

Aerial Maneuvers: The Story of the 1969-73 “Fuselage-Body” Chryslers

A dead-end styling concept based on aircraft design from the early Sixties got renewed interest later in the decade, in time to substantially modernize Chrysler's looks.

by Jeffrey I. Godshall



Your next car: The Great New Chrysler." That was the claim on the cover of the impressively sized catalog for the marque's all-new 1969 models. For more than 1 million Americans over the next five years, a Chrysler *was* their next car, one of the "fuselage" cars, so-called because of their aircraft-inspired body shells.

Today, out of packaging necessity, nearly all cars employ a fuselage design with flush side glass; minimal offset of glass to body; windshield, backlight, and quarter windows attached with adhesives; and thin door sections. In 1969, though, this was all-new territory for American cars.

The automobile and the airplane began together, blossomed together, and matured together during the twentieth century. Though it was rare for airplane designers to look to the automobile for inspiration, automobile designers often looked to the skies for ideas. Indeed, some companies made both cars and planes. Henry Ford built both "Tin Lizzies" and Trimotors; E. L. Cord sponsored Auburn, Cord, and Duesenberg automobiles and Stinson airplanes. Then, too, during both of the century's world wars, auto manufacturers showed planemakers a thing or two about mass production.

One of the early examples of aviation design brought down to earth was the Lincoln Aero-Phaeton, specially built for the New York Automobile Salon of 1928. Its brushed-aluminum LeBaron body sported aircraft-inspired dual cockpits, airfoil fenders, disc wheels, and a boat-tail with a vertical fin shaped like an airplane rudder. As a final touch, a miniature airplane flew over the radiator shell. Later, Gordon Buehrig's magnificent 1936 Cord 810 featured an aircraftlike instrument panel packed with aviation-type dials and throttle levers. After World War II, inspired by the twin rudders of the Lockheed P-38 Lightning, GM designers famously added tailfins to the 1948 Cadillac.

By the mid Fifties, Chrysler, too, began to apply aircraft elements to its automobiles. Under the tutelage of styling director Virgil Exner, Chrysler in 1956 became the first manufacturer to apply fins to its entire line of automobiles. However,

despite claims of added stability in crosswinds, the fins became caricatures of themselves within a few years. Exner began to look elsewhere for direction, but—perhaps ironically—his search led him back to aviation principles.

In an analysis of a typical cross section through a car body, he observed that the side glass was flat and mostly upright, with a space-wasting bulge at the belt where glass met body, leading to a flat, thick lower door panel with little tuck-under at the sill. A typical section through an aircraft fuselage, however, was considerably different. The sidewalls curved up into the roof and down under the floor, with the window glass set flush with the sides. This design increased interior space efficiency while the smooth exterior surface allowed the plane to slip through the air with minimum wind resistance. Exner considered: Could this approach be applied to automotive design?

He first tried the concept with the 1960 Valiant, where he managed to eliminate the bulge at the belt and obtain thinner doors. However, Exner was hampered by the Valiant's lack of curved glass. He tried again with the original plan for the corporation's 1962 large cars, all of which would have had curved side glass. Ultimately, these designs were stillborn and the hastily downsized Plymouth and Dodge that were released instead (with flat side glass) failed in the marketplace, costing Exner his job.

That was the apparent end of fuselage design at Chrysler. Elwood Engel, the new design vice president recruited from Ford, initiated an entirely different styling philosophy that emphasized the width and length of the package. Though curved side glass did at last arrive, the offset to the body at the belt was as distinct as anywhere in the industry. But a flicker of interest in fuselage design remained in Highland Park in the person of Cliff Voss.

As Exner's alter ego, Voss was disturbed by his departure in fall 1961 and eventually jumped ship to Ford Design in the mid Sixties. But Voss was a Chrysler man at heart and after a year or so away, he finagled a return. Back at Chrysler he was put in charge of an advanced studio with Alan Kornmiller as studio manager and a small staff of designers including Chet Limbaugh.

"It was a small studio," recalls Limbaugh, "with room for a single full-size clay, which we used to develop a package model for the 1969, or E-series, Chrysler.

It was a four-door sedan, covered in pale blue Di-Noc, and code-named 'La Scala.' As I remember, it was a really nice car well received by management." So much so that there was serious talk of releasing La Scala as the production model. But there were problems.

"The packaging model wasn't feasible," says retired design chief Dave Cummins, who worked in the Chrysler/Imperial Exterior Studio at the time. "We had to redo it to make it work."

This reveals a nearly universal problem in the automotive industry. Designers in the production studio complain that the people in the packaging studio pay no attention to the vital "hard points" in developing their model, while the designers in the packaging studio complain that the production guys "lose" their design when making it feasible.

In fact, all designers "cheat," although this is less of a problem today with the discipline that computers have imposed. Back then, as the clay model was developed, wooden dowels the diameter of a dime would be driven into the clay at critical points to caution the stylists and clay modelers not to let the surface drop below that point. At the same time, the studio engineers would cover a 22-foot-long movable board with myriad full-sized "master sections" at critical points on the body. These sections would be examined, challenged, and revised continually as the designers and engineers haggled over what was truly feasible. The end result was a car that all agreed could be released for production.

One the most important things both the packaging and production studios had to consider was what was "wrong" with the current car. The Engel Chryslers of 1965-68 were astonishingly successful, with production reaching a yearly average of more than 250,000 cars. However, one of the things that began to date these cars stylistically was the ratio of side glass to body height. Compared to the slinky Pontiac Bonneville, they suffered from tall side glass and high roofs that perched atop the body rather than being integrated into it. The designers would use the opportunity presented by the all-new 1969 C-bodies to change the glass-to-body ratio by raising the beltline to diminish the height of the side glass.

There was another problem the stylists wanted to avoid. The 1967-68 Chryslers had concave bodysides, which resulted in stamping difficulties and surface irregularities around the rear-wheel opening.

The "fuselage-body" Chryslers made their last stand for 1973. A loop front bumper helped define the car's styling in 1969, but was abandoned on '73s like this Newport (with ultimately changed trim above the grille) and its costlier kin.



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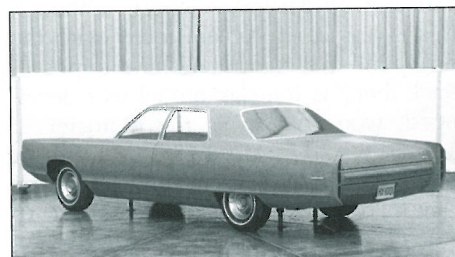
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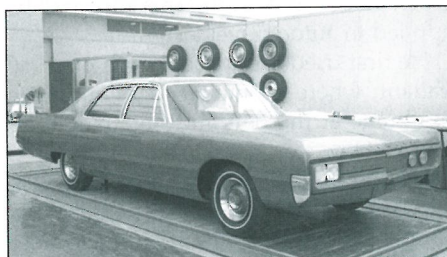
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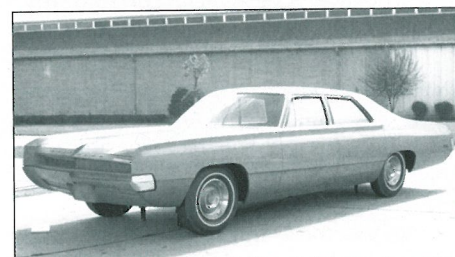
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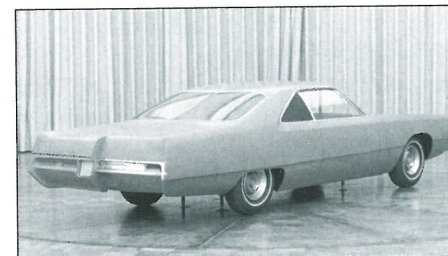
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As the wags said, "You didn't want to buy a black one." The stamping people were adamant that this problem be corrected on the '69 model.

Meanwhile, Dick Macadam came on board as chief of the Chrysler/Imperial Exterior Studio. Formerly head of the Plymouth Studio, Macadam had to be brought up to speed on a product that was considerably more expensive in piece cost than the plebeian Plymouth.

In hindsight, Cummins came to believe that the package got away from the design team as the '69 Chrysler evolved in the styling studio. It was a huge car: Wheelbase was advertised at 124 inches (123.5 inches in actuality); overall length was a whopping 224.7 inches, five inches longer than in '68; and overall width was 79.1 inches.

"[Chrysler product planning chief] Bob Kushler insisted that the four-door sedan roof be higher than the four-door hardtop. The studio retorted that, if so, the rear overhang had to be increased to keep the car in proportion," Cummins recalls of the unusual way the overall length was determined. "So, using thin Foam-Core cardboard, body-color Di-Noc film, and Mylar chrome tape, [Designer Don Wright and I] fabricated a full-size two-dimensional end-of-quarter-panel mock-up that we could stand against a full-size clay, moving it rearward incrementally to determine where the quarter panel should end to balance the design. And that set the length of the car." One result of this was a 22.4-cubic-foot trunk that held eight suitcases, one more than in the '68s.

1, 2. A model from May 1965 created in one of Chrysler's advanced studios displays packaging and stylistic elements of the upcoming fuselage body. 3, 4. By March 15, 1966, the main section of the '69 body is taking shape. 5, 6. An alternative design with fender skirts seen on the same day. 7, 8. A clay photographed May 12 with front and rear ends that suggest early Seventies Dodge and Plymouth more than '69 Chrysler. 9. A model displayed the next day showed a pronounced fenderline crease and lack of a loop bumper. 10, 11. A two-door work-up from May 31 with a longer rear deck on the driver's side. Front and rear details remained unsettled.

While bigger on the outside, the car was, to its credit, significantly roomier on the inside. The side glass, with its tighter 43-inch radius, flowed into bodyside sheetmetal that was more curved, while

the body-sill turn-under was greater than before. The increased curvature of the body side permitted the side window frames to move outward at their bases, resulting in shoulder room increases of 3.5 inches in the front seat and three inches in the rear seat. Hip room was increased six inches. The rear of four-door sedans gained three inches of leg room and more knee room. Convertible tops were redesigned so that the top rails folded down behind the rear seat instead of beside the seat. This change increased shoulder room an impressive 10.6 inches and hip room 7.6 inches. The rear seat in the soft tops was now as wide as in two-door hardtops—58.8 inches—a significant improvement.

The curved A-pillar plus the rounded corners of the windshield resulted in a smoother appearance and made the glass and roof structure appear more unified. Windshields and backlights were adhesively retained so that the glass was nearly flush with the sheetmetal. A polysulfide adhesive developed and supplied by Chrysler Corporation's own Chemical Division did the trick.

The rainwater drip trough above the side glass was set flush with the roof surface. Concealed windshield wipers sported an articulated left-hand wiper with a wipe pattern 4.5 inches wider than in the '68 cars. To further add to the sleek appearance, two-door hardtops with air conditioning featured side-window glass sans the customary vent window.

"I hated that two-door hardtop roof," recalls Cummins. "It was developed in the Dodge Exterior Studio for use on the new 1969 C-bodies and we in the Chrysler Studio were told to use it. The problem was the way the surface of the C-pillars intersected the 'Dutchman panel' below the backlight, necessitating the use of left and right trailing widow peaks in the vinyl-roof touchdown molding. The problem was corrected when we got a new two-door hardtop roof [designed by Jack Crain] with the '72-'73 facelift and we could finally create a smoothly sweeping touchdown molding that looked good in all views."

Corporate management had allotted \$131.2 million to tool the 1969 Plymouth/Dodge/Chrysler/Imperial lineup, \$35.4 million of which was for tooling parts unique to the Chrysler brand. Cummins remembers the day they were about to have a studio review of styling sketches done for the bodyside competition. Before the review got under way, Engel



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1-5. One of the most unusual, and rarely ordered, Chrysler options in 1969 was the "Sportsgrain" simulated-teakwood trim available on Newport two-door hardtops and convertibles. Newports came standard with a 383-cid two-barrel-carburetor V-8 rated at 290 bhp. TorqueFlite automatic transmission was optional. (Owner: Midwest Car Exchange) 6. The only other Chrysler convertible was the 300. Priced from \$4450, production totaled 1933. (Owner: Bryan McGilvray)



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unexpectedly popped into the studio, spied a sketch that he liked, and told Cummins, "That's your '69 Chrysler!" The instant winner was a simple line drawing penned by Bill Wayland. As realized in the clay model, the sheer, chaste side surface was relieved by a broad chamfer directly off the belt that ran from the tip of the front fender to the C-pillar. Running the full length of the lower body was a small undercut that provided a set point for various molding treatments.

The wheel openings had no accent flares. "We couldn't," says Cummins. "The super-wide body and the narrow track already made the wheels look buried without adding flares." For 1970, the rear track was widened 1.3 inches to help alleviate the problem.

Up front, a bold chrome loop bumper encompassed the grille and headlights. This was a big deal. In early 1967, Pontiac introduced its Firebird "ponycar" with an innovative loop bumper that essentially *was* the front end of the car. When the '68 GTO bowed with its body-color "Endura" nose, the bumper was literally hidden in plain sight. It was a styling innovation that promised designers new freedom in shaping front ends.

Though loop bumpers generally cost more (you throw away the metal in the middle), Cummins and the cost estimators found that the loop design wouldn't cost much more than the conventional front bumper on the '68 Chrysler. However, when mocking up the '69 front end, it was discovered that vinyl fillers—at a cost of \$5.50 a car—would be required to hide an unsightly gap between the bumper and the hood and fenders. "Product Planning swallowed hard at the extra cost," recalls Cummins, "but in the end they came aboard."

On the broad, planar hood, the customary center windsplit was replaced with a shallow trough about a foot wide, the sides of which ran to the back of the hood. A portion of the bumper was "spanked down" the same width of the hood trough, a nice touch.

1, 2. A clay from November 1967 wears Sportsgain trim, a 300-style grille and taillights, and Town & Country emblems. 3. Full-sized Chrysler convertibles, including the 300, made their final appearance for 1970. (Owner: Milt Jenks) 4, 5. Town & Country wagons rode a 122-inch wheelbase; other '70 Chryslers used a 124-inch span (Former owner: Murray Park) 6, 7. At \$3925, the Newport ragtop cost \$655 less than a similar 300. (Owner: Sue Kennedy)



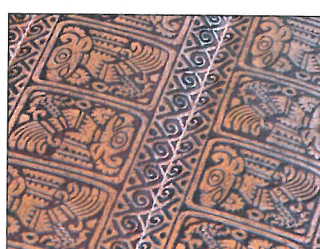
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1. During 1970, Chrysler released a pair of specially trimmed Newport Cordoba hardtops, a four-door and a marginally less-popular two-door. 2-4. Aztec Eagle accents were found on the hood badge (2), door panels (3), and seat inserts (4). 5, 6. Exteriors featured an "Espanol"-grain vinyl roof covering and Cordoba Gold paint. 7. A color-coordinated interior completed the package. (Owner: Sue Kennedy)

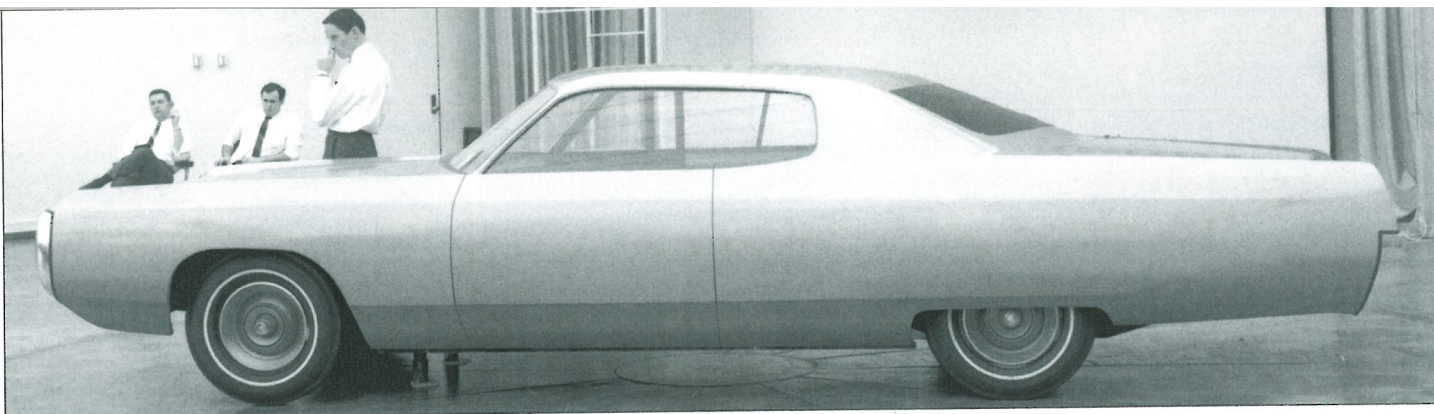
Designers were tasked with filling the bumper's open cavity with series-specific grilles. On the Newport and Newport Custom, the central grille section, which was the width of the hood trough, was decorated with three castle shapes and set nearly flush with the bumper, while the side portions of the fine horizontally lined grille slanted toward the set-back headlamps. Accented by a narrow vertical crest, the more intricate New Yorker grille (shared with the Town & Country station wagon) had a forward-thrusted center portion with recessed side wings parallel to the bumper opening. The sporty 300 continued to feature a crossbar design with the red-painted throat of the horizontal element set on a flat-black vertical-bar grille surface that covered hidden headlamps. The 300's front bumper was unique in that it did not have amber park and turn-signal lamps set into the lower surface like

other Chryslers. Instead, rectangular clear-lens lamps set at a 45-degree angle were placed just inside the ends of the loop. Newports and 300s featured a small "Chrysler" script set low on the driver's side of the grille; marque identification on New Yorkers and Town & Countrys came via narrow individual capital letters located in the hood trough.

There was no loop bumper out back—yet. Base Newports featured twin rectangular taillamps set at bumper height while Customs used these same lamps overlaid with a narrow vertical box texture that spanned the width of the back end. New Yorkers featured wide taillights with a full-width textured appliqué, while 300s had unique full-width taillamps that required back-up lights to be set in the bumper. For the New Yorker, designers fashioned bright moldings on the decklid and quarter-panel end caps to simulate the look of a loop bumper.

Body ornamentation was straightforward. Newports and Customs employed satin-finish moldings of different widths along the lower-body character line. New Yorkers featured wheel-lip, sill, and sill-extension moldings along the bottom of the body, while 300s used the same treatment without the sill extensions. Both had belt moldings that extended forward along the fender peaks, and 300s also sported a trio of thin paint stripes just above the lower character line. Individual letters spelled out "THREE HUNDRED" along the rear quarter panel.

"We decided to make the lettering part of the ornamentation," relates Cummins. "I recalled the individual 'IMPERIAL' block lettering we used on the 1956 model and decided to reprise that for the '69 300. Of course, that meant 12 letters per side, 24 costly letters per car. One day, company president Lynn Townsend, ever true to his accountant's roots, came



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1, 2. Photos from February 15, 1968, provide looks at early and ultimately discarded bodyside styling of the planned-for-1971 Chryslers. Budget issues eventually delayed arrival of the reskinned Chryslers until 1972. 3. In October '69, this literally over-the-top woodgrain treatment was considered for future Town & Country.

Spring Fling: Chrysler's High-Powered '70 Specials

By 1970, Chrysler Corporation had a long history of producing "spring specials," midseason vehicles with something extra to draw shoppers out of their winter hibernation and back into showrooms. In '70, the Chrysler brand whipped up some notable mid-year specials built around the high-performance 440-cid "TNT" V-8.

One of the most memorable Mopar spring specials was the Chrysler 300-Hurst. Chrysler Studio designer Dave Cummins remembers how the car got its start:

"We had just left the styling showroom in Highland Park, where we had obtained final approval of the ornamentation for the 1970 Chryslers, when I was called into a meeting with Chrysler-Plymouth Division head Robert Anderson and Chrysler Product Planning chief Bob Kushler. They outlined an idea for a special low-volume car for the 1970 Chrysler line much like the original letter-series Chrysler 300s that he company had fielded from 1955 through 1965. Inwardly, I shouted 'Hurray!'

"Management had struck a deal with Hurst Performance, who was finishing up a line of Hurst-badged cars for Oldsmobile. This left their plant without an upcoming product, so it was decided that the midyear Chrysler would be a Hurst-themed creation. Naming was simple. Since there had previously been a Chrysler 300-H in 1962, the 'successor' would be called the Chrysler 300-Hurst.

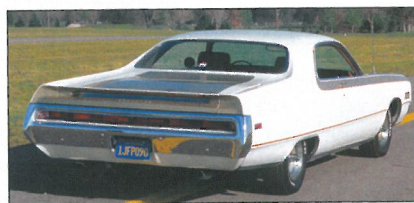
"The car was intended to increase showroom traffic only, a breakeven

car priced to reflect the car's equipment level with no price-premium for its 'status.' Kushler took great exception to this pricing policy but was outvoted."

The principal studio designer on the project was Jack Crain. After 5 P.M., Crain and a small crew of clay modelers headed by Tony Kulka would leave Highland Park and journey a few miles north to Hurst's unused plant on Eight Mile Road, taking with them modeling clay they would heat in an old oven at the facility. They'd work there until 10 or 11 P.M., then head home and be back to Chrysler early the next morning (somewhat the worse for wear). But the modelers loved the overtime!

"The car came together quickly—no more than a month to create," Crain remembers. "For example, we spot-welded a couple of aluminum rods together to use as an armature for the floating rear-deck spoiler, then clayed it up and balanced it visually. As the clay progressed, I'd work up some sketches of various paint schemes and striping proposals and take them back to the studio for review."

The 300-Hurst used stock sheetmetal with the exception of a fiberglass



The 1970 Chrysler 300-Hurst used a unique fiberglass decklid with an integrated spoiler.

hood and decklid. The hood sported a surfboard-shaped power bulge at the center; a scoop at the back near the windshield looked like ducting to the carburetor but actually directed air to the passenger compartment. Bold 300-Hurst nameplates decorated the sides of the power bulge. Flush rotary latches were located along the left and right sides of the forward portion of the hood.

Floating above the decklid and neatly integrated with the quarter panel extensions was a spoiler that, according to *Car Life* magazine, "wouldn't generate enough downforce to keep a robin in his nest." It looked neat, though.

The basic body color was Spinnaker White with Sauterne Mist Gold accents on the hood, decklid, upper bodyside, grille, and taillights. This was set off by what the catalog called "handcrafted pin-striping for sophisticated sportiness." In fact, the car seemed to be a somewhat over-the-top patchwork of half white/half gold. Cummins cautions, however, that whatever it looks like today, the color breakup was in keeping with other Hurst creations of the era (which were not exactly noted for understatement). The car rode on wide-tread H-70×15 raised-white-letter Polyglas tires on special 15×6JJ wheels highlighted by body-color accents and hand pin-striping.

Fitted with "loose-pillow" leather bucket seats lifted from the Imperial, the 300-Hurst's saddle-tan interior was suitably luxurious, "a masculine world of personal performance and luxury." The 375-bhp TNT version of the corporate 440-cube V-8 with high-

into the studio and barked, 'If I find out who was responsible for that expense I'll fire him.' Nobody owned up and nothing happened . . . but the costly individual letters were gone in 1970!"

Two- and three-seat Town & Country wagons rode on a 122-inch wheelbase (truly 121.5) and featured larger rear-wheel openings that visually reduced the bulk of the wagon body and allowed for the use of larger tires. An integral roof-mounted air deflector redirected a portion of the air flowing over the roof down over the tailgate to prevent dirt from collecting on the backlight. The new design, a Chrysler "first," was the result of two years' development by stylists and engineers.

The new T & C also had a 3.5-inch-wider cargo area that spanned 48.5 inches between the wheel housings and therefore could accommodate a 4×8-foot sheet of plywood. A total of 109.2 cubic feet of carrying capacity was available aft of the front seat. The wagons boasted simulated teakwood-grain paneling along the body-sides and the dual-action tailgate. The Town & Country remained America's most prestigious station wagon.

Front-seat occupants faced what might be termed a "loop" instrument panel, a carwide rectangle into which were recessed the instruments, climate and radio controls, and the glovebox. All controls were protected from impact or had minimum intrusion, and instrument-

panel surfaces ahead of the driver had low-luster finishes and subdued colors to prevent glare. To the annoyance of many, the ignition key was, for safety reasons, moved to the left side of the IP. (In 1970 it would move to the steering column.)

Front seating choices included a bench with or without fold-down center armrest, 3-in-1 individually adjustable "lounge chairs" with fold-down armrests, or bucket seats with fold-down armrest or floor console. All-vinyl, cloth-and-vinyl, and leather-and-vinyl seat trims appropriate to each series were utilized. As of January 1, 1969, front-seat head restraints were standard, thanks to Uncle Sam.

Chrysler buyers could choose from two

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Spinnaker White with Sauterne Mist Gold accents was the color scheme chosen for the 375-bhp 300-Hurst. (Owner: Milt Jenks)

performance camshaft, dual exhausts, and twin-snorkel air cleaner was teamed with a TorqueFlite automatic transmission with either conventional column shift or floor shift with a Hurst shift handle.

Cars destined to be 300-Hursts were built "in the white" (that is, in primer) at Chrysler's Jefferson Avenue assembly plant in Detroit and then trucked through city streets to the Hurst facility. Included with each car was a kit with miscellaneous pieces such as the Imperial seats.

Priced at \$5842, the 300-Hurst was considerably costlier than a standard 300 hardtop. Announced in February, production came to just 485 two-door hardtops, though some sources say as many as 501 hardtops—one with a sunroof—were made. There seems to be one known convertible; one or two other soft tops may have been built.

Car Life testers (who drove a car

with column shift and manual windows!) admitted they just didn't get it. The TNT V-8 was available in most other Chryslers on an optional basis. So, too, the heavy-duty suspension, power front-disc brakes, etc.

"The undeniably good features," they said, "are available on the plain 300s. The exclusive features don't offer any clear gain. Those who recognize the name will be offended. Those who don't recognize it can hardly be impressed. . . . The 300-Hurst is an attempt to put a little flash into the mid-year doldrums."

Maybe so. But the 1970 300-Hurst still makes a dandy of a special-interest collectible, especially if you don't mind being noticed.

From New Jersey Chrysler historian Sandy Block comes word of the "Newport 440," introduced in January. Available only on the Newport two-door hardtop, it came with the 440

TNT mill plus TorqueFlite, heavy-duty alternator, heavy-duty suspension, power steering, power disc brakes, Sure-Grip differential, styled road wheels with raised-white-letter tires, vinyl bucket seats with floor console, and "440" medallions low on the front fender aft of the wheel opening.

The only two exterior color choices were the meant-to-be-noticed Lemon Twist and Rallye Red, colors usually reserved for the corporation's muscle cars. Vinyl roofs matched the interior, which came in either black or white.

The Newport 440 package cost \$1240, which, when added to the tab for a Newport hardtop coupe, yielded a sticker price in Chrysler 300 territory. What's most amazing is the number produced—175—which suggests that the Newport 440 was a regional special of some kind. Has anyone ever seen one?

Jeffrey I. Godshall



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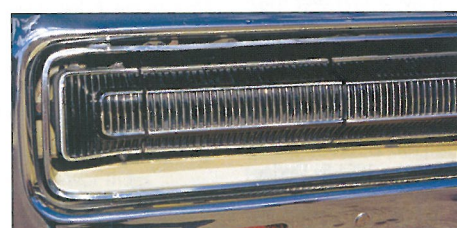


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Only two- and four-door hardtop 300s were produced for 1971. 1. The four-door was priced from \$4687 and attracted orders for 6683 units. 2. Bucket seats upholstered in vinyl were standard. 3. The dashboard received a revised glove-box door that sat nearly flush with the crash pad. 4, 5. Disappearing headlamps were continued on the 300. 6. So, too, a full-width taillamp lens. (Owner: James Harland)



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basic engines. All Newport varieties and Town & Country's came with a 383-cid V-8 with two-barrel carburetor and 290 bhp. An optional variant with a four-barrel carb, twin-snorkel air cleaner, and dual exhausts developed 330 bhp. Three Hundreds and New Yorkers featured a 440-cube four-pot V-8 good for 350 horsepower. (This engine, with twin exhausts, was optional on the Town & Country under the name "Special Wagon V-8.") A potent 375-horse "TNT" 440 with a high-performance camshaft, twin exhausts, and dual-snorkel air cleaner was optional on all save the Town & Country. All came with a three-speed TorqueFlite automatic transmission except the two Newport series, where a three-speed manual shift was considered standard.

Per Chrysler custom, bodies were of unitized construction that required nearly 5000 individual welds. Suspension featured front torsion bars and parallel 62-inch rear springs with 4.5 leaves on Newports, 5.5 leaves on 300s and New Yorkers, and 6.5 leaves on 4400-pound-plus Town & Country's.

The all-new fuselage Chryslers were available in 15 models in a choice of 18 exterior colors, five colors of paint stripes, and vinyl roofs in four colors. Perhaps the most unusual option was the "Sportsgrain" treatment: For an extra \$126.55, you could have the long flanks of your Newport two-door hardtop or convertible covered in simulated teakwood planking. Good luck finding one—a mere 195 cars were so equipped.

Another scarce option was the handsome cast-aluminum road wheel developed in conjunction with supplier Kelsey-Hayes. Testing at the Chrysler Proving Ground found that the lug nuts would "back off" the aluminum and come dangerously loose. Six days before the public debut of the '69s, these wheels were recalled and dropped from the option list. Those that eluded the recall are prized (but usually not driven on) by today's collectors.

The line bowed on September 19, 1968, at the nation's 3632 Chrysler dealers. When the model year concluded, production came to 260,771 units, about 4000 fewer than in 1968.

Changes to the 1970 models were minimal. Grilles were tweaked across the board and bodyside trim was rearranged, with moldings going lower relative to their 1969 position on Newports but higher on Newport Customs and New Yorkers. The molding that defined the



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1. For 1971, Town & Country wagons came standard with simulated Brazilian rosewood panels on the sides and tailgate. 2, 3. During the 1971 run, Chrysler added lower-priced Newport Royal models. Two- and four-door hardtops were available, but the \$4078 four-door sedan was the most popular with 19,962 made. Royal prices undercut those of concurrent "standard" Newports by \$112. (Owner: Milt Jenks)

bottom of the Town & Country's wood-grain paneling area now dipped down ahead of the rear-wheel opening, which made the wagon appear more athletic.

Out back was a new decklid, end caps, and two different loop-style bumpers. New Yorker and 300 bumpers had a thin, wide opening. The former stuffed this space with wide taillights separated by a decorative panel; that latter sported a clean, full-width taillamp. Newports

and Newport Customs had a different bumper with a solid center and rectangular taillights at the far ends. Newport Custom lenses again were decorated with vertical boxes and horizontal detailing was found on the lenses of Newports.

Much effort was devoted to the reduction of road noise and vibration, beginning with the addition of more than 25 square feet of sound isolation. Rubber insulators were installed in the suspen-



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1, 2. Of the three available 1971 Newport two-door hardtops, the Custom saw the lowest production run at 5527. (Owner: Larry Kennedy) 3-6. Chryslers were restyled for 1972, the year when the New Yorker split into base and Brougham lines. Equipped with a tasteful cloth-and-vinyl interior, the base four-door hardtop accounted for 10,013 assemblies. (Owner: Robert Huelsman)

sion to reduce metal-on-metal contact that transmitted noise and vibration to the body. The insulators separated the front body structure from the passenger cabin and mounted the rear axle and springs in a rubber "sandwich." Additionally, the forward body was reinforced to insure a shake-free ride, a rubber coupling was added to the steering column to stanch vibration to the steering wheel, and additional sound insulation was added to the rear-seat and shelf-panel areas. Standard on all but wagons and convertibles, the system was called "Torsion-Quiet Ride."

One interesting new idea was the "rim blow" steering wheel in which the horn could be activated by merely squeezing your hand to compress a small vinyl membrane on the inside of the wheel rim. It was great—when it worked. In Chrysler Engineering-speak, however, the system "was not robust" and was discontinued after a few years.

To increase showroom traffic at mid-year, Chrysler introduced a pair of Newport Cordoba hardtops. Unlike its far-better-remembered mid-Seventies



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namesake, this Cordoba had vinyl seats and lacked a glamorous TV spokesman. It featured special Cordoba Gold exterior paint and an antique-gold "Español"-grain vinyl roof. Grille and wheel rims were also painted Cordoba Gold, while Aztec Eagle accents (designed by Roman Baranyk) were featured on the hood badge, vinyl bodyside moldings, seat inserts, and door-trim panels. The package added about \$180 to the cost of a Newport. Production was almost equally balanced between 1868 two-door hardtops and 1873 four-door hardtops.

Other more interesting—and rarer—midyear models were centered around the 440-cid engine: the Newport 440 and

the 300-Hurst [see sidebar]. The flamboyant Hurst-modified 300 was in essence a reinterpretation of the mighty "letter-series" Chryslers that had disappeared after 1965.

Overall Chrysler production slumped to just 180,777 cars for 1970, a year of growing financial uncertainty. On June 21, the Pennsylvania Central Railroad declared bankruptcy in what was then the largest corporate bankruptcy in American history. Avaricious Wall Street insiders, looking for the "next Penn Central," settled on Chrysler, prompting an enraged outcry from Highland Park that "Chrysler was no Penn Central." Well, not this time.



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The Chrysler line for 1971 was not what had been initially planned. The corporation had budgeted \$93 million for a complete reskin of its C-body cars, with \$27.6 million allotted for changes exclusive to the Chrysler brand. This was in line with the practice of renewing the company's namesake marque every two years, a sequence that began with the 1963-64 cars. But the corporation was booked to spend \$109.9 million to tool all-new Plymouth and Dodge intermediates for '71. Since it was essential for competitive reasons that the three-year-old B-bodies be redone, the corporation decided to move the C-body renewal to the 1972 model year (and cancel all-new

'72 Valiant and Dart compacts, thereby saving \$77.9 million).

Cummins recalls part of the resulting scramble to come up with a third iteration of the 1969 Chrysler:

"The tooling people had a deadline for beginning to cut 'the stone,' the steel block from which tooling for the New Yorker grille was to be fashioned. Trouble was, we hadn't yet settled on a design. Nevertheless, the tooling people insisted they had to start *now*. To help them out, we committed to the New Yorker using the same plan view as the grille used on the Newports, and this enabled them to start cutting the tool on time."

The grille on the '71 Newports was

divided by four bright horizontal strips while the grille developed for the New Yorker and Town & Country was more formal with its vertically stacked segments. Additional distinction for the New Yorker/T & C was provided via individual rectangular headlamp bezels. The 300, with its disappearing headlamps, featured a thin cross-car "grille within the grille" filled with bright vertical bars and set against a black field. Taillight designs were tweaked, with the Newport Custom sporting a new three-element look with the vertically ribbed horizontal lamps flanking a matching center element.

Ventless side glass became standard on all models—though a power-operated



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1. The Newport Royal became a stand-alone series in '72, replacing Newport as Chrysler's anchor. Up front, its loop-type front bumper used a bolder split-grille design and the redone hood sported a raised center windsplit detail. 2. Out back, a large bumper and vertically placed taillamps completed the new look. The \$4051 Newport Royal four-door sedan was the least-expensive '72 Chrysler. It was also the most popular with 47,437 made.

vent was optional on the New Yorker four-door hardtop. New Yorkers, with their wide lower-body side moldings, now came with rear fender skirts. Wagons wore side and tailgate paneling with the look of Brazilian rosewood made from a new material that permitted some of the underlying paint color to show through the woodgrain. Torsion-Quiet ride was quietly extended to T & Cs.

Inside, the passenger side of the instrument panel was reworked by bringing the glovebox door rearward and set nearly flush with the crash pad. Seat trims, fabrics, and door-trim panels were all recast; each of the five series had its own unique look and feel.

Basic engine choices remained the same: 383-cid V-8 in two- and four-barrel iterations and two versions of the 440 V-8. Horsepower ratings diminished as car companies began to cite SAE net ratings rather than gross horsepower. An April 13 technical service bulletin advised that a limited number of 400-cid V-8s with automatic transmission would be installed in Newports during the 1971 model year, presaging the '72 lineup.

Bigger news was the midyear introduction of the Royal, the least-expensive Chrysler available. Considered a subset of the Newport series, the Royal came in all three of its body styles, albeit at a savings of \$112. A 360-cid two-barrel V-8 and cloth-and-vinyl interior in six color choices were standard. A three-quarter-length bodyside molding and a Royal call-out below the Newport fender script marked the exterior. Some 33,350 were built, a good showing considering the late introduction. In fact, assemblies of '71 Royals exceeded the 24,687 built in 1950, the last year Chrysler offered a car by that name. By spring 1971, Royals were garnering 25 percent of Chrysler sales.

Missing from the lineup were the Newport and 300 convertibles, the combined production of which in 1970 totaled a mere 2201 units. Sun worshippers were still courted via an optional power sunroof available on two-door hardtops with vinyl roofs. Model-year assemblies fell a little further to 175,118 units, reflecting the unanticipated carryover of the 1969 styling for a third year.

Nineteen seventy-two saw the debut of the postponed second-series fuselage Chryslers. They received a total exterior reskin. The gently curving bodyside was featureless save for a slight light-catching kick-out along the lower body. The smoother 1972 bodies looked enormous; it was almost as if the cars themselves were gloating in their immensity. Even the Town & Country looked bulkier with new standard fender skirts. To improve the appearance, the rear track was stretched again by 1.4 inches to a total of 63.4 inches.

A new front loop bumper was divided by a vertical center bar, and the hood accentuated this change by acquiring a center windsplit. Newports received a bolder grille featuring recessed vertical slats while the grille on the New Yorkers and Town & Country employed horizontal elements that swept forward to the center divider.

At the rear of New Yorkers, a new loop bumper—this one more integrated into the sheetmetal—featured wide slit-like taillights with central back-up lights. Newports now had a conventional bumper, notched at the outer ends to accommodate vertical taillamps that extended into the fender end caps in the manner of recent Oldsmobiles.

Series offerings were reorganized into three basic nameplates: Newport (in Royal and Custom versions), New Yorker (in base and Brougham trim), and the Town & Country. The first-ever New Yorker Brougham boasted upgraded interior trim and more standard equipment. For the first time since 1955, there was no 300 series in the lineup, production in 1971 having dipped to 13,939 examples.

TorqueFlite transmission, power front-disc brakes, and power steering were finally made standard equipment. Engine choices, all V-8s, included a two-barrel 400-cid, four-barrel 440-cid, and four-barrel dual-exhaust 440. In the initial press release for the 1972 cars dated August 29, 1971, the 360-cube V-8 was still listed as the standard Royal engine but by the time the catalogs were printed, it apparently



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had been dropped. Compression ratios were reduced to 8.2:1 to permit the use of regular gas across the board.

Optional with all engines was Chrysler's new electronic ignition system, which eliminated two components often at the root of poor engine performance—distributor breaker points and the condenser. The new electronic distributor was made in the company's Indianapolis electrical plant, which also produced the transistorized voltage regulator standard on Chrysler-built cars since 1970. Early electronic-ignition units were installed in Dodges and Plymouths racing in NASCAR in 1971, causing series champion Richard Petty to report, "It's the biggest single improvement ever made on stock car engines."

Customers apparently appreciated the added visual heft of the new bodies. Production jumped to 204,764 cars with the Newport Royal accounting for 85,244 units. Though new to the lineup, the more profitable New Yorker Brougham bested the plain New Yorker by almost 8100 cars. The Town & Country, which since 1971 had been facing competition from new 127-inch-wheelbase wagons from Oldsmobile and Buick, topped 20,000 in sales for the first time in three years.

Then, for 1973, the Royal name was lopped from the base Newports. Engine choices included a 400-cube two-barrel V-8, standard on the two Newport lines; and the 440 four-pot V-8, standard on the senior models and optional on Newports. Electronic ignition, extra-charge in '72 (pun intended), was now standard.

Missing was the signature front loop

bumper. Federal regulations of the time were forcing carmakers to install bumpers that could withstand a five-mph impact "without significant damage to the body" and 2.5-mph bumpers on the rear. Loop bumpers could not easily meet these new requirements. Manufacturers were permitted to phase in the standards, thus Chryslers (with annual sales of more than 200,000 units) had to comply in '73 while the low-volume Imperial (16,000 units annually) could get by for another year by adding bigger bumper guards.

The Chrysler's conventional front bumper was set further from the body with plastic filler strips covering the space between bumper and body. Protection

was provided by full-length reinforcement members on both front and rear bumpers and by strengthening the support members for the front bumpers. The system was augmented up front by solid-rubber bumper guards nearly four inches thick. Overall length of the '73s increased to a garage-busting 230.2 inches.

Designed by Ken Carlson, the rectangular grille-opening panel was flanked by headlights in square bezels. Distinct grille textures—a grate of fine horizontal boxes on Newports; long horizontal strips with a center peak on New Yorkers and T & Cs—were deeply recessed. Individual letters spelled out CHRYSLER on the header panel above the grille. A new



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1. The 1972 two-door hardtops (here a Newport Royal) used a new roof design with a revised rear quarter-window shape that gave them a more formal look than the sportier sloped style used in 1969-71. 2. Front ends were restyled for the 1973 models, and no longer used the brand's signature loop-type bumper. The photo commemorates the 1-millionth 1973 Chrysler-Plymouth Division product built, a Newport sedan.



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1969-73 Chrysler: Models, Prices, Production

1969	Weight	Price	Prod
Newport (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	3,891	3,485	33,639
convertible coupe	4,026	3,823	2,169
4d sedan	3,941	3,414	55,083
hardtop sedan	4,156	3,549	20,608
Total Newport			111,499 ¹
Newport Custom (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	3,891	3,652	10,955
4d sedan	3,951	3,580	18,401
hardtop sedan	3,971	3,730	15,981
Total Newport Custom			45,337
Town & Country (wb 122)			
4d wagon, 2S	4,435	4,583	10,108
4d wagon, 3S	4,485	4,669	14,408
Total Town & Country			24,516
300 (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	3,965	4,104	16,075
convertible coupe	4,095	4,450	1,933
hardtop sedan	4,045	4,183	14,464
Total 300			32,472
New Yorker (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,070	4,539	7,537
4d sedan	4,135	4,487	12,253
hardtop sedan	4,165	4,615	27,157
Total New Yorker			46,947
Total 1969 Chrysler			260,771
1970			
Newport (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,030	3,589	21,664 ²
convertible coupe	4,085	3,925	1,124
4d sedan	4,080	3,514	39,285
hardtop sedan	4,110	3,625	16,940 ³
Total Newport			79,013
Newport Custom (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,035	3,781	6,639
4d sedan	4,091	3,710	13,767
hardtop sedan	4,125	3,861	10,873
Total Newport Custom			31,279
Town & Country (wb 122)			
4d wagon, 2S	4,490	4,738	5,686
4d wagon, 3S	4,555	4,824	9,583
Total Town & Country			15,269
300 (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,135	4,234	10,084 ⁴
convertible coupe	4,175	4,580	1,077

hardtop sedan	4,220	4,313	9,846
Total 300			21,007
New Yorker (wb 122)			
hardtop coupe	4,235	4,681	4,917
4d sedan	4,310	4,630	9,389
hardtop sedan	4,335	4,761	19,903
Total New Yorker			34,209
Total 1970 Chrysler			180,777
1971			
Newport (wb 124)			
Royal hardtop coupe	4,121	4,153	8,500
hardtop coupe	4,121	4,265	13,549
Royal 4d sedan	4,171	4,078	19,662
4d sedan	4,171	4,190	24,834
Royal hardtop sedan	4,191	4,216	5,188
hardtop sedan	4,191	4,328	10,800
Total Newport			82,533
Newport Custom (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,126	4,391	5,527
4d sedan	4,181	4,319	11,254
hardtop sedan	4,211	4,471	10,207
Total Newport Custom			26,988
Town & Country (wb 122)			
4d wagon, 2S	4,525	4,951	5,697
4d wagon, 3S	4,580	5,037	10,993
Total Town & Country			16,690
300 (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,246	4,608	7,256
hardtop sedan	4,321	4,687	6,683
Total 300			13,939
New Yorker (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,250	4,961	4,485
4d sedan	4,335	4,910	9,850
hardtop sedan	4,355	5,041	20,633
Total New Yorker			34,968
Total 1971 Chrysler			175,118
1972			
Newport Royal (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,035	4,124	22,622
4d sedan	4,095	4,051	47,437
hardtop sedan	4,100	4,186	15,185
Total Newport Royal			85,244
Newport Custom (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,130	4,357	10,326
4d sedan	4,185	4,435	19,278
hardtop sedan	4,195	4,435	15,457
Total Newport Custom			45,061

Town & Country (wb 122)			
4d wagon, 2S	4,610	5,055	6,473
4d wagon, 3S	4,665	5,139	14,116
Total Town & Country			20,589
New Yorker (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,270	4,915	5,567
4d sedan	4,335	4,865	7,296
hardtop sedan	4,365	4,993	10,013
Total New Yorker			22,876
New Yorker Brougham (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,270	5,271	4,635
4d sedan	4,335	5,222	5,971
hardtop sedan	4,365	5,350	20,328
Total New Yorker Brougham			30,934
Total 1972 Chrysler			204,704
1973			
Newport (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,160	4,254	27,456
4d sedan	4,200	4,181	54,147
hardtop sedan	4,210	4,316	20,175
Total Newport			101,778
Newport Custom (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,145	4,484	12,293
4d sedan	4,200	4,419	20,092
hardtop sedan	4,225	4,567	20,050
Total Newport Custom			52,435
Town & Country (wb 122)			
4d wagon, 2S	4,670	5,241	5,353
4d wagon, 3S	4,725	5,266	14,687
Total Town & Country			20,040
New Yorker (wb 124)			
4d sedan	4,355	4,997	7,991
hardtop sedan	4,375	5,125	7,619
Total New Yorker			15,610
New Yorker Brougham (wb 124)			
hardtop coupe	4,335	5,413	9,190
4d sedan	4,425	5,364	8,541
hardtop sedan	4,440	5,492	26,635
Total New Yorker Brougham			44,366
Total 1973 Chrysler			234,229

¹Includes 195 hardtop coupes and convertibles with optional Sportsgain trim. ²Includes 1868 with Cordoba equipment. ³Includes 1873 with Cordoba equipment. ⁴Includes 485 or 501 with 300-Hurst equipment; sources vary. Some sources also indicate that one or two convertibles were made. Source: *Encyclopedia of American Cars*, by the Auto Editors of Consumer Guide®, Publications International, Ltd., 2006.



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hood and fender end caps were required to complete the look and a stand-up ornament was added to the hoods of New Yorkers and wagons. At the other end of the nearly 20-foot-long cars, taillight-bezel detailing was tweaked.

In pursuit of safety, interiors were now made of materials treated with fire-resistant chemicals to smother flames and slow the burning process in accordance with federal regulations. A new security alarm was optional, a company spokesperson noting that it was "the first alarm system that is built into the car's wiring harness as factory-installed original equipment

1, 2. Chrysler displayed the one-of-a-kind Newport Mariner two-door hardtop during 1973. Given the name, it's no surprise the car was done up in nautically themed trim and colors. 3-5. New Yorkers like the Brougham four-door hardtop wore the same basic front-end styling as Newports, but used a different grille insert. Changes to the rear from '72 were not nearly as drastic. The optional stereo cassette system (5) included a recording function with corded microphone. (Owner: R. Michael Noe)

and not a 'hang-on' system." Bowing to the wishes of older buyers, manual vent windows were optional on four-door models, with power vents optional on New Yorkers. Available midyear on the Newport was the Special Edition trim package. It consisted of copper-metallic exterior paint; a contrasting white vinyl roof; and an interior with an orange carpet, black instrument panel, and white vinyl seats with dark Navajo-pattern fabric seat inserts traversed by horizontal stitching in white.

Buyers snapped up 234,229 of the 1973 Chryslers, including 101,778 entry-level

Newports. Both figures were the best since 1969, but it was the end of an era. All-new 1974 C-body Chryslers that arrived concurrently with a nationwide energy crisis saw production drop to 117,373. There were fewer still in 1975, when the smaller "personal-luxury" Cordoba saved the Chrysler marque. The day of the behemoths was passing.

By the way, when it came time to create the 1974 Chryslers, designers—having tired of the fuselage look's high beltline—reverted to a lower belt and taller side glass. Designers are notoriously fickle. **CA**

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Clubs for 1969-73 Chrysler Fans

WPC (Walter P. Chrysler) Club, Inc.
P.O. Box 3504
Kalamazoo, MI 49003-3504
Website: www.chryslerclub.org

National Chrysler Products Club
P.O. Box 64
Fayetteville, PA 17222
Website:
www.nationalchryslerproductsclub.com

Chrysler 300 Club, Inc.
1801 Redwine Terrace
Brentwood, CA 94513-6000
Website: www.chrysler300clubinc.com
Recognizes 1969-71 300s

Chrysler 300 Club International, Inc.
P.O. Box 40
Benson, MD 21018
Website: www.chrysler300club.com
Recognizes 1970 300-Hurst