**History of the Barracuda**

The Barracuda was purchased in December of 1966 as a new showroom vehicle. I had graduated from Notre Dame that previous June and after attending the Navy Supply Corps School in Georgia, needed a vehicle to go to my duty assignment in California.  Returning to Indiana from school in December, the 1962 VW beetle (borrowed from my older brother) lost a valve and came limping into Indiana on 3 cylinders stopping 2 miles short of home for lack of fuel. It was time for me to spend my college-earned savings, but first I wanted advice from home. I carefully explained to my Dad that I hoped to find a reliable set of wheels with more than 4 cylinders. He smiled and said I was young, had the money, and that it was appropriate because people are judged by their car even if one didn't agree with the notion. It didn't take much more than that nod for me at age 22 years to go shopping for a new car.

It was the Christmas holidays of ‘66. I and two of my brothers had been looking around for a few months prior and chose three candidates: the Chevy Camaro, the Ford Mustang and the Plymouth Barracuda...all the "in" cars at the time.

The weather was cold, snowy, slushy and grey. We were well into afternoon by the time we got to Detroit from Fort Wayne. Even though I had wanted to visit different dealerships, spending the night there was not part of the plan, so in a way, serendipity led me to the top choice. I liked the Barracuda immediately . . . except for the black top. Vinyl tops, black or white and sometimes a neutral like cream color were newly in style. The dealership gussied it up with a painted on textured finish look-alike coating (see picture). I didn't think much of it, and told the salesman to find a model just like it without the top treatment. All they had was a coupe without the fastback, or an automatic transmission version, neither of which were appealing.

As I headed out the door the negotiation-dance began. In the end, the final price was $2865. They took out the original factory AM radio and replaced it with a new aftermarket Motorola AM/FM. (The old VW had a Blaupunkt AM/FM, which had made an impression.) I later  installed a 4-track tape player, the precursor to the more familiar 8-track. It was cutting-edge technology for the time. Later, thieves would smash the driver’s side quarter-glass window when the car was parked at the Indiana Purdue Fort Wayne campus and steal that 4–track.

After New Year’s Day, I set off from Indiana to California for Navy duty. The car was reliable mechanically. I did take it to a dealer for new car issues like a side window adjustment and the replacement of the plastic trim that holds the windshield and rear window in place. That bit of window engineering was disastrous! The plastic shrank every time the weather got cold. Driving into the mountains the cold at high altitudes caused the metal corners to detach and fly off. I saved the old plastic to make pieces to splice in the gaps but eventually gave up; the following year the Plymouth went back to metal trim. The Barracuda and I explored California’s warm sunny scenes whenever there were breaks from the naval base in San Diego.

It sat in storage while I was overseas on the USS Waddell, a guided missile destroyer based in Long Beach, Calif. (operating out of Subic Bay in the Philippines). In March of 1967, we were stationed in the Gulf of Tonkin during the Vietnam War. The Barracuda was in storage until my return the next winter.

If I recall, the storage facility staff started the engine once a week, so they said. I drove the car gently, always taking care to change the oil and check under the hood. It responded in kind, cruising along nicely at 70 mph thanks to the 4-speed manual transmission. Trips across the desert were frequent: Vegas, Phoenix, into the mountains east of San Diego. Those road trips were as fine as any Beach Boys tune.

Work in the Navy was taxing, and weekends were my nirvana. I’d return to California and spend many happy Saturday evenings in that car, cruising the coast between San Diego and Long Beach. Pretty girls, blues bars, sandy beaches, the ever-present sunshine, the San Diego Zoo. I took it all in from the vantage point of a neat little fastback car.

In June of 1968 I received orders for shore duty in Danang, Vietnam. I packed up the car and headed for Indiana. The trip home took three long days. I trekked about 1,000 miles on the last day, having left Wyoming at 7 a.m. and arriving in Bluffton, Indiana (my home town) just as the sun was rising at 6 a.m. the next morning. Nobody was up yet, so I took a nap on the patio at the new family home on Sutton Circle. The last few miles of that trip were slow going because the asphalt on US 30 (somewhere around Warsaw, Ind.) had buckled. Impact caused a badly damaged front suspension/alignment. The front wheels were visibly cocked apart making the car’s speed lucky to reach 20 mph. So I limped home, barely making it again, this time in the Barracuda.

After getting the car repaired, (basic alignment, etc.) a young girl ran a stop sign on Morgan Street and crashed into the front of my car. Doyle Stern repaired it while I was deployed to Vietnam. I asked my Dad and my brother John to take care of it during that year. It greeted my return a year later in 1969 sitting in the garage, looking like new.

During my first week back from the war, as I reached a stop at an intersection some teen drivers slid on a patch of gravel turning onto Stogdill Road from River Road in Bluffton. The Barracuda was smashed again. If a third time is the charm, the final hit occurred two months later when the Barracuda was side-swiped while parked behind the family Western Auto store near the Gal Ham building in downtown Bluffton. Doyle did all of the repairs. His very professional work helped me cope with the disappointment of the unfortunate repeated impacts.

I met my future wife in 1970 and used the car to visit Maureen in Indianapolis, and to commute to graduate school at IU Fort Wayne until we were married in 1971. I sold it to my brother John for his use at Notre Dame. We moved from Fort Wayne to Bluffton early in 1972. It had logged somewhere around 60,000 miles, I suppose.

I don’t recall any major mechanical problems. Things like alternator, water pump, radiator, transmission, clutch, etc…all were original. Due to its solid lifters, I had the valves adjusted so it ran quiet and smooth. I enjoyed that car and have many clear memories of good times at the wheel. In 1974 I bought another Plymouth, a Sebring, to accommodate our growing family—three little girls in four and a half years.

Later, the car was sold to my nephew who drove it during his high school days and still has the car safely stored at his home. His son is now very interested in keeping it clean and mechanically sound and so the car may continue to a third generation with pride. My nephew’s son has commented repeatedly that he can’t take the car out without at least someone stopping him to remark on how wonderful the vehicle is. It’s my hope the car will remain in our family for many more generations to come.