

'70 Plymouth Roadrunner by Paul Gaspard



It all started back in 1999 when I sold my 1969 Plymouth Barracuda Fastback. I have wanted a 1970 Plymouth Roadrunner for many, many years and this gave me the opportunity to get the car of my dreams. Well, the saga begins as a nightmare. I could have bought a car that was already done but what fun would that have been and how would I find one that was exactly like I wanted it. I wanted a big-block 4-speed car that was preferably Hemi-Orange. I located an extremely rusty 383 cubic inch 4-speed beeper in Seguin sitting at Sam Davis' house. He had recently purchased the car from a guy in Pearsall, Texas. The car had a bare block in it with a 4-speed A-833 attached. It had an open differential with 2.76 gears and from inspection of the underbelly had apparently done some mudding or a lot of driving on dirt roads. There was red dirt caked in every nook and cranny. Other than the missing engine, the car was complete albeit needing a complete restoration.

The first thing I did was build a full rotisserie to be able to do everything I envisioned for this car. I mounted the Roadrunner on the rotisserie and begin stripping everything off of it. As all things go, time and money are always a factor and this was no different. The car was pushed to the side of the shop rotated on its side out of the way and was rarely touched for about four

years. I was still accumulating parts to go on the car and storing them in my loft in my workshop.

During the parts-gathering years that went by, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend a Mopars at Thunder Mountain show and race at Bristol, Tennessee. This gave me the perfect opportunity to stop by Keisler Engineering in Rockford, Tennessee to pick up the new TKO-2 5-speed manual overdrive transmission that was going in the car. While at Thunder Mountain, I was also fortunate enough to meet up with Ken Hensley of Hensley Performance. Lo and behold, he had Edelbrock RPM aluminum cylinder heads on sale at the show. It was such a good deal that I ordered a set on the spot and they were delivered the following week.

Now let me tell you a little about the years of hard work to get this beast on the road. The engine is a '72 model 400-block bored .040 over with Diamond Racing Pistons, Eagle Rods and 4.15" Eagle stroker crankshaft obtained from Hughes Engines out of Washington, Illinois. The camshaft is a retrofitted hydraulic roller camshaft with a set of Harland-Sharp roller rockers. Originally, I intended to use an Edelbrock Victor 383 intake manifold but it was just too tall to fit under the stock cowl hood. So I replaced the intake manifold with a 2"

shorter Torker 383 topped with a Barry Grant 850 cfm Demon carburetor. The ignition system is a MSD DIS-6 with two rev limiters and a nitrous-retard should I decide that I am not making enough horsepower with this combination.

As we all know the drum brake system on these older cars were minimally acceptable. I decided that if this thing was to go quickly, it also needed to stop quickly. I installed a Stainless Steel Brake Company master cylinder and booster along with a four-wheel disc brake setup from Wilwood Engineering. No problem stopping now with that new adjustable proportioning valve.

Suspension was completely upgraded on the car with new Performance Suspension Technology polygraphite components throughout. New ball joints, tie rod ends, control arm bushings, rebuilt steering box and power steering pump were installed. The rear is equipped with Calvert Racing mono-leaf springs (moved inboard with a 3.5" spring relocation kit) and their Caltracs traction system that totally eliminates the need for a pinion snubber. Thank goodness for that since the new Dana-60 differential that my son, Josh, and I custom built was originally from a '74 Dodge one-ton flat-bed truck which doesn't use a snubber. Speaking of the rearend, we



narrowed it to fit perfectly under mini-tubbed body. New custom axles were ordered from Moser Engineering to go along with the totally new 3.73 gears and sure-grip assembly. The rear wheels are a set of 15 x 12 Weld Pro Stars fitted with a set of 29 x 15.50 – 15 Hoosier Pro Street tires. The front wheels are a set of 15 x 8 Weld Pro Stars fitted with a set of 27 x 10.50 – 15 Hoosier Pro Street Tires.

The interior was kept original with the exception of a set of Infinity Tweeter in the dash, a set of Infinity Woofers in the doors and an aftermarket tachometer mounted on the steering column. Door panels, carpet, dash pad, head liner, armrests, sun visors, pistol grip shifter and boot, and seat covers were all out of Year One. The arm rest bezels were all rechromed at Mr. G's Enterprises out of Ft. Worth, Texas. The instrument cluster and all dash bezels were completely restored at Performance Car Graphics out of Tallahassee, Florida. They converted the gauges to white faced gauges and also converted the clock to a quartz movement for better accuracy (need to be on time for all those car shows).

Now it's time to tell you about the biggest job of all...the bodywork. As I stated earlier, the Roadrunner was a basket case. What fool would attempt such a job like this with all the rust in the trunk, floor pans, quarter panels, etc? Well, you found him. I knew I could do it. All I needed was the time and tools to do it. Well, I had plenty of time and I was fortunate enough to accumulate the necessary tools through the years to do most of it. Unfortunately, my eyes aren't as good as they once were so I needed some help with the welding part. My son, Josh, came to the rescue. He is a

phenomenal welder and a meticulous craftsman with a very logical method to his madness. We carefully cut out floor pans and welded in new ones with a perfect fit. Next we undertook the task of replacing trunk pans and trunk extensions. Once again, Josh came through with perfection. We also put in a set of mini-tubs to be able to fit the set of monster meats on the rear. The trunk filler panel and even the package tray were replaced. The back window had so much rust that there was no way to even attempt patching it. We located a replacement package tray along with a much-better-than-ours tail panel from a donor car at John's Salvage in Seguin, Texas. Measure twice and cut once and all fit like a glove.

Well all the metal work was done and it was time to farm the body out to a professional. This is one area that I would never profess to be able to do. I don't have the patience or the skill to do body work. We took the car over to New Braunfels, Texas to Mr. Danny Zoeller at Danny's Hot Rods. Danny is a true body man who believes in metal work not plastic filler. Even though the body had new metal on it, it had waves in it from the replacement panels that were recently welded in. Danny looked at it carefully and decided on a plan of action. Well, after over 150 hours of labor later, the car was ready for the spray booth. The body was painted to include door jambs, trunk jambs and engine compartment. I picked up the body a couple of days later and began the fun of reassembling all the new goodies going back into the car to include the totally new engine, transmission, and rear end. While I was putting things together, Danny continued working on the doors, front fenders, trunk lid and hood. After about 300 hours of hard work, he had the rest of the Hemi-Orange on all the panels. Last thing to do was lay out the hood stripe and get it painted semi-gloss black. We got together and carefully planned and put down tape to mask off the appropriate areas. The next morning, Danny

painted the black stripe and let it cure. After a couple of days, we installed the hood and trunk and once again I took the Roadrunner back to my shop.

Install this, install that and guess what we are nearly finished. I still have the air conditioning to complete. This was a non-AC car so I am retrofitting a Vintage Air system with a relocated Sanden compressor. All that is left now is to get hoses made and charge the system. Can you say cruising in comfort? Yes, that's what I plan on doing. In fact, Emma and I plan on doing Cruising the Coast on the Mississippi Gulf Coast this October. I also plan on taking the car to San Antonio Raceway soon and give it a couple of test runs down the drag strip.

Who knows, with a little luck, I may be able to give my son and his '73 Dodge Challenger a run for his money.

It might be tough since he runs 11.80s with his small block.

I'd like to thank my son, Josh Gaspard and my friend, Dewey Perankovich for all their help and their time. I would have never been able to do it by myself. But foremost, I must thank my wife, Emma for her understanding and support to allow me to spend all the time and money necessary to complete the car of my dreams.

Hope to see you all at many cruises, shows and drag racing events in the future.

