

# 1960-61 Plymouth Fury Golden Commando

*It was ahead of the technological curve, but behind the times in styling*

by Duane Carling

**F**ury SonoRamic Golden Commando. If a name like that can't sell cars, nothing can. That's apparently what the brain trust at Plymouth was thinking in 1960. After years of conservative design, and names like Cambridge and Belvedere, Plymouth decided more flash was just what it needed to move out of third place on the new-car sales chart. Unfortunately, the 1960 models started a sales slide from

chopping off the bottom—and, for symmetry, the top—of the wheel. The company's sales literature claimed the square wheel allowed better forward vision. A contemporary road tester compares turning the FSGC to "juggling a cigar box."

To the left of the wheel, five push buttons, marked R-N-D-2-1, were for operating the three-speed automatic transmission (Chrysler engineers were big fans of the

hundreds of fasteners and allowed the entire body/frame assembly to be dipped in primer. Chrysler said its process doubled corrosion resistance. The FSGC also introduced high-strength door latches and an asymmetrical leaf-spring suspension.

Even some of the gizmos were clever. Options included a below-the-dash record changer that played through the radio. It held up to 14 45s, and rarely skipped a groove no matter how bumpy the road.

Still, the FSGC's *pièce de résistance* was under its hood. The 383 cubic-inch SonoRamic V8 made 330 hp at 4800 rpm. Its distinguishing feature was intake manifolds that mounted one four-barrel over each of the valve covers; with intake runners nearly three feet long, the 383 produced an amazing 460 lb ft of torque at 2800 rpm. Exhaust gas heated the base of the Carter AFB carbs to improve fuel atomization. Idling in cold weather could be a problem: Cold fuel tended to puddle en route to the intake valves.

At a *Popular Mechanics* test at Daytona Beach, the FSGC turned the quarter mile in under 14 seconds—faster than any contemporary full-size Ford or Chevy.

That kind of performance wasn't lost on law enforcement agencies. After years of experimentation with a number of brands, the California Highway Patrol settled on Plymouth in 1961. Back then, California freeways were still nearly empty expanses of new concrete; the CHP could overlook the Plymouth's quirks and excessive styling in the interest of sheer speed.

The car-buying public wasn't as forgiving. The '60 Plymouths, intended to push the brand past Ford into second place on the sales chart, had the opposite effect. The year ended with Plymouth in fourth place, 1800 units behind Rambler. For 1961, the Chrysler and Plymouth brands were consolidated into one division. All Plymouths, including the FSGC, were restyled in a more conservative theme. But despite more technical innovation, including alternator-powered electrical systems and closed crankcase ventilation, Plymouth fell to seventh in sales among American car brands.

The Fury SonoRamic Golden Commando was dropped after the 1961 model year. Less than 500 FSGCs were sold. If you're ever pounding the interstate in your '90s thrill machine, and you get passed by an old Plymouth with strange badges on its fenders, you've just seen one of the rarest Chrysler products ever built. ■

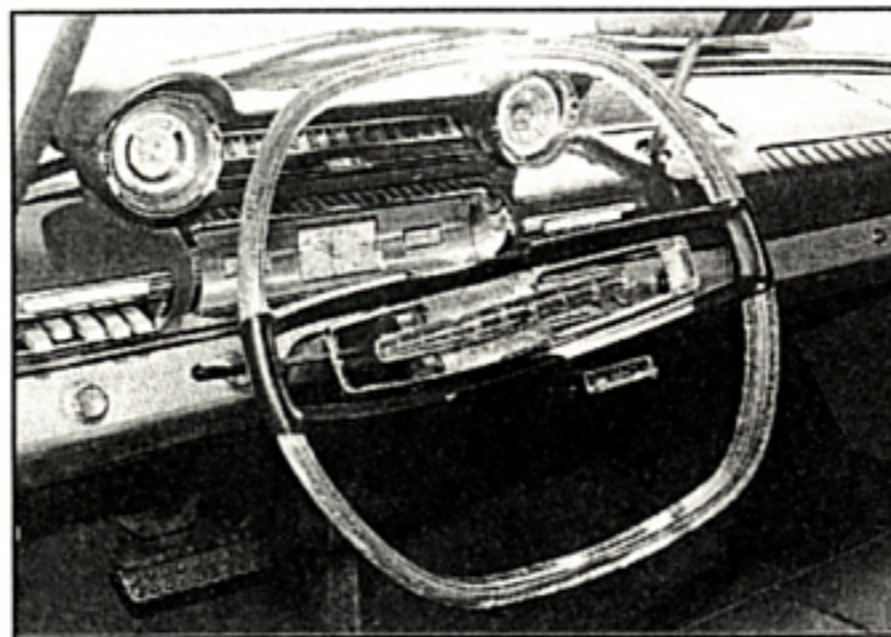


The '61 FSGC's look (above) wasn't as ostentatious as the '60's, but underneath was impressive power and decent handling.

which the brand has never fully recovered.

Even badges on the '60 Plymouths were ostentatious. To the basic Fury script, the upgrade Sport Fury added a six-inch round rocket medallion on the rear fender. The next step up was the Golden Commando, which featured the circle/rocket and a triangular wedge on the front fender. Finally, the SonoRamic Golden Commando added a slash through the wedge to accommodate the entire name. With long, tall vertical fins and huge chrome bumpers, the Plymouths carried the late-'50s chrome-and-fin craze to the extreme. Trouble was, the craze had peaked, and other companies had already begun to show more restraint in styling.

The Fury SonoRamic Golden Commando (FSGC) was the glitziest Plymouth of all. Its driver was greeted by a square steering wheel molded in clear plastic with gold metal flake. The car was aimed at the gentleman sportster, who must have had trouble with his not-so-sporting belly rubbing the wheel. Plymouth solved the problem by



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parking brake, and didn't add a "Park" function to their transmissions until 1962, some 10 years after Ford and GM). On the right were five identical buttons for the control of ventilation, heating and cooling. One can imagine a new FSGC owner, still getting familiar with the car, turning the transmission to scrap by inadvertently pushing reverse when he wanted to turn up the heat.

The FSGC's eccentricities are more ironic in light of its true strengths; it was one of the most advanced full-size cars of its time. The '60 Plymouths had unibody construction before any other Big Three car, and more than a decade before it became the industry standard. The unibody eliminated