



# *The Plymouth Bulletin*

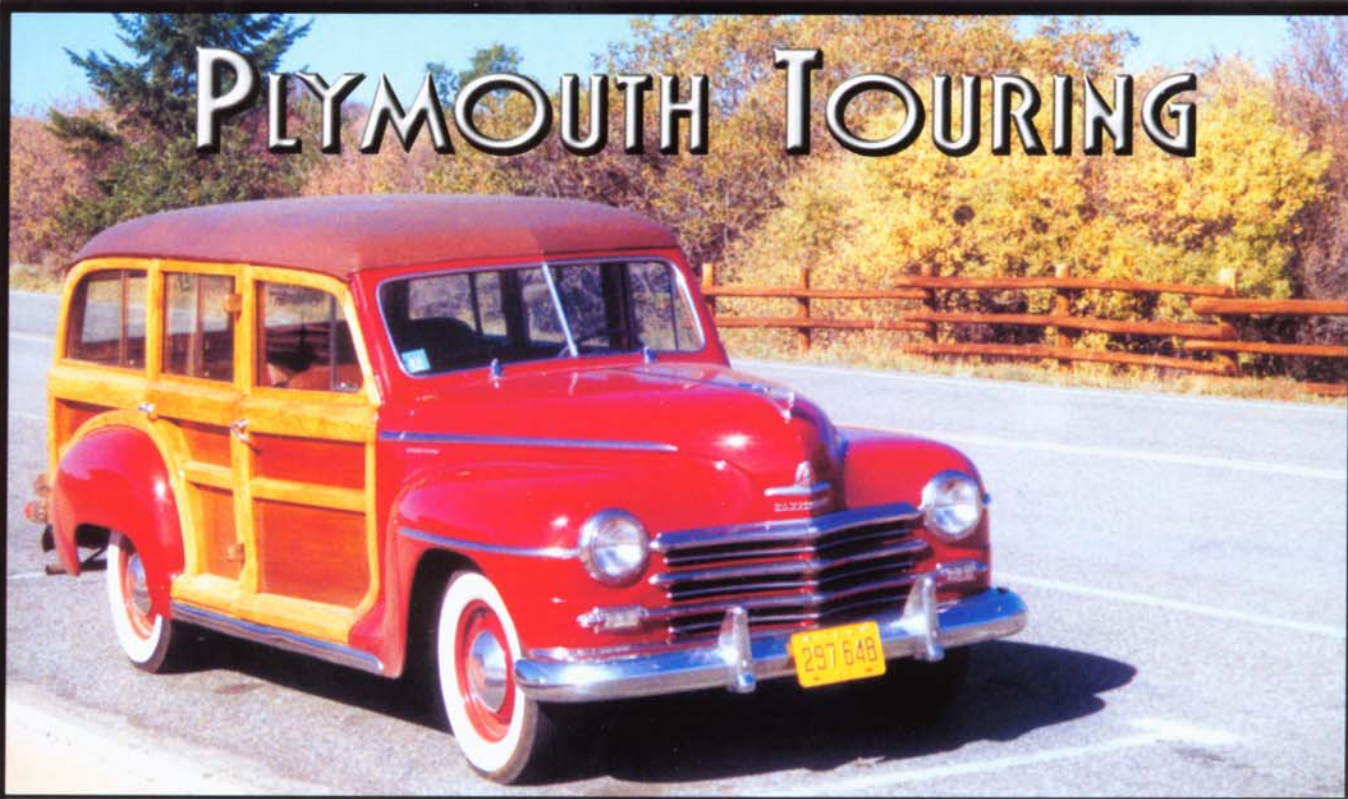
*Thirteen Time Old Cars Weekly "Golden Quill" Award Winner*

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2003

No. 258

Volume 44, Number 2

## PLYMOUTH TOURING



Robert Van Buskirk's 1947 P15 station wagon

Cover designs by Ross Enge



Roger Wermeskerch's 1983 Plymouth Scamp

*When  
Plymouth  
was a Scamp.*



# Plymouth Scamp pickup

*Plymouth "trucks" seems an oxymoron to those who have no memory of Plymouth's pickup and sedan delivery commercial vehicles from 1937-1941. Following World War II, these vehicles disappeared from Plymouth's lineup... until 1974. That model year marked Plymouth's "second wave" re-entry into the field with the Trail Duster sport utility and Voyager van (technically called a wagon since only windowed versions of the vehicle were offered). Plymouth later followed these vehicles with their Arrow and Scamp pickups and market-breaking Voyager minivan.*

*This article is the fourth in a series by Don Bunn, member and noted Dodge truck historian and author.*

by Don Bunn

**W**as the 1982 Dodge Rampage designed to be a Chevrolet S-10/Ford Ranger fighter or a Volkswagen Rabbit pickup/Subaru Brat fighter? The bigger competition came, of course, from Chevrolet's and Ford's US-built mini-pickups which had replaced the re-badged Japanese trucks they had been selling the previous ten years.

Spending the development money required to get the Rampage to market, from our perspective in 2003, doesn't seem to have been a very wise decision. The S-10 was new in 1982 and the Ranger followed six months later. The Brat dated back to 1978 and the US-built VW pickup to 1980.

You might also say the Rampage was a down-sized El Camino. That truck dated way back to 1959. The D50 pickup had been Dodge's smallest RWD pickup until the Dakota came along in 1987.

With the addition of a small diesel engine the VW pickup was the truck industry's MPG leader by a wide margin. I suspect what Mr. Iaccoca and company had in mind was to simply field a high-mileage light pickup. In so doing, Chrysler contributed to the creation of a new type of truck--a front-wheel-drive,

ed integrally with the body, forming both cab and cargo box sides. This construction was believed to be ideal for a small truck because it combined body and frame into a single monolithic structure. Thus it possessed great strength and rigidity without adding the excess weight that could lower fuel economy and detract from handling. Because it was welded, rather than assembled with nuts and bolts, body remained solid and tight after thousands of miles of hauling.

Rampage's body structure consisted of a one-piece body side panel that formed the right and left side structures and exterior side surfaces (less doors and front fenders) including the pickup box. Robot welding helped to ensure



car-based mini-truck--even though time would show that it was to be rather short-lived.

The Plymouth Scamp, like its Dodge Rampage sibling, was nimble, easy to drive, able to carry a noticeable payload, and very economical to operate.

Dodge engineers used the Plymouth Horizon TC3/Dodge Omni 024 sports-type cars as their base vehicle. They employed unibody construction with a truck frame structure weld-

dimensional control for a high level of assembly uniformity. It also helped to assure accurate door and hinge attachment and quality door fit.

The pickup box itself was of double-wall all-steel welded construction. The box sat on (was welded to) two rigid structural side members and six sturdy cross members. The tailgate was a one piece, double-walled steel unit with a sturdy latch that opened with a single handle for ease of opera-





tion.

Rampage was more than merely a conversion of the Horizon TC3 it may appear to be from a front view. From the side and rear views, it's obvious that the pickup part of this vehicle was designed and built to be a pickup. Its integral box was far superior to a separate box and cab. Chevrolet had used a similar construction style on its El Camino for years.

Standard specifications of the front-wheel-drive Scamp included a 104.2-inch wheelbase; its cargo box measured 63.7 by 41.8 by 15.5-inches high; and its tailgate was 50 by 17-inches. Power was from the famous Chrysler 2.2-liter, 84 horsepower, four-cylinder engine, mounted transversely. The standard transmission was a four-speed manual; a 3-speed automatic was optional. Suspensions included front Iso-struts and a beam axle with leaf springs in the rear. Fuel consumption was rated at 28 MPG com-



bined city and freeway driving.

The Scamp was offered as either the base Scamp or the sporty Scamp GT. The GT was a very racy model, sporting special graphics and a distinctive hood bulge. Standard equipment included power brakes, rack-and-pinion steering, steel-belted radial tires mounted on Rallye wheels, tinted glass in all windows, vinyl bucket seats with adjustable backs and behind-the-seat storage.

The Scamp lasted only one model year--1983; the Rampage was new in 1982 and was dropped after the 1984 model year.

You may want to pick up one of these nifty pickups now and put it away until 2008 when it becomes eligible for Plymouth Owners Club recognition. Not many were sold; *Collectible Automobile* (Dec '92) reports that just 2,129 were built. The Scamp GT would be the most desirable. It would be good to have several Scamps at the Grand National Meet in Detroit in 2008.

**PB**

According to *Collectible Automobile*, the Scamp/Rampage is becoming a "minor cult car." Better get one now! --ed.

BROCHURE PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MARK OLSON.





## PLYMOUTH SCAMP AND SCAMP GT

Here's the distinctive and exciting front-wheel drive Plymouth Scamp for 1983. Bold and sleek at the same time, and as peppy as it looks.

With its responsive 2.2-liter engine and optional five-speed manual transaxle (standard on Scamp GT), you'll find it only skimps at the pump. The Scamp is rated at [28] EPA EST MPG,\* 47 estimated highway.

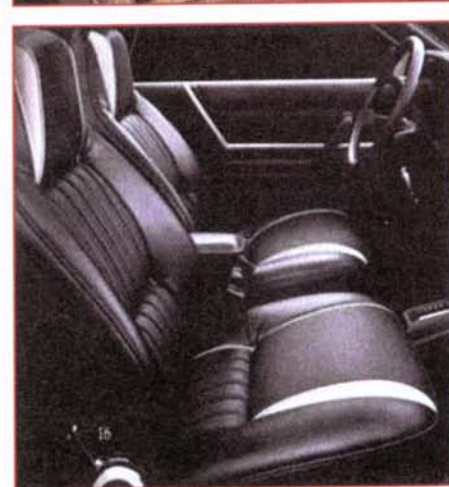
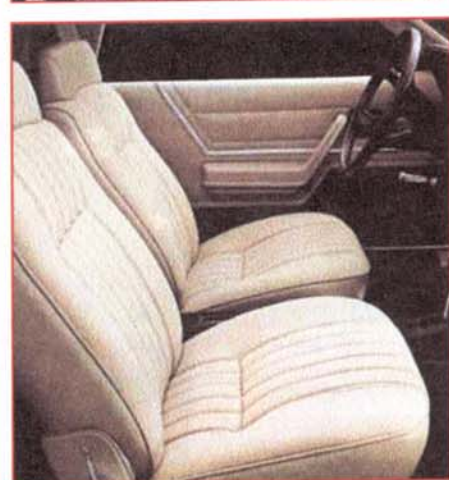
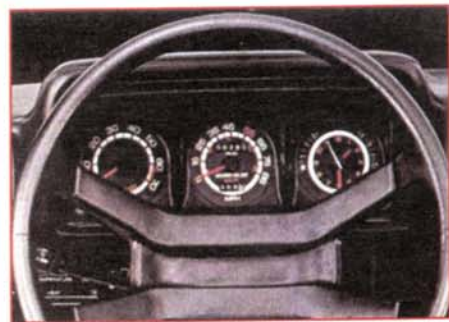
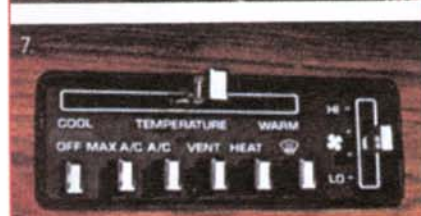
And whether you choose the Plymouth Scamp or the sporty Scamp GT you'll be able to take a lot of fun with you in its spacious cargo area. Some other pluses are standard power brakes, rack-and-pinion steering, radial black sidewall tires mounted on 13-inch Rallye wheels (14-inch Rallye wheels and raised black letter tires are standard on Scamp GT), and tinted glass on all windows.

Chrysler Corporation feels so confident about Scamp's quality procedures that upon expiration of the normal 12-month/2,000-mile new vehicle limited warranty, limited warranty coverage is extended on power train components, including engine, transaxle, and axle—plus outer panel rust-through protection—to five years/50,000 miles, whichever comes first. A deductible applies. See your dealer for details.



Plymouth Scamp GT in Crimson Red.

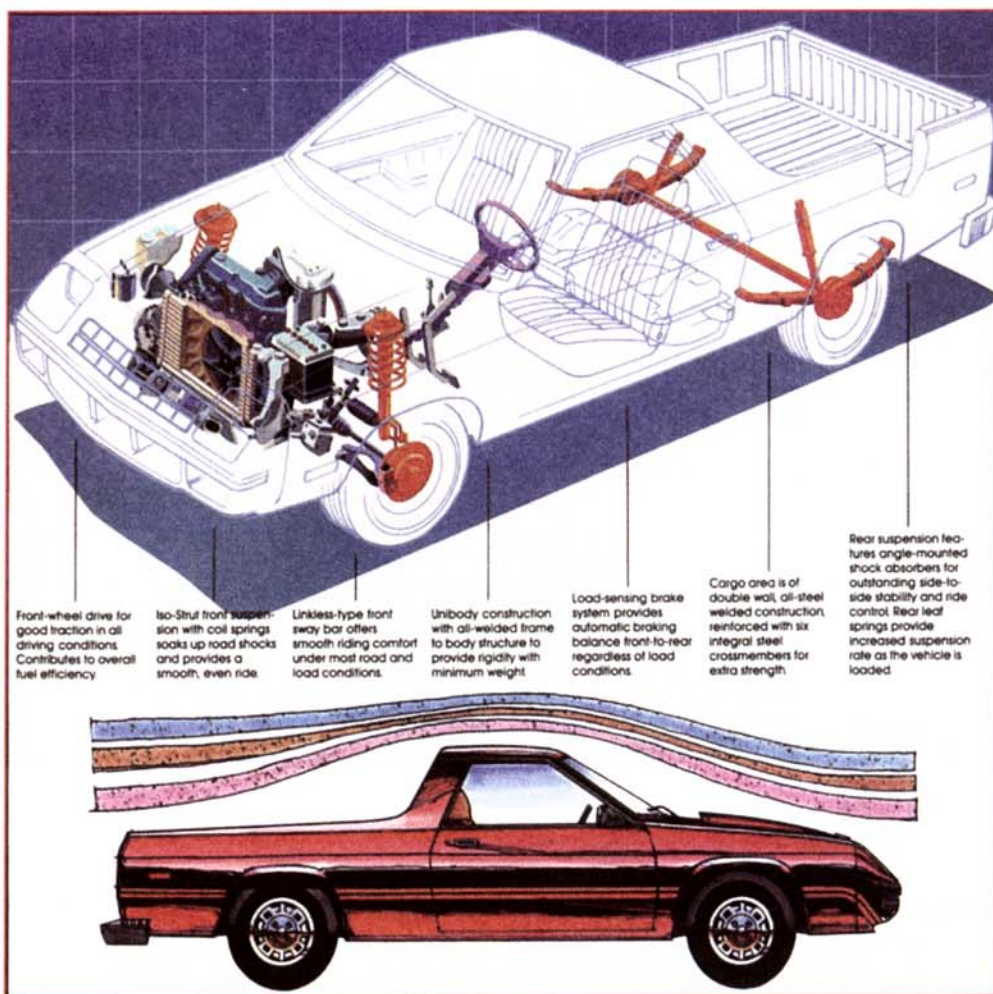
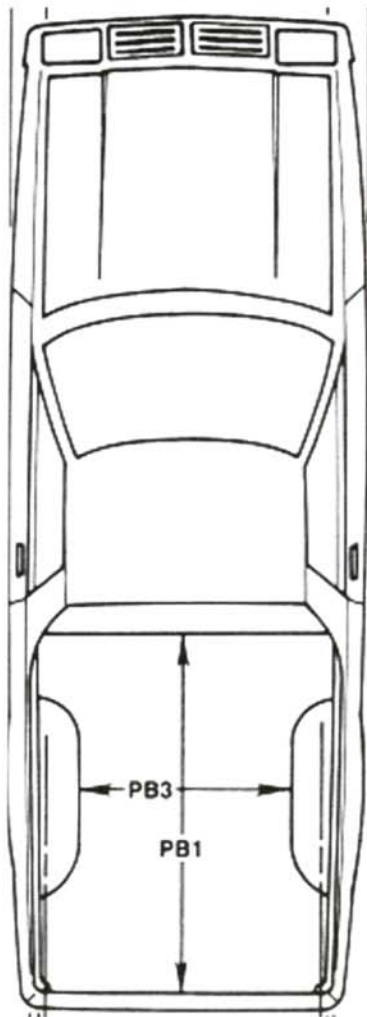
\*See EPA 137 MPG numbers for comparison. Your mileage may differ depending upon speed, weather and trip length. Actual highway mileage will probably be closer than highway estimate. In California, 28 EPA 47 MPG, all estimated highway.



**The Scamp GT** interior included a sport steering wheel and an instrument cluster with clock, tach and trip odometer and choice of low back or high back bucket seats in vinyl or cloth and vinyl (also available with racing stripe motif as seen on the previous page). Low back vinyl buckets were standard Scamp fare.

**Scamp options** included: side box rails; all vinyl fitted tonneau cover; air conditioning; electronic-tuned AM/FM stereo available with or without a cassette tape player with Dolby sound; automatic transaxle; Automatic Speed Control (Chrysler, its originator, still wouldn't call it "cruise"); five-speed manual transaxle; manual remote passenger side mirror.





Front-wheel drive for good traction in all driving conditions. Contributes to overall fuel efficiency.

Iso-Strut front suspension with coil springs soaks up road shocks and provides a smooth, even ride.

Linkless-type front sway bar offers smooth riding comfort under most road and load conditions.

Unibody construction with all-welded frame to body structure to provide rigidity with minimum weight.

Load-sensing brake system provides automatic braking balance front-to-rear regardless of load conditions.

Cargo area is of double wall, all-steel welded construction, reinforced with six integral steel crossmembers for extra strength.

Rear suspension features angle-mounted shock absorbers for outstanding side-to-side stability and ride control. Rear leaf springs provide increased suspension rate as the vehicle is loaded.

## 1983 PLYMOUTH TURISMO/SCAMP



The American Way to Get Your Money's Worth

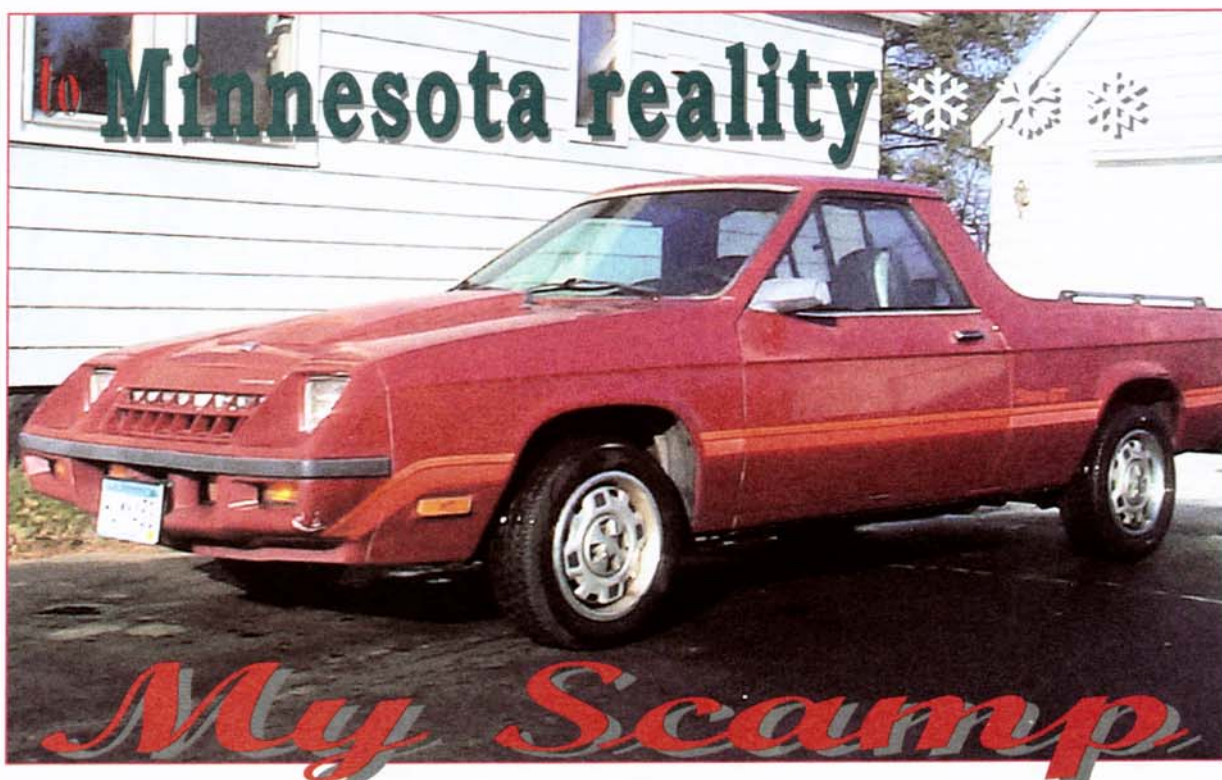


1983  
Scamp Pickup

**Scamp** shared its sales catalogue with the Turismo coupe from which it was largely derived. The X-ray view, above, shows Scamp's rear I-beam, leaf-sprung axle designed to carry loads Turismo's coil-over-shocks couldn't handle. Scamp did have its own order book in which all optional equipment is shown in black-and-white, including its wheel offerings. Thirteen-inch Rallye wheels were standard; 14-inch Rallyes with a bolt-on center cap were optional (standard on the GT). For more money a buyer could specify 14-inch cast aluminum wheels.



From  
California,  
a man,



by Mark Olson  
Proctor, Minnesota

**“SCAMP?** Didn’t Plymouth make those little cars the early ‘70s?”

That is usually the first thing any one who knows his or her Plymouths will say when I tell them I bought one. Well, my Scamp is a Plymouth, but it is not a car. My 1983 Plymouth Scamp GT is a commercial vehicle with a gross weight of 3,450 pounds. That makes it a full-fledged half-ton pickup!

In the spring of 2001 I got the urge to find another vehicle (Plymouth, of course) to take up some of the vacant room in my garage. I had a daily driver and my 1968 Fury III convertible and wanted more. I knew it had to be small, as I was pretty much left with an open area eight feet wide and 15 feet deep. I remembered the Rampage (Scamp’s Dodge twin) and then I remembered Chrysler made a Plymouth version too. So the quest was on.

I started by searching the internet for information. I found out a little about them from the AllPar site at <http://www.all-par.com/omni/rampage/index.html> and I liked what I saw.

Searching various on-line car dealers, I ran across a Scamp GT in California. I live in Minnesota, the land of car rust and rot, so “a rust-free California car” sounded a lot better than one with “free rust”! The seller (Paul) was asking \$1500 for the Scamp, which, based on the description he gave, seemed reasonable. It had high mileage but no major damage. Paul was its second owner (for 16 years) and again: NO RUST!

In March, of 2001, I emailed Paul, then called and talked to him a few times. I discovered that he had bought the Scamp when it was two years old with about 20 thousand miles on the odometer. He told me, “It is without a doubt the

best vehicle I have ever owned!” He had put on a lot of the miles driving it between San Jose, where he lived, to Oregon to visit his mother in a nursing home. We talked quite a few times and he came down to \$1100, but I still did not like the idea of buying a car, sight unseen, in California. I kind of let it drop as summer came and I was going to car shows and became busy with other warm weather things.

Then in August I got another email from Paul: “When are you going to buy my Scamp?” He had taken it off the market because, after he talked to me and heard I wanted to restore it, he just could not sell it to someone who wanted to use as it for a “gardener’s truck.” He also had been offered \$1100 from local kids who planned to use it for street racing, but he wanted me to have it. I thought, OK, this guy WANTS me to have it. I decided I had to give it a shot.

I searched the list of Plymouth Owners Club members and found that Robert Semichy lives in San Jose. I contacted him and he was able to find a friend who knew more than he does about newer Mopar vehicles to go with him to look over the Scamp on my behalf. Club members are a great resource, and I would do the same for any of them. Their verdict was that the vehicle was indeed rust-free and was what the seller was describing. Having a real flesh and blood contact is a comforting thing.

(This was actually the second time I purchased a car on the internet. I had also bought my 1968 Fury III convertible from an advertisement on the web.)

I decided that shipping the Scamp to Minnesota made sense and found a transport company that could pick it up in a few weeks. After relieving me of about \$700 for their services, they had the Scamp in Minneapolis by November 12th. Three days later, I picked it up at a friend’s house, where it was dropped off, and drove my new acquisition 150 miles to



its new home.

Being that it was winter here in the Northland and not time for driving a California car, I decided to do a little engine work. The head gasket was leaking a little--the reason why I did not want to drive it from California. I had the head off and the machine work done and the engine back together by mid-winter.

I plan on driving the Scamp as a limited use (nice weather only) second car until 2008, when it will be old enough to be admitted to the club. Over the next few years, I also plan on restoring it as close to original condition as possible.

The paint is pretty good for being having been "baked" for 18 years by hot California sun. A small dent at the rear corner on the passenger side was repaired this spring. It still has a few shopping cart dings in the doors and a small crease in the right wheel well needing repair, and a total repaint is in the future. I have already started the process of getting the GT logos and stripes recreated at a local graphics shop.

I have checked with some upholstery suppliers who say they should have no problem getting new seat covers in the original material for the bucket seats. I have already replaced the foam and cloth headliner. The foam deteriorates and the cloth falls. Many different places sell exact replacements, because this is such a common problem. The carpet (still original) is pretty close to mint condition. As the vehicle spent its first years in California, no winter sludge and salt have been destroying the carpet and the metal under it.

The dash in the GT is shared with the TC3 and has a built-in tachometer and quartz clock for rally racing. The steering wheel is of a kind of soft, spongy rubber and, amazingly, it does not seem to have been destroyed by the California sun.

The Scamp is fun to drive, the five-speed transmission in my GT is pretty easy to shift. When it was new, the little pickup must have been quite a head turner.

**THE SCAMP SHARED** a lot of parts with the Horizon and the Horizon TC3. From the B-pillar to the front bumper, most things swap. The floor pan from under the seats to the back of the cab is a direct part exchange with the Horizon four-door sedan. The doors have the same part number as the TC3, but the glass is unique to the Scamp.

The back part of the vehicle, however, is totally different. Both the TC3 and the Horizon have coil springs over shocks for rear suspension, while the Scamp uses very light three-blade leaf springs. The front and rear spindles and brakes are the same as the rest of the Horizon line. The front springs are a little heavier than those on the TC3, but will interchange.

The rear brakes have an unique feature: a spring-loaded proportioning valve with levers that act as sensors. As the springs are loaded, the valve increases braking power to the rear wheels. This is not ABS, but, by reducing the applied force to the rear brakes when no load is in the box, it does keep the rear wheels from locking up.

**IN THE PROCESS OF LOOKING** for my Scamp, I have acquired the original owner's manual, shop manual, advertising brochures, dealer spec sheets and some other paper for the Scamp. I also have a mint condition full-line Chrysler Corp Parts manual in paper form and on microfiche.

I have also found a computer registry on-line for the Scamp. The URL of that site is <http://scampgt.freeyellow.com/>. The fellow who runs the site, Steven, is maintaining a very informative site on the vehicle and trying to create a useful resource for the little trucks. Rampages are covered also, along with some other small FWD Mopars.

**THE PRODUCTION FIGURES** for the Scamp and the Scamp GT are not too clear. In his book on Plymouth and DeSotos, Jim Benjaminson states that less than 2,000 were made. The Scamp Registry pages (URL listed below) show basic Scamp production at 2,184 and Scamp GT production at 1,380, putting total production at approximately 3,600--a number I have found other places. No matter what numbers you choose to use, I do know that Scamp production was very limited.

Information I have indicates that Belvidere, Illinois, was the assembly point for all Scamps. My own GT shows a build date of April 9, 1983. I have heard that some Scamps sat in dealers' inventories until late 1984. I have also heard rumors that a buyer could order a 1983 Scamp during the 1984 model year, yet it would be listed as a 1983 model on the title. I can't imagine anyone wanting a Plymouth so bad that they'd buy an '83 model when a 1984 Dodge version could be purchased for the same price, so I do not put any faith in that rumor.

If you are thinking of buying a Scamp, don't wait! These little guys are disappearing fast, and, in some locations, are becoming hard to get already. Also, it is hard to tell if any will survive in regular use for another ten years. Most newer cars are considered "throw-a-ways", and their parts will disappear fast after 20 years. Most of the parts I have found for my Scamp were listed in Chrysler's dealer inventory database rather than as stock items at the parts depots.

The 2.2 liter engine has been out of production for almost ten years now; with each passing year it will become harder to get mechanical parts. However, the nice thing about restoring an early 1980s Mopar is that they still have carburetors, and the computer is not the only reason they keep running. As mechanical parts are much easier and cheaper to reproduce than custom electronic stuff, I can imagine it will be more difficult to restore post-1980s automobiles.

**ITS VERY LOW PRODUCTION** and the fact that the Scamp was the last pickup truck made by Plymouth--and the only pickup made by Plymouth in this country (the Arrow was a Mitsubishi) after WWII--make the 1983 Scamp a good bet for a future Plymouth of distinction! Look for mine at a National Meet after 2008.

**PB**

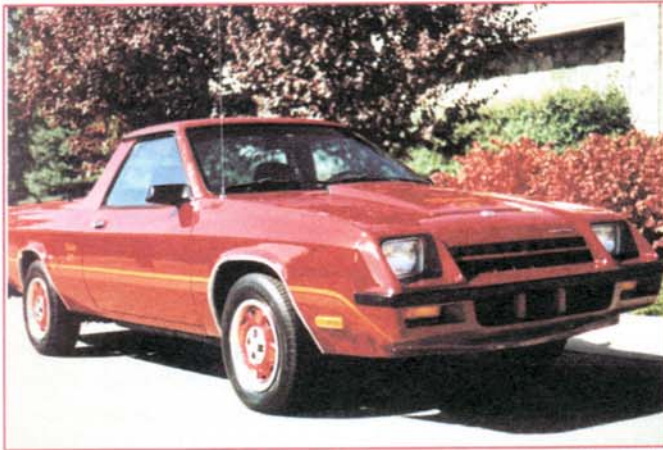




## Scamp Gallery



*Scamp*: base version, Roger Wermeskerch, Lincoln, Nebraska.



*Scamp GT*: R. E. Stephens, Kaysville, Utah.



*Scamp GT*: at Shakopee Mopar Show. Photo by Don Bunn.



*Scamp GT*: unidentified, with bedcap. Photo by Don Bunn.



*Scamp GT*: unidentified, at Shakopee. Photo by Clif Nelson



Yeah, sure...and it's got a Cummins diesel under the hood, too! *Scamp GT*, Clif Nelson, Adams, North Dakota.