ROAD TEST

CHRYSLER 300-D

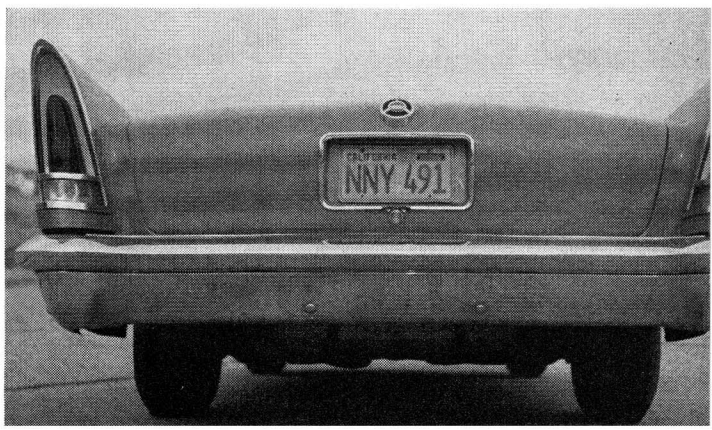
THE MAMMOTH 300-D has come in for a great deal of criticism, in which Road & Track readers have played their part. Objections to what is apparently the mere existence of the car fall roughly into three groups: those which see red at the great size; those which assert that it is only a Chrysler New Yorker (or even a Plymouth) with a leather interior; and the largest body of correspondents, who cry loudly that it is not a sports car.

Of course it is too big: it is 220 inches long and just short of 80 inches wide, making it 16 inches longer than the already-too-long Plymouth, but only minutely wider. (It *is* shorter, by 26 inches, than the smaller Bugatti Royales!) One of our editors suggests reducing the entire Chrysler line to ¾ scale, a not-so-mad idea which might prove unexpectedly popular. But to get back to earth, they are not about to do it. The 300-D sells against Lincolns and Cadillacs, and they are big, too.

In a moment, we shall enumerate the ways in which our test car differed from a standard New Yorker. As for those who protest that it is not a sports car, truer words were never spoken. It is an American prestige car, whose sports-car-derived features and characteristics make it outstanding.

Driving the 300-D in close quarters is even more frustrating than driving other large, overpowered domestic products, which are frustrating enough. The very tender touch that the others demand must be even further refined with this car, for—though your eyes tell you you're wrong—it is surprisingly easy to be fooled into thinking that this weighty behemoth is both small and light. The feathery, comparatively fast power steering, the power brakes, the torque, and the well controlled suspension will be appreciated by above-average drivers. Overconfidence in the car's gentle competence could be a real threat to others.

For years, Chrysler has had a reputation for spending money on inner virtues. This praiseworthy attitude, combined with the characteristic dumpiness of their cars' appearance before the advent of Virgil Exner in the 1955 model year, dropped sales uncomfortably close to the brink. They are now devoting attention to both the flashy and the long-term aspects of overall car design, with the latter



The frontal aspect is a little busy, with a maze of straight and curved lines creating all sorts of circles, rectangles and other odd shapes. The rear view is pleasingly plain.

Lack of useless ornamentation makes the 300-D the best appearing of the Chrysler line.

ROAD TEST CHRYSLER 300-D

confined more and more to the higher-priced models.

The hemispherical-combustion-chambered FirePower V-8 is the outstanding example of this. Expensive to build, it was introduced in 1951, two years behind the instantly popular Oldsmobile and Cadillac overhead-valve V-8's. Its displacement was exactly the same as the Cadillac's, but its design was different enough to attract world-wide interest. The absence of double overhead camhsafts, though logical in view of what they would have cost, was at first lamented by perfectionists. But the double rocker arms with conventional pushrods gave plenty of room for big, widely spaced valves to satisfy the volumetric efficiency addicts. At the same time, the engine pleased habitual Chrysler straight-8 buyers with its freedom from spark knock (they could even run it on regular gasoline if they liked), freedom from knotty tuning problems, and smooth idle. Even more important for the leaping horsepower ratings to come, there was room for development on the basic design.

Modified versions soon appeared at Le Mans, Watkins Glen, and Elkhart Lake. To collaborate with Firestone in a racing tire testing program at Indianapolis, Chrysler built —on the still-standard 331-cubic-inch block—an engine with 400 horsepower at 5200 revolutions per minute. It was not supercharged, and it covered more than 1400 miles at high speeds without so much as a spark plug change. The first (1955) 300 took its name from its horsepower, which would be upped in succeeding years to 340, 375, and now 380 (390 with fuel injection).

Today's 300-D powerplant looks like the FirePower engine in the Chrysler New Yorker and the Imperial, but has significant differences which will justify its cost to the connoisseur. It has dual 4-barrel carburetors for greater air intake at higher engine speeds, a modified intake and exhaust manifold and air cleaners, and a camshaft with both longer duration and higher lift than that on the standard engine. Intake valve lift is .435 inch instead of .389; exhaust valve lift is .442 inch, compared to .389. Duration of both intake and exhaust valve openings is up from 252° to 276°. Idle speed is 30% greater (650 rpm) to minimize the unevenness inherent with this camshaft.

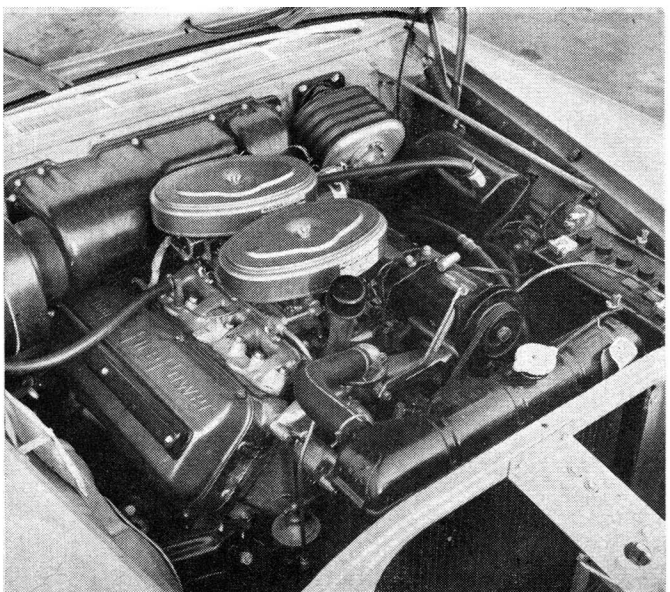
As insurance, there are myriad smaller modifications. The 300-D develops its 25 more horsepower at 600 rpm higher than its quieter sisters, and wisely has mechanical instead of hydraulic tappets. Adjustable rocker arms maintain correct tappet clearance, and pushrods are different.

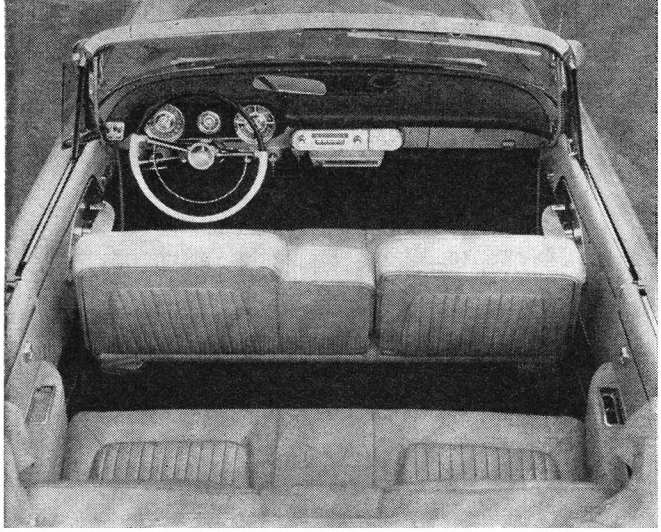
Double valve springs replace the standard single springs.

Trunk space is more than adequate for most occasions.

PHOTOGRAPHY: POOLE

Large engine supplies plenty of urge for a large car.





Interior is comfortable, conservative and well appointed.

an athletic but lovable Amazon

and valve seat inserts provide longer life in the face of higher temperatures and loads.

Both main and connecting rod bearings are tri-metal (babbitt on copper-lead alloy, on a steel back) instead of conventional babbitt on steel. A harder crankshaft is used.

Dual exhausts are 2¼-inch diameter on the hardtop but only 1¾ on the convertible due to frame interference.

Elsewhere, too, this is no standard New Yorker. Manual-shift transmission is available (extra) but demands the use of so strong a clutch that gear changing is far from fun. This version also has non-boosted brakes and steering, and while the latter is not stiff, it is ridiculously slow for this car. The manual control options cannot, therefore, be recommended. On the bright side, the power steering is the fastest in the U.S. (3½ turns lock to lock) and the TorqueFlite 3-speed automatic transmission is a versatile one. It upshifts automatically into both 2nd and 3rd at about 5 mph higher than other models when either the "D" or No. 2 buttons are pressed. But there is no automatic shift from the lowest range, controlled by the No. 1 button, and the absence of a tachometer is hard to reconcile with such eagerness to rev up.

Nylon racing tires (Goodyear Blue Streaks) are standard, with 30 pounds pressure recommended for high speeds. They have flat spots after the car has been sitting; these worsen in direct proportion to the period of idleness but indirectly with the temperature, and disappear only after several miles.

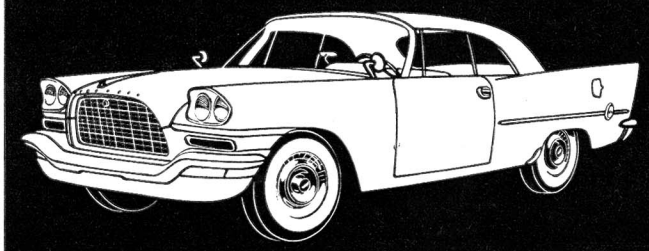
Other differences include torsion bars with a higher spring rate, thicker rear spring leaves, and the five rear-axle options listed in the February issue: 2.93, 3.18, 3.31 (standard), 3.54 and 3.73.

America's latest contribution to "Me worry?" driving, the Auto-Pilot, is also optional. This automatic throttle control has a small, reversible electric motor which activates linkage to the throttle pedal. Conventional, semi-automatic or fully car-controlled operation may be picked by the driver.

At $500 extra, the Bendix electronically controlled fuel injection system will tempt few buyers with its offer of 10 more horsepower at the same 5200 rpm; torque remains unchanged. Transistors control the electrical impulses that measure out the fuel.

This is a significant car—not a sports car, but the very best Detroit has to offer in its "sedan class."

ROAD & TRACK ROAD TEST NO. 165



CHRYSLER 300-D

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	$5538
Wheelbase, in.	126.0
Tread, f/r	61.2/60.0
Tire size	9.00-14
Curb weight, lb	4920
distribution, %	54.4/45.6
Test weight	5190
Engine	V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke	4.0 x 3.9
Displacement, cu in.	392.0
cu cm.	6426
Compression ratio	10.0
Horsepower	380
peaking speed	5200
equivalent mph	129
Torque, lb-ft	435
peaking speed	3600
equivalent mph	89.3
Gear ratios, overall	
3rd	3.31
2nd	4.80
1st	8.10
1st & converter	21.1

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	13.65
Cu ft/ton mile	106.0
Engine revs/mile	2420
Piston travel, ft/mile	1575
Mph @ 2500 ft/min.	95.4

PERFORMANCE, Mph.

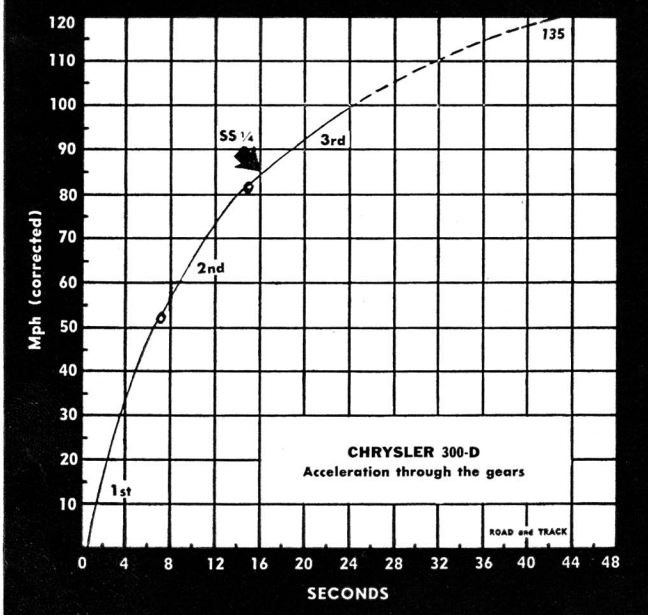
Top speed (est.)	135
2nd (4800)	82
1st (5200)	53
see chart for shift points	
Mileage range	11/15

ACCELERATION, Sec.

0-30 mph	3.4
0-40 mph	4.7
0-50 mph	6.7
0-60 mph	8.4
0-70 mph	11.2
0-80 mph	13.8
0-90 mph	19.8
0-100 mph	24.4
Standing start ¼ mile	16.0

TAPLEY DATA Lb/ton

3rd	310 @ 60 mph
2nd	475 @ 40 mph
1st	off scale
Total drag at 60 mph, 156 lb	

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

Indicated	Actual
30 mph	29.6
40 mph	38.8
50 mph	47.9
60 mph	57.6
70 mph	67.0
80 mph	75.5
90 mph	86.6
100 mph	96.8