, so that had to be replaced. The carpet was worn very badly, like they usually do after 46 years, so that was replaced as well. But nothing else on the car has been touched. The engine has never been removed or taken apart, nor have any other mechanical systems been replaced."

On the road is where this Sport Fury really excels, as it has plenty of power to match its handsome looks. "The 395 Golden Commando engine runs very smooth and strong," Richard tells us. "On take offs from a standing start, it will easily spin the tires, and it even chirps the tires when shifting into second gear. That's a huge thrill, one that I never get



The original two-tone upholstery faded to brown, so it was replaced with an authentic duplicate, then protected with plastic covers. The swivel seat was standard on the Sport Fury. Emerald Green exterior paint is original.



“It’s an excellent rust-free survivor; a very nice #3 condition car.”

tired of experiencing.”

Today, all Richard does with his Sport Fury is take it to a variety of car shows and cruise nights in and around South Florida so others can enjoy looking at its distinctive shape. And, of course, he drives it, taking it on short trips with his wife, Yvonne. Richard tells us, "When I bought this Sport Fury, it had been driven just 43,100 miles since it was new, and I've already added another 16,648 miles, which averages out to about 1,600-1,700 miles per year. I try to drive it at least twice a month, in order to keep all the fluids flowing and everything lubricated. I plan on fitting radial tires soon, to make it steer and handle better, and safer, too."

As for maintaining and preserving the car's originality, Richard says, "I do not find it difficult at all. It still has the original factory paint, but it is starting to wear thin in some areas. More importantly, this Plymouth needs to be kept as original as possible for its historical value, and as a sample of how it was done so other 1959 Plymouths that do need to be restored have something to go by."

Perhaps the best description written about the 1959 Plymouth Sport Fury was the factory's own crafty, college football reference to the series: "Combining Ivy League smartness with Big Ten performance." Now, isn't that the truth. 🏈

