



Richard Burdick bought his 1959 Sport Fury new and treated it to a restoration when it hit 25 years of age. Plymouth built 5,990 convertibles and 17,867 hardtops such as this one in the Sport Fury line during 1959.

# Family Fury

1959 Plymouth Sport Fury has been in the family since new

*Story and photos by Bob Tomaine*

**T**here's no shortage of cars whose owners view them as family members, and sometimes, those cars have been around long enough and played parts large enough that the description is especially accurate.

Richard Burdick of Hawleyton, N.Y., bought his 1959 Plymouth Sport Fury new, ordering it with a 318-cid V-8 and a three-speed with overdrive. Admittedly, it's an odd combination, so it's not surprising that Burdick had a reason for his order.

"I guess I liked the gas mileage," he said. "Even though I could buy gas once in a while for about 15 cents a gallon, I was still looking for more mileage, because I was cheap."

The Plymouth returns about 21 miles per gallon on the highway and most drivers — cheap or not — can understand that. Burdick appreciated it well enough to keep the car for a decade before he considered replacing it. He was negoti-

ating a deal for a station wagon in 1970, he recalled, and learned that he was going to receive next to nothing for the Plymouth.

"The guy wanted to give me \$250 for a trade-in," he explained, "and I said, 'No, I'll keep it before I'll give it to you for that.' Luckily, my dad had a big old cow barn that had lots of room to store it and I drove it in there and parked it."

That wasn't the Plymouth's first time in storage; Burdick had left it in his father's care during a stint in the military.

"My father left his car out for those two years," he recalled, "out of the garage so I could keep mine in it."

Buying a car new and driving it for 10 years isn't especially unusual, nor is it extremely rare for a car to wait out its owner's military service. However, Burdick's story becomes less typical because he valued the Plymouth enough to keep it instead of dump it. What happened next still wasn't unheard of, but the combination of details behind Burdick's decision to restore the Plym-

outh is probably pretty rare. The car had hit the magic quarter-century mark that's inspired countless similar projects, but there was much more.

"I decided, 'Well, it's 25 years old already,'" Burdick said, "and I think that same year my daughter came to me and announced that she was going to get married. I said, 'If you can give me a year before you get married, I'll restore the car and take you to the church in the car you were born in.'"

Now, that surely hasn't happened very often.

It was Jan. 6, 1965, and Burdick's wife, Joan, was pregnant with the couple's second child, Kimberly. They were living in Clifford, Pa., when the time for Kimberly's birth approached, and one minor detail had suddenly become major.

"We still didn't have a phone in the house," Burdick said, "so I went to call — two minutes down the road — and the doctor didn't answer, so I thought, 'I'll wait for him.' I waited and waited

and waited and I called again. They said, 'No, he's still not back,' and I said, 'I've got to go and bring my wife into the hospital.' I came back up and she said, 'Oh, we're not going to make it into the hospital.' I got her in the car and I said, 'We'll make it in there.'"

He was right and they did make it, but the emergency room's entrance was locked.

"It was 5 o'clock in the morning," Burdick said. "I'm pounding on the door and unbeknownst to me, there was a sign above the door that said, 'Ring the bell and somebody'll let you in.' I was a little excited. I didn't see that.

"Finally, a doctor came down and we went out to the car. My wife had already delivered the baby herself, right there at the door."

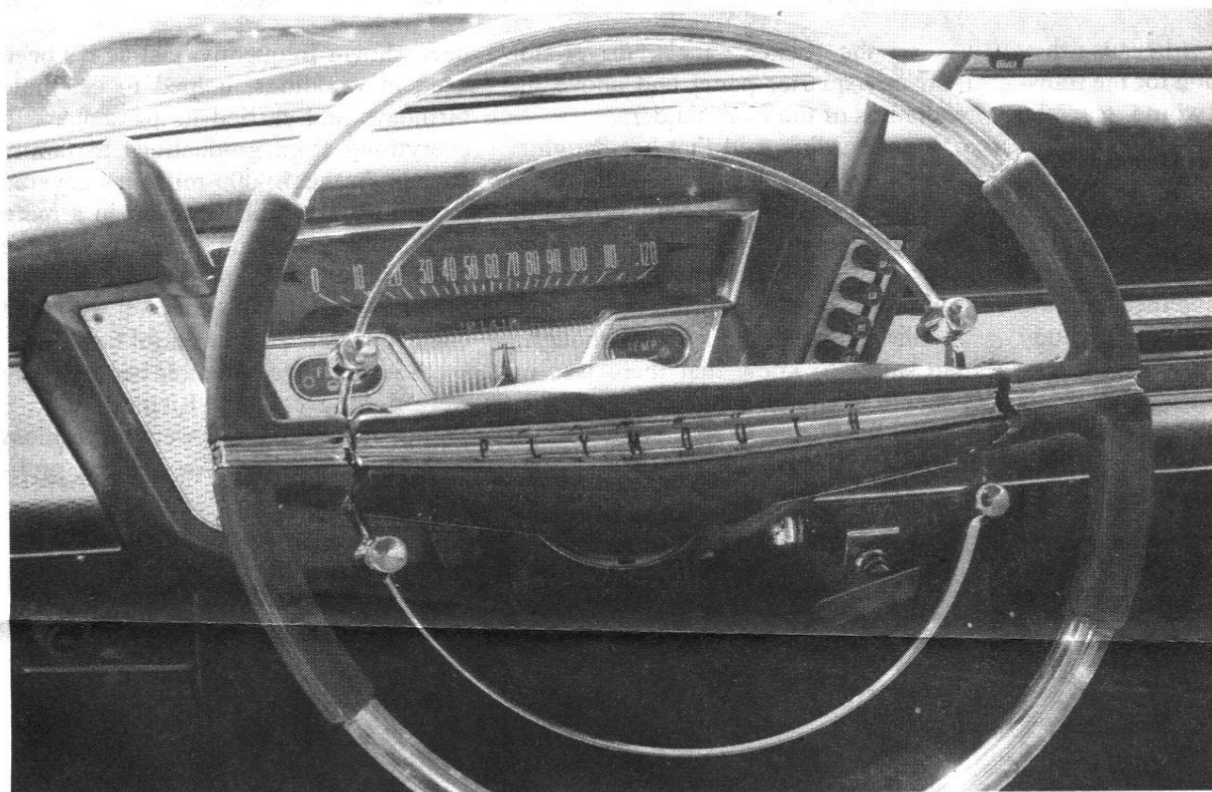
Even without that kind of connection, though, the car was an interest-

ing one to restore thanks to the "Fury" badge's role in Plymouth's history. Like the other Chrysler divisions, Plymouth resumed production after World War II by barely modifying its 1942 line and reintroducing it for 1946. All-new bodies arrived for 1949 and again for 1953, but Plymouth soldiered on with flathead sixes as first Chrysler, then De Soto and finally Dodge were given V-8s. Everything changed for Plymouth in 1955, though, as the 241-cid Hy-Fire V-8 placed 157 hp in a fresh, modern body. As if to make up for lost time, a 260-cid V-8 with up to 177 hp quickly followed, but 1956 brought the addition of fins to the 1955 body, as well as new engines and a new model — the Fury.

With a 240-hp 303, the Fury arrived as a coupe three months into the model year and wore a unique but subtle look — off-white paint and anodized gold

trim — marking it as something different. Plymouth had its entry in the horsepower race and sold 4,485 examples, enough to jump-start the division's performance image and ensure the Fury's return. The Fury was back on the new 1957 body and again on the lightly updated 1958 Plymouth, but lost its exclusivity in 1959 as it was expanded to an entire line. The Fury faithful were not completely forgotten, as the Sport Fury was added to the top and could be equipped much like an earlier Fury. Its largest available engine was the 305-hp 361 and that actually was optional in all 1959 Plymouths. Burdick wanted the 361-cid V-8 in his Sport Fury, but was forced to accept the Sport Fury's base 260-hp, 318-cid V-8 in order to equip the car with a manual transmission.

"I wanted to get the 361 and they sent the order in," he recalled, "but the



*The Sport Fury included a padded deluxe steering wheel with a horn ring. Many MoPar steering wheels featured futuristic clear sections, found through much of this wheel's circumference.*

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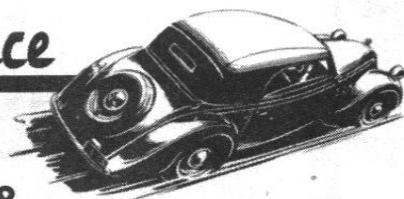
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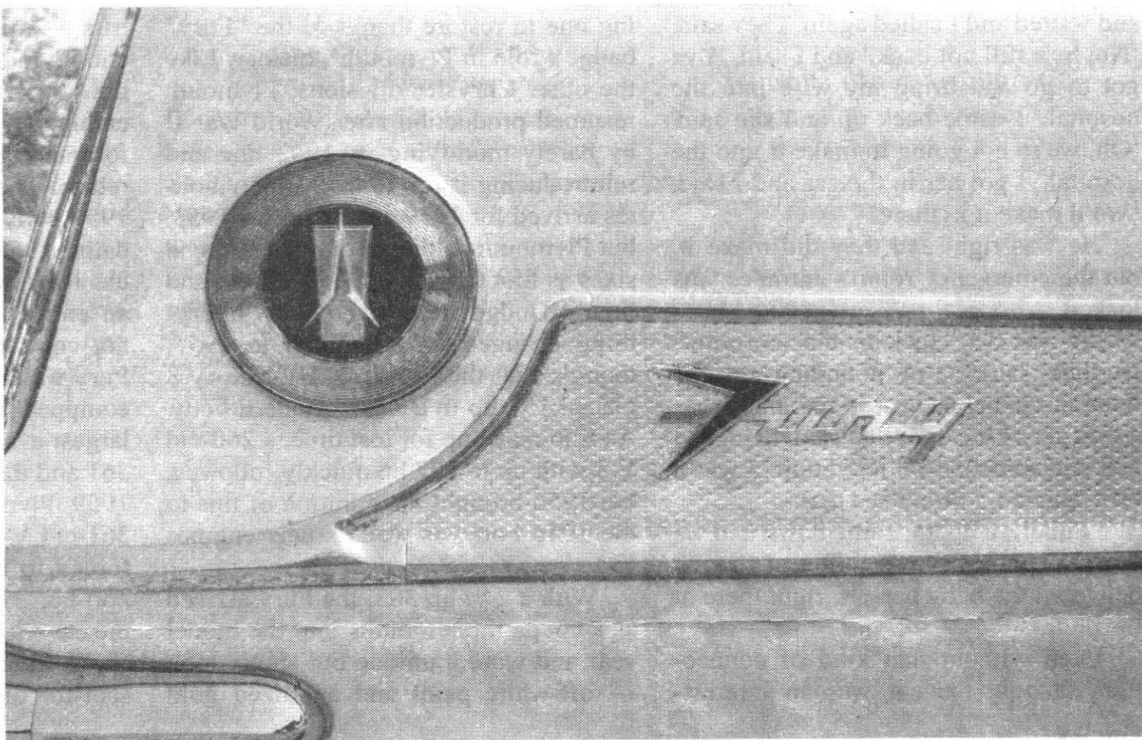
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**In 1959, Sport Fury models still included anodized side trim, but it was now silver, rather than gold as found on 1956-'58 Furies.**



factory wouldn't accept it because they said it has too much torque for the transmission. They said it would tear the overdrive right out of it."

Burdick said that there was no master plan to keep the Plymouth forever, but its years off the road helped keep it in relatively good condition. The engine was rebuilt as a preventive measure, the front seat was reupholstered and body mounts were replaced. Despite the tendency toward rust shown by late-1950s MoPars in northern states, Burdick said the Plymouth's frame and much of the body were solid. The major rust repair

was on the rocker panels, driver-side floor, one quarter panel and above the headlamps of the front fenders.

Joan Burdick said that her daughter has a soft spot for the car, even though it was parked when she was still too young to appreciate it. She added that Kimberly wasn't worried that the Plymouth would disappear.

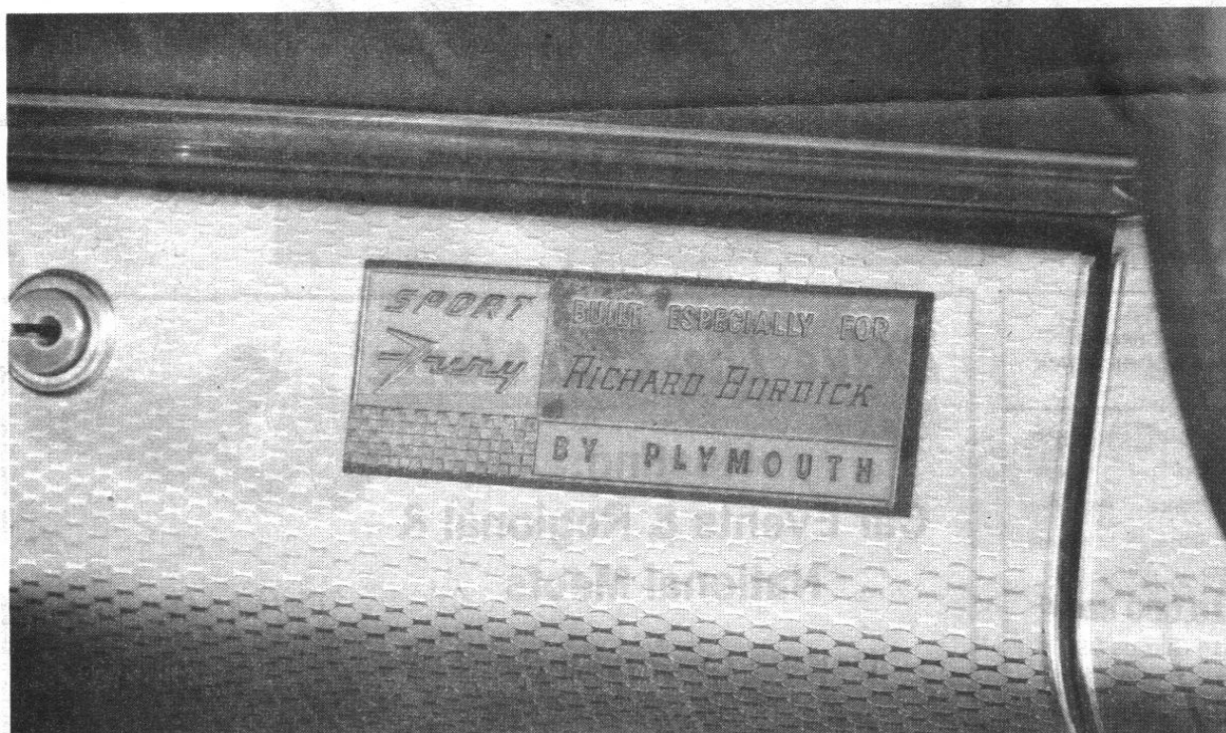
"She knew her father well enough," Joan said, "to know that there was no chance it would be sold."

"He'll always keep that," Richard laughed.

Since its restoration, the Plymouth's

been shown frequently, just as it's been used in weddings, helped to celebrate birthdays and carried its passengers to everything from graduations to family parties. In the 16,000 miles it's covered in that time, it's also proven in a more measurable way that it really was the right choice back in May 1959; overdrive-enhanced fuel economy is a good thing, but so is an uneventful trip.

"I just changed the tires because they were getting cracks," Richard said. "I changed them before I went to Vermont with it, 200 miles. We had no problems."



**When Burdick's car was delivered new, this gold plaque with his name was affixed to the glove box door.**