

When the once-modest Dodge shattered all U.S. closed car records at Bonneville, it foretold an all-out sales assault on other makes in the low-medium bracket

AN MT RESEARCH REPORT



DODGE is a serious contender for more than its usual share of sales in the medium-price field for 1956. Competitive anticipation keynotes this car from grille to "flight-sweep" rear fins. In between, items such as increased power, pushbutton shifting, record player, and an abundance of power assists have been incorporated to create a package of "that's for me" sales appeal which will be hard to resist.

Test car: Custom Royal Lancer V8 2-door hardtop with powerpack (230-hp) engine. Equipment included PowerFlite transmission; dual exhausts; power-assisted steering, brakes, windows, and front seat; radio; heater and safety belts. Rear-axle ratio 3.54 with 7.60 x 15 tubeless tires.

Engine: Dodge's bid for performance laurels this year is based upon a revised 230-horsepower "Super-Powered Super Red Ram" V8 with a 3.63-inch bore and a 3.80-inch stroke (highest powered of 3 available V8 engines). This engine boasts 315 cubic inches working under a com-

pression ratio of 8.0 to 1, representing an increase of 45 cubic inches over last year's hemispherical combustion chamber model with dual rocker arms (giving 183 hp).

Other options: In keeping with the general trend, Dodge offers a full complement of optional equipment. In addition to the usual array of power assists, music lovers will find the new record player another reason why motoring is America's greatest pastime. Up to one hour of thoroly mixed music is featured on each side of the 6 records furnished with the unit. Air conditioning, seatbelts, windshield washers and the like make this "optional at extra cost" list as extra as you want it. Safety doorlatches, rear-door safety lock and safety rim wheels are standard equipment.

Aside from PowerFlite, either 3-speed or overdrive transmission can be had in any Dodge model, 6 or V8. These transmissions should be desirable when an economy package (such as the Dodge 6 with overdrive) is under consideration. However, don't treat them too roughly if cou-

pled with the top engine, as they are an old design and slow of gate. Power brake and steering options should be considered only in the light of your either being willing to pay for extreme driving convenience or planning for an economic situation at trade-in time. The cars without these options are adequately easy to handle.

WHAT THE CAR IS LIKE TO DRIVE

Exit and entry: You'll have no trouble getting in or out of this car. Body dimensions are the same as last year, featuring wide-angle door hinges, plenty of headroom and kneeroom from doorsill to windshield cornerpost, and a steering wheel that is high enough to slide under easily.

Driving position: This can best be described as comfortable for most people. Power seat will operate up, down, forward and backward but has no tilt arrangement. Seatback is positioned rather erectly, and a slight feeling of top-heaviness may worry driver until several hours have been

spent behind the wheel. Shoulder- and elbowroom is usually generous, while steering wheel placement allows quick and easy maneuvering in traffic. Seat padding is on firm side but not uncomfortable. Instrument grouping is good and readable. Glove compartment (on far right side) is small.

Vision: Vision is good for a hardtop (usually 2 inches lower than a sedan) despite some distortion in upper corners of sharply curved windshield. Cornerposts are relatively thick but produce no blind spots. Gently sloping hood allows a good forward view of road while both front fenders are just visible over rather high cowl. Rear window affords ample view but as in front, a tall person will have to slump slightly to see below roofline when using rear-view mirror. Side or fender mirrors are a necessary accessory for this car.

Operation of controls: Undoubtedly the

however, if we touched (but didn't really push) any of the other 3 buttons, the engaged button would pop out, leaving the transmission in the previously selected gear and us with absolutely no visual means of knowing what gear the car was actually in. From experience, we found it was far too easy to inadvertently touch another button while selecting a gear and have all buttons in the "out" position with the car actually ready to leap away. We are happy (and proud too, if our early criticism of this feature played a part) to report that a spring on the activator plate has ended the problem on all Chrysler products built since about January 1. A light shining thru the button indicating what gear is engaged would also be a welcome change; at present the light shines thru all buttons, with no differentiation.

Dash controls are easy to reach and operate. Heater, defroster and fresh-air vents perform their designed functions

brakes, is the standard cowl-hung unit introduced last year.

Acceleration: The 230 brake horsepower claimed for this year's next-to-top engine shows a marked improvement in all-around performance. You will especially like improvement in the passing ranges of 30-50 and 50-80 mph (where it should be); as much as 4.4 seconds have been lopped off last year's best time.

Of course, performance drops off down thru the range of the many engine options available. The 218-hp "Super Red Ram" (same as the "Super-Powered, etc." test car except for a 2-barrel carburetor) should give adequate performance but will not necessarily be more economical. The next option, the 189-horse "Red Ram," seems like a poor bargain, considering the small extra cost of the punchier models. The 6-cylinder 131-horsepower "Getaway" engine is strictly for the economy minded



photos by Jim Lodge

most publicized item on the '56 Dodge is its new pushbutton shift control (standard with PowerFlite). Located on an extension of instrument panel to left of the wheel (photo above, right) and out of the way of youngsters are 4 pushbuttons, arranged so as to place N for NEUTRAL at the top, R for REVERSE to the left, D for DRIVE to the right and L for LOW on the bottom. Selection is merely a matter of pushing the desired button. A hydraulic interlock will automatically place the transmission in neutral should the driver inadvertently select R when the car is moving forward above 10 mph. Control from the selector to the transmission is accomplished by means of a single cable and series of liners. Unit being purely mechanical, maintenance should be at a minimum.

Our test crew found pushbutton driving a welcome addition to comfort with one exception: it had no positive selection lock. For example, if D was engaged, it would remain in its depressed position (indicating that it was engaged) until another positive selection was made. Unfortunately,

with efficiency and relative quietness. Windshield wipers are electrically operated and do an effective job except for center and side areas of the curved windshield (photo at left above).

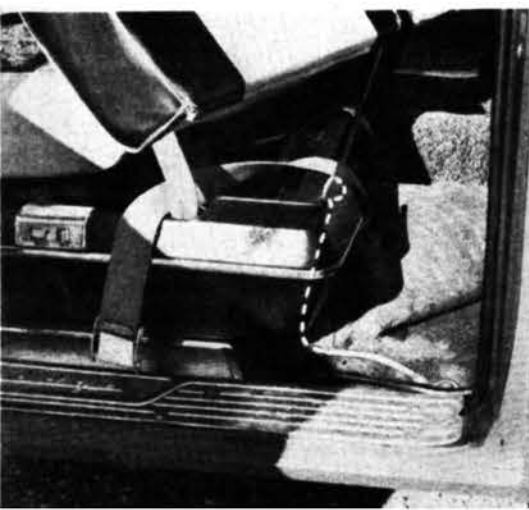
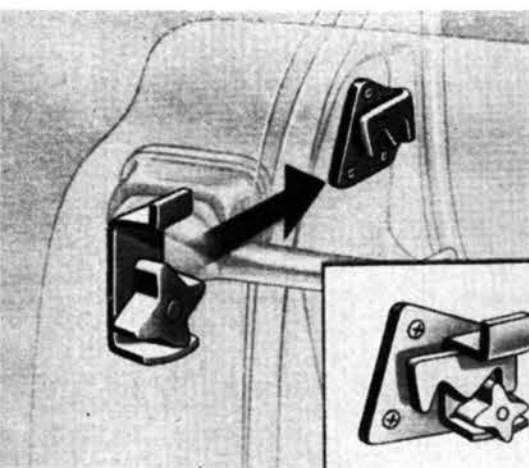
Ease of handling: Dodge has retained its "full-time," coaxial-type power steering with its 3½ turns from lock to lock (5 turns on mechanical type). This, coupled with power assists in practically all other departments, makes for today's most nearly effortless driving. Unless you're used to full-time power steering, you may have a tendency to over-control going into a turn. On the credit side, it is quick to respond and with a little practice should create no particular driving problems. Crosswinds won't give you any trouble. In the city, this car comes close to being the ultimate in driving ease.

Brake and accelerator are positioned for quick and easy foot movement, the brake pedal being wide enough (8 inches) for left-foot braking. Pedal on non-PowerFlite equipped cars, with or without power

(when coupled to overdrive) but obviously must work pretty hard to keep up with present-day traffic. Its long-stroke design, tho troublefree, has a shorter life expectancy than the V8s.

PowerFlite transmission is smooth and responsive thruout full driving range; you're wasting your time to try and out-think it when selecting shifting points. During our full-throttle acceleration runs, automatic shift into DRIVE range occurred at approximately 4000 rpm. By manually shifting from LOW (intermediate gear) into DRIVE at up to 400 rpm over this normal shift point, we could better our 0-60 time by only 0.4 second. The same technique over the quarter-mile course reduced our time by only 0.3 second, a saving hardly worth the effort.

Braking: This year, Dodge is featuring a new power brake design on PowerFlite equipped cars, incorporating a cowl-mounted bellows maintained at atmospheric pressure (photo next page). Upon brake application, engine vacuum collapses the



bellows, transferring the resultant force thru a lever arrangement to the master brake cylinder. This produces a power assist of 2.5 times the pedal's mechanical advantage. A reserve vacuum tank takes over when the engine is stalled. In the event of complete vacuum failure, brakes can be operated by mechanical means alone, but we braked hard from 60 mph with ignition off and had power all the way.

Using MT's standard brake test consisting of 12 consecutive stops from 60 mph at a deceleration rate of 15 feet per second per second (results shown in table), a slight fade was noticed after the 4th stop. On the 5th stop, pedal travel increased to an alarming degree, and during the 6th we ran out of brake. No grab or swerve was noticed. Brakes returned to usefulness in 3 minutes. Complete recovery required 5 minutes of 50 to 60 mph driving. During this "cooling off" period, a slight tendency to pull right or left was noticed until brakes had completely returned to normal.

Roadability: Characteristically, Dodge has retained its soft ride and with no important chassis changes, it inherits the same basic roadability that was evidenced in the '55 model.

Despite very flexible springs, at practically any speed road dips are taken in stride and without oscillation, thanks to a set of fine Oriflow shock absorbers. Potholes and rough surfaces are ironed out by this same combination and directional stability is exceptionally good on both flat and high-crowned roads. Hard cornering will produce substantial body lean, but the car has no wild tendency to take off into the brush. It can be made to break loose but in most cases a quick twist of the wheel or rapid increase of power is all that is needed to put it back in the groove.

High speed gives one a feeling of overall lightness. Response to the slightest wheel correction is instantaneous. Altho some vibration was noticed from 80 mph up, the car seemed willing to obey our every command.

Characteristic of soft springs, a definite nose dip or rear-end squat is noticeable during hard braking or fast acceleration. However, this has no noticeable effect on the steering geometry.

Ride: Acoustically, this car has good control. You will feel tar strips and other road irregularities (in spite of soft springing) but you won't hear them. Proper use of rubber-mounted components and body panel soundproofing is responsible for this low sound level compared to that of last year's model.

Dodge safety belts wrap around transverse bar at rear of seat. Top of seat frame is a narrower bar, encircled by a steel cable (dotted line) which goes down thru frame and under rear compartment mat to bolt in floor

WHAT THE CAR IS LIKE TO LIVE WITH

Passengers should find this car comfortable and relaxing under most conditions, tho twisting or mountain roads will produce enough body roll for discomfort.

Riding in the front seat: Plenty of legroom, shoulder space and headroom. Firm but comfortable padding under non-slip upholstery with seat placed at chair height. Controls are easily reached and can be operated without visual attention. Excellent armrests, convenient ashtray placement, and absence of reflections from the dash panel go a long way toward creating all-around comfort.

Riding in the rear seat: Under most conditions, very comfortable. Visibility is good and the rather firm seat is wide enough to accommodate 3 average size people without discomfort. Legroom is adequate altho noticeably less in the 2-door hardtop, especially if the front seat is all the way back. Plenty of headroom helps here: you have a tendency to sit in a more upright position. The rear doorsill sweeps back farther than usual, giving you more head and shoulder clearance when entering or leaving the car.

ECONOMY AND EASE OF MAINTENANCE

Fuel economy: It does not surprise us that this year's substantial rise in horsepower has been accomplished at some expense in economy. You can't always add cubic inches onto a basic design without adversely affecting economy. The surprising thing is the performance increment gained at so little cost in economy. MT's simulated traffic course, using Mobilgas Special, produced an average of 13.4 mpg, an increase of about 1 mpg over last year's model. Consumption at steady speeds was up slightly (see table). The smaller V8 should be considerably better at steady speeds and the 6 still better.

Is the car well put together? Workmanship both inside and out is above average. Panels fit well and the paint is smooth and glossy. Upholstery, which was the typical Jacquard-type with metallic thread, was excellently tailored as was the headliner. Close-fitting windowsills, instrument panel trim, and floor mats add up to an A for workmanship. The rather spacious trunk was well-lined and dustproof.

How did it hold up? We drove our test car 673 grueling miles in 2 of the more strenuous days of testing without developing trouble, mechanical or otherwise. Body tightness and engine responsiveness seemed to be unchanged except for a slight rattle in the steering (Continued on page 55)

PERFORMANCE

'56

(230-bhp engine)

ACCELERATION From Standing Start
0-30 mph 4.2 0-60 mph 11.8
Quarter-mile 18.6 and 77 mph

Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 4.4 50-80 mph 13.6

TOP SPEED Fastest run 107.1 Slowest 104.0
Average of 4 runs 105.1

FUEL CONSUMPTION Used Mobilgas Special
Steady Speeds
20.8 mpg @ 30 19.2 mpg @ 45
16.2 mpg @ 60 13.5 mpg @ 75

Stop-and-Go Driving
13.4 mpg over measured course
12.5 mpg tank average for 673 miles

STOPPING DISTANCE 155 feet from 60 mph

BRAKE FADE Slight after 4th stop from 60
Complete during 6th stop
Partial recovery 3 minutes
Complete recovery 5 minutes

SPEEDOMETER ERROR Read 32 at true 30, 49 at 45,
65 at 60, and 81 at 75

'55

(183-bhp engine)

From Standing Start
0-30 mph 5.2 0-60 mph 16.2
Quarter-mile 20.3 and 68 mph

Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 7.9 50-80 mph 15.3

Fastest run 102.7 Slowest 101.0
Average of 4 runs 101.8

Used Mobilgas Regular
Steady Speeds
21.5 mpg @ 30 20.1 mpg @ 45
16.8 mpg @ 60 13.9 mpg @ 75

Stop-and-Go Driving
14.3 mpg over measured course
13.1 mpg tank average for 600 miles

152 feet from 60 mph

**Read 30 at true 30, 47 at 45,
62 at 60, and 78 at 75**

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE: Ohv V8. Bore 3.63 in. Stroke 3.80 in. Stroke:bore ratio 1.047:1. Compression ratio 8.0:1. Displacement 315 cu. in. Advertised bhp 230 @ 4400 rpm. Bhp per cu. in. 0.73. Piston travel @ max. bhp 2786.7 ft. per min. Max. bmep 151.3 psi. Max. torque 316 lbs.-ft. @ 2400 rpm.

TRANSMISSION: Standard transmission is 3-speed synchromesh with helical gears. Automatic transmission is PowerFlite, 3-element torque converter with planetary gears. Overdrive transmission is standard shift with planetary gears.

RATIOS: Drive 1.72 x converter ratio and 1.00 x converter ratio; Low 1.72 x converter ratio; Reverse 2.39 x converter ratio.

REAR-AXLE RATIOS: Standard 3.73; PowerFlite 3.54; Overdrive 4.10.

STEERING: Number of turns lock to lock: mechanical 5, power 3.5. Overall ratio: mechanical 27.1 to 1, power 20.1 to 1. TYPE: Mechanical, worm and 3-tooth roller. Power,

DIMENSIONS

A FRONT OVERHANG 38.7
B WHEELBASE 120.0
C REAR OVERHANG 53.3
D OVERALL HEIGHT 62.7 (68.8 LOADED)
E MINIMUM GROUND CLEARANCE 5.7 (at oil pan)
F FRONT LEGROOM 44.5
G REAR LEGROOM 45.0

rack and sector and recirculating ball nut. WEIGHT: Test car weight (with gas, oil, and water) 3875 lbs. Test car weight bhp ratio 17.8:1.

TIRES: 7.60 x 15 tubeless.

PRICES: (Including suggested retail price at main factory, federal tax, and delivery and handling charges, but not freight.) CORONET 6 2-door sedan \$2155, 4-door sedan \$2229, CORONET V8 2-door sedan \$2263, 4-door sedan \$2336, 2-door hardtop \$2399, 4-door hardtop \$2513, convertible \$2639, ROYAL 4-door sedan \$2474, 2-door hardtop \$2544, 4-door hardtop \$2658, CUSTOM ROYAL 4-door sedan \$2584, 2-door hardtop \$2654, 4-door hardtop \$2768, convertible \$2873, STATION WAGONS 2-door Suburban 6 \$2452, 2-door V8s \$2560 and \$2689, 4-door 6-passenger V8s \$2677 and \$2829, 4-door 8-passenger V8s \$2783 and \$2935.

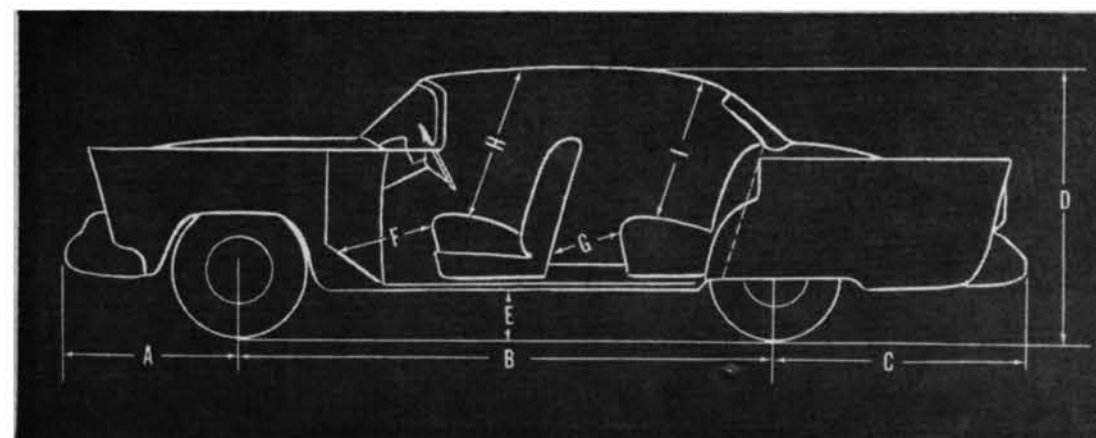
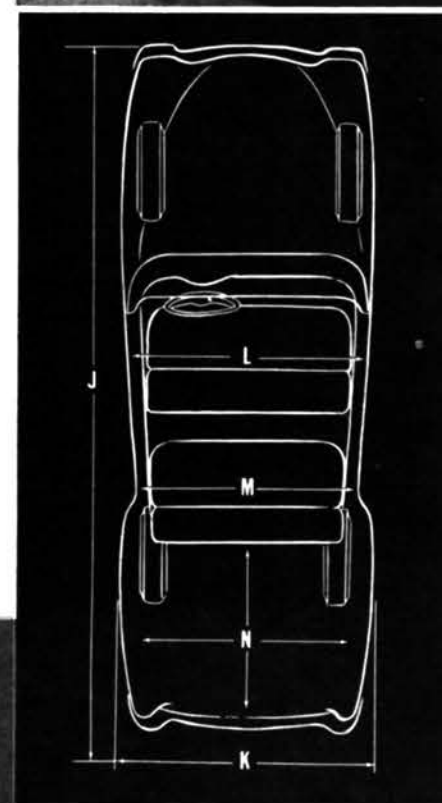
ACCESSORIES: PowerFlite \$183, overdrive \$103, power steering \$92, power brakes \$38, power seat \$70, power windows \$102, radio \$110, heater \$88, air conditioning \$567.

M FRONT HEADROOM 35.5
I REAR HEADROOM 34.9
J OVERALL LENGTH 212.0
K OVERALL WIDTH 74.6
L FRONT SHOULDER ROOM 58.0
M REAR SHOULDER ROOM 57.8
N TRUNK CAPACITY N/A

MT ROAD TEST



'56 DODGE
Custom Royal V8
2-door hardtop
with powerpack
and PowerFlite



and "Engine" Charley Wilson, left a (recognized) gap in automotive merchandising. Styling, GM and elsewhere, started with the advent of Harley Earl and his 1927 LaSalle. This was an essential part of merchandising, as most cars ran reasonably well by now, but the concept didn't become all-important until warnings of the approaching buyer's market became apparent in 1948, with waning interest in what were obviously warmed-over pre-war cars with minor facelifts.

It was then that Harley Earl got the go-ahead to create Le Sabre, a 2-year project and the 1st of a long line of show cars which may have been criticized in total but left an undeniable legacy of very salable details. True, Buick had its "Y" job in 1938 and Chrysler produced special custom built Thunderbolts in the early 1940s, but a wedding of styling and showmanship (who long before should have lived together, wedded or not) did not come publicly until the 1st dream-car-studded Motorama, premiered in New York in January, 1953. There were other Motoramas, before and after World War II, but the one in 1953 jelled the concept. Ever since, the whole industry has given sneak previews of what is to come thru dream cars, and thus whetted the appetite of nearly every member of the U. S. car-buying public.

Expansion of the Motorama idea, as well as all the other "amas" including Power and Future, plus Parade of Progress, is just one weapon in super-salesman Curtice's book. It is an era of selling all one can produce, and "GM's Curtice" is doing a pretty good job as the records will show. Despite all this and the fact that he is man-of-the-year, he also has the problem-of-this-year and those immediately to come. He must prove that in business, bigness is not a sin.

—Don MacDonald

continued from page 24

'56 Dodge Road Test

wheel crossbar that developed very early.

Servicing: The '56 Dodge should present no unusual servicing problems. Except for the usual accessory plumbing and shrouded carburetor, engine components are accessible, especially the sparkplugs. Unlike many new V8 engines, it won't require asbestos gloves, special wrenches, and the patience of Job to clean these plugs. They sit right out in the open, a tempting challenge to the "do it yourself" fan. With the 6, you can climb into the compartment alongside it, and still have room to work.

Summing up: Not satisfied to rest upon past laurels, Dodge for '56 has been improved mechanically and stylewise to meet the challenge of a highly competitive year. If style, comfort and driving ease are any portent of the future, this challenge should be met with flying colors. There are many features that make this an ideal family car.

—John Booth



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