



The 1960 New Yorker Town & Country: King of the Luxury Wagons

Suddenly, it actually was 1960! As dramatic as the introduction of the *Forward Look* cars was in 1957 - when the “Suddenly it’s 1960” tagline was used in ads - the new decade ushered in even more major changes. 1960 was a pivotal year for Chrysler Corporation. Always a leader in engineering innovation, Chrysler made a huge investment in the future by switching construction of all its cars, save Imperial, to a method it called Unibody. This technique had the body and frame welded into one solid unit. The primary benefits of this method are far greater strength and increased interior room. Other cars had used this body/chassis construction before, but the brilliance of the Chrysler method was the use of a bolt-on front sub-frame to support the engine, front suspension and all front sheet metal. Unitized cars in the past were more expensive to modify annually because the entire car, front to back, was all part of the chassis. With Chrysler’s method, it could

re-style the front sheet metal and doors as easily and cheaply as a body-on-frame car. Another economy in production was realized by the clever use of two basic bodies and two different length front sub-frames to build three sizes of cars in 3 different wheelbases: 118”; Plymouth and Dart, 122”; senior Dodge, Desoto, and Chrysler Windsor, and 126”; Chrysler Saratoga, New Yorker, and 300-F. (The Valiant had its own body.) The results were very successful. In addition to the annual styling flexibility this allowed, the front fenders could be completely removed for repair – something not true of many unit-body cars from other manufacturers. In fact, the entire front portion of the car could be detached from beneath the cowl and rolled out intact from the main body: engine, suspension, and all. This made it possible to repair Chrysler products after front end damage where other unit-body cars might have to be totaled.

Styling in 1960 was perhaps the best since 1957. Returning to clean, pure, dramatic lines on all models, the designs of 1960 Mopars were cohesive refinements of Virgil Exner's *Forward Look* styling themes. Nowhere was this theme better expressed than with the 1960 Chrysler. Pure Exner from grill to tailfin, it is easily one of his finest moments. Borrowing the dramatic front end styling of the 1957 300C and earlier Chrysler concept cars, all 1960 Chryslers had a bold large grill flanked by two horizontal headlights under fender brows. The character line created by these brows extended along the front fender to the rear of the car, arching up as it passed through the front door and ending in soaring fins with their famous boomerang, *Forward Look*-logo tail lights.

In addition to completely new styling for 1960, a new body-style was added to the Chrysler lineup – the 4-door hardtop wagon. Pioneered by Rambler in 1956, and offered by Buick, Oldsmobile, and Mercury beginning in 1957, the 4-door hardtop wagon added glamour and sleekness to the utility body style. Although late to the hardtop wagon party, Chrysler (and senior Dodges) offered this body style until 1964, long after it had been abandoned as too costly by other makes. Available in Windsor and New Yorker trim and in 6- and 9-passenger forms, they were sleek and beautifully detailed cars. The Windsor rode on a 122" wheelbase and had a 383 cu. in. 2bbl engine under the hood. The New Yorker had a 126" wheelbase and was powered by the mighty 413 cu. in. 4bbl engine with 350hp.

With air conditioning and other typically ordered equipment, the window sticker price for a 1960 New Yorker wagon was in the \$6,500 range (about \$57,300, adjusted for inflation), a price 20% above its nearest competitors when similarly equipped. Notwithstanding the early 50's Packard and Buick woodie wagons, the New Yorker Town & Country wagon was without peer as the best equipped, most lavish, and most expensive station wagon in the postwar era. To give perspective, the 1960 Imperial LeBaron had a base price of \$6320. In a modern context, the last American luxury wagon, the 1996 Buick Roadmaster, topped out at around \$30,000, or \$49,000 in today's dollars.

Nothing could really rival the New Yorker Town & Country in 1960. Buick had its deluxe Invicta Custom wagon with a leather bucket seat interior and every power assist standard to make a very plush wagon. But it had a smaller engine, less horsepower, less interior room, and wasn't a hardtop. The Mercury Colony Park was a handsome hardtop wagon (the last year Mercury offered one), and although it had similar interior room, it had 40 less horsepower and offered nowhere near the interior luxury of the New Yorker. So the 1960 New Yorker wagon stood in a class by itself. It could be argued that it remained the pinnacle of its genre because in 1961 Chrysler began to de-content the New Yorker wagon, along with steadily lowering its price. This trend continued until the model disappeared entirely in 1966. Ultra luxury wagons of this caliber would not reappear on the scene until the craze for SUV's (i.e., luxury station wagons) caught fire in the 90's.

But back in 1960, the concept of a luxury wagon was almost unknown. Station wagons were largely regarded as low-line utility vehicles and used as such. Therefore, there was an extremely limited market for luxury versions and very low production resulted. Only 1295 New Yorker wagons were built: 624 6-passenger and 671 9-passenger models. Wagons in general have notoriously low survival rates, and coupled with low production few of these beauties still exist. Along with fellow 1960 New Yorker Town & Country owners (and WPC members) Dale Anderson and Roger Irland, we have been compiling a list of all known survivors. After years of searching we have found only 23 still on the road or under restoration, including one in France, one in Finland, two in Sweden, and two in Australia. This makes them significantly more rare than 300-F convertibles. If anyone else has knowledge of any other 1960 New Yorker wagons on the road we would love to know!

I got very lucky in the search for my 1960 New Yorker wagon. After years of combing ads and being prepared to go anywhere in the country to find one, a wonderful example appeared in a town 45 minutes from my home in Atlanta. A friend had an airmail subscription to Hemmings, which

meant he got his issue about a week before everyone else. One month he was amazed to see an ad for a low-mileage, air-conditioned example near our home town. Having been on the search for a vintage wagon himself, he immediately went to see it that same day. What he found discouraged him. The car ran and drove beautifully, but it was stripped of trim, had a badly reupholstered interior, and had paint that no amount of polishing or touching up could ever revive. Not wishing to tackle a restoration project at that time, he called me about the car while still in the seller's driveway. "Make the deal!" I said. I'm glad he did, because his acute bargaining skills resulted in a price about ½ of what was listed in Hemmings. This price was arrived at because the seller was one of those wonderful collectors who understood the uniqueness of the car and had a greater interest in seeing it properly restored than in making a killing on its sale. So, despite the fact that when the regular Hemmings hit and calls started coming in from around the world promising to pay sums exceeding the original asking price, the seller stuck to his deal. Several years later when I paid him a visit with the freshly restored car, he was so excited and pleased to see it. Somewhat stunned at its transformation, he said he absolutely made the right decision and had sold it to the right person. That was very gratifying for me.

So, in May of 1997 I had bought my dream car, and I had bought it sight unseen. A couple of friends took a flat bed to pick it up and showed up later at my house. When the tailgate was opened and several mice jumped out, I asked myself, "What have I done?!!" The car was pretty scary. From the paperwork and in talking with the seller, I learned the car had lived its entire life in Florida. It had only 58K miles on it but had spent many years of indifferent storage outdoors in the carport of the elderly owners. Alas, the tail end of the car was exposed to the sun and the rain. This meant the tailgate filled with debris that held water and caused rust. Also, the cargo area carpet was dry-rotted by the sun, the taillights were baked to almost clear, and Florida's toxic humidity had bred a blush of surface rust on everything else.

The good news was that beneath its shabby surface the car was very sound, ran well, and an

inventory of all trim pieces stacked in the cargo area revealed everything was present and accounted for. Best of all, it was loaded with all the right options. Lacking only Mirror-Matic and AutoPilot, it was a 9-passenger model with just about every other item on the option list: 6-way power seat, 7-button radio, power locks, auto-dim, and dual air conditioning. Also, the seller had cut out the rust in the back of the car and new sheet metal was welded in ready for finishing. Another plus, the previous owner had recently redone the brakes and installed a new exhaust system. But still, there was no way around it, the car was a mess, and I needed to bite the bullet and do a full cosmetic restoration.

The original paint color was Daytona Sand, one of the ugliest whites ever. It had a grey-brown undertone that made it look perpetually dirty. (The color was dropped in 1961 for good reason.) The interior was equally awful, and in my opinion had been that way straight from the factory. It had originally been silver-grey vinyl with black trim. And although the door panels and dash were almost perfect, the original fragile basket-weave perforated vinyl seat inserts had apparently self-destructed quickly in the Florida climate. The seats had then been redone in solid greenish-grey sheets of bus upholstery. On top of that, in 1960 Chrysler inexplicably installed gold dashes and steering wheels in cars with silver interiors. So the car came from the factory mismatched. How odd. How ugly. This would never do.

Thus, the first and most important decision was what to do with the interior. From that decision everything else would flow. Originality is one thing, but going to all that restoration effort and expense only to re-create an ugly exterior color with an even uglier interior was never an option for me. And since there were so many wonderful color and interior choices in 1960, I felt no guilt about correcting the poor selections of the original owner.

I never cared for the all-vinyl interiors in 1960 New Yorkers. It is a quirk of 1960 Chryslers that the deluxe New Yorkers used the same seat upholstery as the basic Windsor when all-vinyl was specified. Only the door panels and carpet quality differed. I much preferred the New Yorker's optional cloth interior. More befitting a

luxury car, the seats have deep biscuit tufting that is every bit as lush as the quite similar interior of that year's Imperial LeBaron. Plus, the cloth interiors came in a wider assortment of great colors and the fabric has a cool snowflake design done with mylar threads. I called SMS, and when they told me they had the original New Yorker "snowflake cloth" in Terra Cotta along with the companion vinyl, my color decision became quite simple. The coordinated Terra Cotta exterior paint was a one-year-only color choice and was always my favorite from the 1960 Chrysler palette. So this is exactly the interior/exterior combination I would have ordered had I gone into a Chrysler showroom back then.

Off and running! I figured whatever I did with my ugly duckling, I couldn't make it look any worse on its path to becoming a swan. Although I had never restored a car before, I decided to jump in, completely disassembling everything that could be removed from the car. Fearing later paint problems from chemical stripper residue, every painted surface on the car was ground down to shiny bare metal. Visiting my local Sikkens retailer, I had Terra Cotta paint mixed to match a large color sample I had from an original 1960 Color & Upholstery book. First item to be painted was the dash. I was so pleased with the result I ended up painting the whole car myself. (But that's another story...)

With the interior completely stripped, I was happy to discover zero rust issues with the floors. To prevent any rust from ever forming in the future, the entire floor, cowl to tailgate, received a thick layer of asphalt, similar to what was done at the factory. On top of that went a layer of thick felt, followed by a layer of high quality soundproofing. The carpet had its own soundproofing pad, also. The result is an amazingly quiet interior, especially for a wagon, and this method would appear to be an excellent approach when restoring Unibody cars.

Using the original vinyl on the door panels as patterns, I sewed new panels with Terra Cotta fabric and vinyl. I sent the seats out to be done professionally. Since they had to create an original look without an original pattern, I prevailed upon many WPC members to supply me with a stack of photographs of New Yorker

fabric upholstery details. (Many thanks again to you all.) I found a wrecked 1960 wagon in an Arizona salvage yard that provided the measurements and details on a New Yorker wagon's unique 2nd seat upholstery pattern. Roger Irland's lovely wagon provided all remaining upholstery documentation. Using those measurements I drew a "blueprint" onto the plain bus vinyl that covered my seats. This provided a full-sized, detailed guide for the new upholstery pattern, complete with notations for French seams and welting where they occurred. Armed also with a thick notebook of photos and instructions, I took my seats in to be done. The upholsterer did a beautiful job, right down to doing the individual-block-of-foam effect that creates the needed depth of each of the biscuits.

I was very excited when I found carpet to match the Terra Cotta upholstery. Only blue and Terra Cotta interiors got color-keyed carpet in 1960 New Yorker wagons. All other interior color schemes used black carpet. The pile of the carpet I found, while not as extravagantly deep as the original, had a very good look. With that hurdle jumped, I found myself at a loss as to what to do about the stainless runners in the cargo area. Many originals had been crushed or badly scarred over the past 40 years. Where do I get replacements? The answer turned out to be surprisingly simple. Chrysler used these same stainless runners in its wagons all the way up through the K-car wagons of the 80's! From various Pick-A-Parts I rounded up excellent long ones, polished them bright, and cut them to size.

While stripping the exterior, I learned many interesting things about my car. For one, being an early production model, it has a flat roof panel without the five embossed ribs seen in all later Mopar wagons. Another unique aspect of 1960 wagon roofs is the smooth "C" pillar. These are separate side pieces welded onto the roof panel with seams concealed with lead filler. Beginning in 1961, Chrysler used "C" pillars with embossed ribs that disguised the seam and did not require expensive hand finishing. Also, at the base of this pillar is a chrome finish plate. On 1960 wagons this plate has a concealed fastener on the back for flush attachment. In 1961, this fastener was eliminated and the finish plate is attached to the pillar with a rather unsightly exposed screw

punched through its center. Another change in 1961 was the elimination of the chrome surround for the tailgate window glass and elimination of the compound curve bubble at the top of the windshield glass. Add to that a switch from lush cut-pile to loop carpeting, plus the deletion of power windows from the standard equipment list and it all helps explain why base price of 1961 wagons was \$260 less than their 1960 New Yorker counterparts – a substantial 5% decrease.

While the front sheet metal was off my car, I had the front end entirely rebuilt. It was then I discovered that 1960-1962 New Yorkers used different front suspension components from Windsors. They share everything with the Imperial, which is about as heavy duty as it comes. New Yorkers also share radiator supports and inner fender liners with the Imperial. Compared to their Windsor companions, New Yorkers have 4 inches extra length in front of the cowl, which means they have different hoods and fenders, too. And believe it or not, although appearing identical, Windsor front bumpers do not interchange with New Yorker front bumpers.

Restoration on my New Yorker Town & Country was finished in 1999, and it immediately went off from Atlanta to the Labor Day Kruse event in Auburn, Indiana. With sponsorship by Chrysler

that year, my wagon had the honor of joining other Mopars in the annual parade of Auburns, Cords, & Duesenbergs through the town square. The following May, it went to a car show in Detroit, making the trip up from Atlanta without incident and winning a First Place in the process.

1960 Chryslers are exceptional road cars. With rebuilt suspension, KYB shocks, and correct 9:00 x 14 bias ply tires, the ride is nothing short of amazing. The ride frequency is so low it feels like it is on air-suspension. No jittery oscillations for this car. It is also quite quiet. With its correct dual exhaust system, you need to be standing in front of the car to know it's running. Traveling on the highway, little is heard other than the whoosh of the wind. And the dual air conditioning system provides air vents for all seating positions, keeping everyone happy and cool in the summer heat of Georgia.

With its exciting dream car styling, its outstanding power and refinement, and its Imperial level of appointments and equipment, the 1960 New Yorker Town & Country is truly King of the Luxury Wagons.

Chris Hawkins

With special thanks for assistance from Dale Anderson and Roger Irland



1960 New Yorker Town & Country publicity shots always showed the wagon in luxurious, upscale surroundings. In front of their lavish in-town residence, these owners are packing for a weekend getaway to their country home while the housekeeper bids them farewell. Interestingly, these wagons were never shown with roof racks, thus stressing sleek luxury over utility.



Rear shot of my wagon reveals tail fins and famous boomerang tail lights are nicely integrated into wagon styling. The lenses are wagon-only, as are the larger back-up light housings. Also visible are the sleek "D"-pillar mounted assist handles that emerge from the chrome-edged roof ribs.



The front end of the 1960 Chrysler was inspired by 1957-9 Letter Car styling. New Yorkers use a unique inset grill within a deep chrome surround. Windsors and Saratogas have a delicate egg-crate grill mounted flush with the front of the car. Oddly enough, New Yorkers had the least chrome trim of all three series, allowing its beautifully sculpted sheet metal to be fully appreciated. Very plain hubcaps are a shrewd counterpoint to the extravagance of the styling.



My wagon was delivered stripped of all trim. The previous owner had begun restoration, including some bodywork. Car was very solid and basically rust-free. Fortunately, most moldings and trim bits on 1960 Chryslers are stainless and can be polished to like-new condition.



Finished wagon in Terra Cotta is a dramatic improvement over the original Daytona Sand.



(above) Original door panel was all-vinyl – silver with black accents. All color choices for all-vinyl interiors used black trim inserts and black carpet.

(below) Cloth interiors feature door panels with fabric inserts and white vinyl accent trim, which gives a brighter appearance. Late 1960 Chrysler prototypes were shown with coordinating white buttons in the electric window switches, but these were changed to black at the last minute.



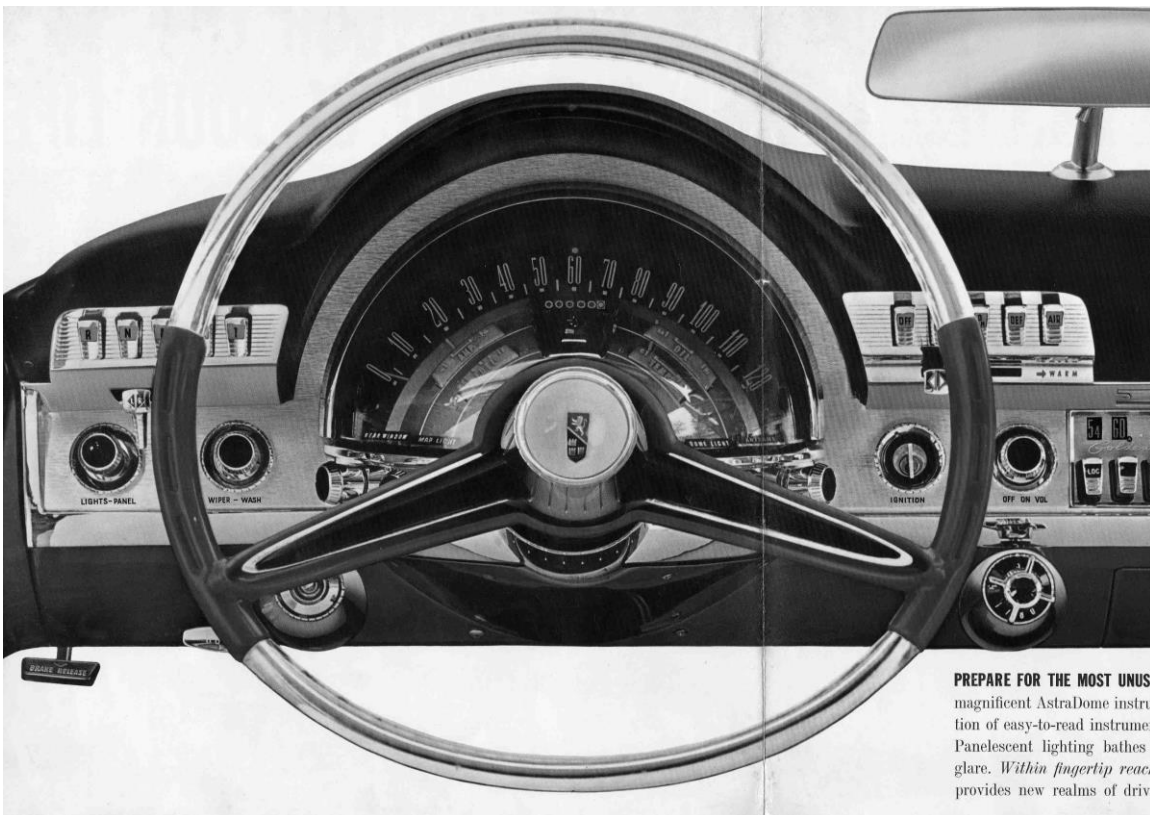
(top) Thick cut pile carpeting lines floor and sides of cargo area. Bright stainless rub strips protect carpet. Chrysler used the same stainless rub strips until the end of station wagon production in the 80's.

(bottom) The rear-facing third seat was as luxurious as the front seats. Below the bottom cushion is a color-keyed fiberglass cover for the spare tire. Adjustable air vents in the rear A/C unit cool second and third seat area.



(Above) Plush interior with deep biscuit tufting on seats was one of the most elegant ever installed in a station wagon.

(below) About as good as it gets. The amazing Astrodome dashboard featured full instrumentation under a half-hemisphere plexiglass dome, transmission and heat/AC controlled by symmetrical pushbuttons, and electroluminescent lighting.



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Restoration involved the complete dismantling of interior and exterior. All painted parts were taken to bare metal for refinishing. The cowl, hood and engine compartment had been completed when this picture was taken.



(above) Completely smooth roof panel unique to very early production 1960 Mopar wagons. Later wagons had five embossed ribs for added strength. All New Yorker wagons were built in the Jefferson Ave. plant

(left) Also unique to 1960 wagons are smooth "C" pillars welded to roof panel. The seam was filled with lead and hand finished. Smooth chrome trim plate at bottom of pillar had hidden fastener in '60. In later years, a large exposed screw was punched through the middle of this trim plate to attach it.