

# CAR OF THE QUARTER . . .

## 1968 Plymouth Barracuda ..... by Frank Polowy



### A Dream "In Progress"

Being a baby boomer, life long auto mechanic, and a car racing fan, I have always been interested in restoring an old car or building my own hot rod. But I never had the money (having served 20 years in the Air Force and was required to move every 3 to 4 years) or the time until one of my step daughters called me one night.

In March of 1996, my step daughter, Melanie called to ask me if I wanted to buy her 1968 Plymouth Barracuda Notchback, 318, automatic. She explained that the car had been parked in her dad's front yard for the last 15 years in Laredo Texas. He needed it moved, because he acquired a new job in Brownsville Texas. He wanted her to move it or he would send it to the junk yard. She told me that she and her husband, Bobby, towed the car from there 3 months earlier. She shared that the car was complete except for a radio, and that her husband Bobby had gotten it running. It was in fair shape but had rust holes in the trunk and various parts of the body. She said that the reason she called me to offer to sell it, because she knew I like old cars and that Bobby had tried to fix the car, when the engine had developed water leak and he just got tired of "messing with it". If I did not want it she was going to junk the car. She wanted \$350.00 for the car and would tow the car to me from where she lived in Baytown near Houston. I told her I would have to talk with my wife Barbara before I decided whether or not to get the car, and that I would call her back with an answer. (I had just finished a Bachelors degree in Vocational Education at Southwest Texas State and I hoped to find a job teaching Automotive or Electronic repair at one of the local school districts).

Barbara and I had a long discussion about where the money would come from to get the parts it would take to fix it up. We agreed that any money for parts would have to come from an outside source other than the family budget. We had two school age children. Barbara and I finally agreed that I would get the car and register it as an antique so the tags would not be as expensive. I only had a one car garage at the time and I would have to move a lot of stuff around to make it fit.

After I got the car, I started to check it out to find out what parts it would need. About this time, the Lord provided a part-time job as a Driving Instructor with Central Park Driving School and a way to pay for the car parts I would need. I had planned to involve my son Richard, age 12. And use it as a father and son project as he showed interest in learning about how to work on cars and had helped me to work on the family's 79 Malibu wagon. When Richard saw the car, he immediately wanted me to get a bigger engine and make a "hot rod" out of it. I decided then, that with the limited money I had, it would be best if I just "restored" the car and keep it as close to stock as I could. Besides after doing a lot of research the car would be worth "more" if I kept it stock (same motor and running gear). I wanted more of an investment than a hot rod.

August of 1996 I started to find out what the car really needed. My son and I sanded the car down so that we know what kind of body work it needed. We found out that the drivers' side of the car had been side swiped at some point in time because the whole left side had a ton of bondo on it and the left rear quarter panel and the trunk pan were so rusted out that they both would have to be replaced. I did not have a welding torch or know how to use it and did not have the money to take to a body shop to have it done. So I had to find someone that could do it and save up enough to pay for it. We also found that the engine would need to be pulled to replace the rear freeze plug. I would have to get the seats done; the rug and the headliner would also have to be done too, not to mention the instrument panel did not work either. The more stuff I checked, the more stuff needed to be repaired. I was starting to get very discouraged with facing all the work I felt would have to get done. One thing for sure, I did NOT want to let my wife know how bad everything was, otherwise she might force me to sell it which I did not want to do. I would just do a little at a time as I could afford it and had the time. One night while work on the car which was going especially frustrating, my wife came into the garage and asked me "how it was going" (she must have known that I was having a tough time) because she told me "not to give up" on the car and everything would get better and it did...

The second Friday in September of 1999, my son and I finally made the time to stop at the Pig Stand, one of the places that most of the Classic Car guys hung out, where I met Paul Gaspard. He told me about the car club and that I could get some help with my Cuda. I joined the Mopar Club of San Antonio and met a lot of other guys like myself, but most had cars in show room shape unlike mine.

In the next few years I have had the seats done; found a guy to replace the rear quarter panel, went back to school to get a Masters degree in Special Education. In 2001, I bought an engine (318) and transmission from Paul (who bought a 1971 Sebring for parts to build his new Road Runner but he did not need the engine or transmission) so I could replace the one in my Cuda. As I found out that there was a water pump change in '71 and I ended up making a custom lower radiator hose to make it work.

The last couple of years, I have replaced the carpet, bought the head liner and other parts online, to replace as I find the time. I have completely primed the car to a charcoal gray and decided to paint all the chrome part a shining black because I still can not afford to get all the parts chromed like they should be to be competitive in car shows. I have also registered the car as a "classic" (DLH225) instead of an antique. My plan is to have the car painted the original Red and have the rest (bumpers, mirrors and grill, etc) in Black, with the original color of the interior of Burgundy and Black.

So, it has been a very long (more than 12 years) process trying to balance the time and the money to get the car to where it is and it still has a long way to go. But, it is "A DREAM UNDER CONSTRUCTION".

