



# Error In *Judgment*

This is the car Plymouth should have built in 1959—but didn't.

**BY GREG RAGER / PHOTOS BRAD BOWLING** ■ AS THE LAST TO RECEIVE AN OHV V-8 ENGINE, PLYMOUTH WAS A LATE BLOOMER IN THE CHRYSLER CORP. FAMILY. HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR CHEVROLET'S SIMULTANEOUS LAUNCH OF ITS NEW OHV V-8 THAT SAME YEAR, 1955 MIGHT VERY WELL HAVE BEEN A MORE MOMENTOUS OCCASION FOR CHRYCO'S JUNIOR BRAND. AS IT WAS, THE 1955 PLYMOUTH, WITH MUCH MORE MODERN STYLING, ALONG WITH THE NEW 241CI AND 259.2CI V-8S, IMPROVED PLYMOUTH SALES BY MORE THAN 200,000 UNITS COMPARED TO 1954. BUT IT WOULDN'T BE UNTIL THE FOLLOWING YEAR THAT PLYMOUTH UNLEASHED ITS BIG GUN.



With minor front and extensive rear styling differences, the '56 Plymouth didn't quite equal 1955 in terms of total sales, but a new hot rod, the Fury, got the attention of the entire auto industry—along with 4,485 buyers. Fury was available only in white, with gold-anodized side trim and matching gold wheel covers. Under the hood was a new solid-lifter 303ci Fury V-8 at 240 horsepower. The 3,650-pound Fury came in with a horsepower-to-weight ratio of 15.20:1, putting it in some very fast company. It was a specialized car, to say the least.

1957 would see a radical change at Chrysler Corp. with cutting-edge styling across the board. The tailfin war was in full swing, and ChryCo had no intention of settling for runner-up. Nowhere within



**Everything about the late-Fifties/early-Sixties Chrysler products was futuristic. That's what "Forward Look" styling was all about, looking forward to the future. This 48-year-old interior would look contemporary if introduced today.**



Isn't it amazing what a little paint and upgrading from silver to gold trim can do to transform an already beautiful car into a work of art? Similar photos, no doubt also in color, were probably relegated to a stylist's wastebasket back in the day.



**In the three previous years, three different engine introductions took place under the hood of Plymouth's Fury. Presumably, the Sonoramic Induction 413 (introduced in 1960) would have been showcased similarly had there been a true '59 Fury.**

the corporation was that more obvious than at Plymouth. Back for an encore performance was Fury, looking better than ever and appearing to be traveling at 150 mph even when parked at the curb. Once again, Fury was available only as a two-door hardtop and in only one color (Sand Dune White). Gold-anodized side trim continued along with a gold-tone grille and other accents. Thanks to its new 290hp/318ci, dual four-barrel Fury V-8, horsepower-to-weight improved dramatically to 12.39:1 with zero-to-60mph capability in the

mid eight-second range. Sales nearly doubled over the previous year, maxing out at 7,438 units. Fury was destined for stardom.

As was the industry trend, the 1958 Plymouths received quad-headlamp styling as their major upgrade. Taillight and trim tweaks helped differentiate the '58s from the previous year. Fury buyers had a choice: take your car in Buckskin Beige, or shop elsewhere. Although the Stephen King movie "Christine" was about a '58 Plymouth Fury, the red-and-white starring car was, in reality, a

Belvedere. Fury for '58 continued to have gold-anodized side trim with assorted other gold trim separating it from lesser models. It was the most-expensive Plymouth you could buy in 1958, and it looked the part. The 318/290 was back as the standard engine, but once again, a new optional powerplant was showcased in the Fury as Chrysler introduced the first of the B-series engines at 350 cubic inches. With dual four-barrel carburetion, the 350 Golden Commando V-8 produced 305 horsepower—putting the horsepower-to-weight at an impressive 11.50:1, just a feather or two below the 392 Hemi-powered Chrysler 300D. Sales fell off somewhat to 5,303, still a very respectable number for a specialty car with a price tag eclipsing the magic \$3,000 mark.

For 1959, it was painfully obvious throughout much of the auto industry that marketing heads had won out over gearheads and stylists in the corporate boardrooms. At Chevrolet, the stunning Impala and equally breathtaking Pontiac Bonneville of 1958—both offered as two-door hardtops or convertibles only—were now relegated to garden-variety family car status for 1959. Granted, they were top-of-the-line models, but a station wagon in Bonneville or Impala trim somehow seemed un-American.



**Fifties Chrysler products offered swivel front seats for easier entry and exit. They disappeared, no doubt as a cost consideration. But in 1959, they were standard on Sport Fury convertibles and hardtops.**

Or, at the very least, humiliating.

Over at Plymouth, the same mindset prevailed, as the hallowed Fury was now available as a full model lineup, including four-door sedans and Sport Suburban station wagons. The new top-of-the-line Plymouth was the Sport Fury, available only as a two-door hardtop or convertible. Styling for '59 was both fresh and modern, but Sport Fury lacked the uniqueness and exclusivity Fury had become known for. Like its predecessor, the '59 Sport Fury could be had with plenty of horsepower on tap, thanks to the 361ci/305hp Golden Commando 395 (designating the engine's torque output) "B" engine for the best horsepower-to-

and '58 Fury, and also liked the '59 body style. Under the hood, he went one step beyond—something the first three years of Fury were famous for—and added 413ci Sonoramic Induction "RB" engine power with 375 ponies available. Keeping true to the heritage of those earlier cars, Fox's '59 is painted Palomino Beige with corresponding brown and beige interior, thanks to Rick's Upholstery in McMinnville, Oregon.

Anodized-aluminum side trim (originally silver for 1959) has been upgraded to gold, as select other trim Plymouth stylists would have no doubt chosen for the same treatment, had there not been a lapse in judgment in Highland Park at

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weight yet in a Plymouth—11.39:1. For most folks, the memory of the original concept that made the early Fury such a standout car was lost forever.

Not so for Tom Fox, of Welches, Oregon.

Few of us will ever have the opportunity to correct such a glaring factory error in judgment, but when that opportunity presented itself, Fox went for it. Beginning with a 1959 Plymouth Sport Fury two-door hardtop, Fox set out to continue the legacy of the original Fury for one more year. Graduating high school in 1957, he had fallen in love with the '57

the time. Fox finished the restoration in 1994 after locating the car in Gresham, Oregon. He says the most difficult tasks of the resto were repairing the front lower valance (too many curb kisses) and locating the front bumper outer wings. He currently owns a '59 Belvedere convertible and a '59 DeSoto Adventurer, in addition to the Fury seen here.

Seeing what the factory could have done, with just a bit of trim shuffling to set a true Fury apart from other models, one can only wonder—"Why?" Perhaps "Why not?" would be a far more appropriate question. ■



**By 1959, quad/dual headlamps were pretty much an industry standard. Plymouth used that format to maximum advantage, styling the '59 front fenders to give the appearance of separate "eyebrows" for each eye.**



**Ineffective as they were, mounted so far forward on the front fenders, even Chrysler's sideview mirrors reflected the Forward Look philosophy. Driver-side adjustment was usually remote, with manually adjustable passenger mirrors.**



**No mere two-speed PowerFlite here—an upscale transmission for an upscale car made the three-speed TorqueFlite standard in Golden Commando applications. Note the driver-side rearview mirror adjusting knob at lower left of dash.**