

Do you wish some car would put sport back in driving? The D-500 has done it

UNLIKE THE OTHERS of the Hot Three, the Dodge D-500 is something of a specialty product. Introduced in 1956, the model has been radically redesigned this year along with every other car that bears the Chrysler stamp.

In last month's Plymouth road test we took you driving in that all-new car, which has not only the softest ride but also the finest handling among the Big Three at the bottom end of the price ladder. The other models in the Dodge line are in a similarly enviable position in their price class. But this D-500 is for the special buyer who wants superb handling above all other driving considerations. He or she must expect a stiff liaison with the road; the soft ride of other Chrysler products has been intentionally given up.

Our Custom Royal four-door sedan was not the hottest D-500, but had the single four-barrel carburetor and dual exhausts. Power steering, power brakes, and three-speed TorqueFlite completed the performance options, and electric windows plus a six-way seat added a touch of automation.

Do all these fripperies belong on a performance car? The power steering most certainly does, for handling becomes a drawn-out—though still easy—process without it. Power brakes seem a matter of buyer's preference on the Dodge. TorqueFlite shifts slowly, and so cuts down acceleration times a little; its torque multiplication from a standstill, though, is enough for anyone. Without expensive alterations, the transmission refuses to remain in No. 2 gear beyond an indicated 70 miles per hour, which is barely more than a true 60. Since it's by no means over-revving at that point, we suggest factory changes on at least those TorqueFlites scheduled for use in D-500s. If you're going in for competition, you'll want the hotter D-500 anyway, and you'll order it with a stick shift. But if it's just fun you want, think twice before ruling out the automatic.

The lesser Dodge V8s will not set the road so solidly aflame, nor will their owners' fuel bills be so high. The competition D-500 will cost even more to run. The six is not recommended for most people: it could be pretty much of a white elephant when you go to sell it, though it's a good, tough powerplant.

Is It the Top-Handling Car?

Of this month's group of three cars, this one unquestionably heads the list. There's no basic design difference between this chassis and that of any other contemporary Chrysler product, yet the stiff shock absorbers make a whale of a difference. If it's exhilaration you want from your driving, you should try this one. You'll get no tire squeal at all in normal circumstances, very little when you yield—as inevitably you must—to the car's invitation to hurl it about.

First impressions from the cockpit are that the wheel is too small, that it sits nice and low, and that all cars should have windshields as big as this. Later, we got to like the wheel size—it's sufficient for such easy steering—and we wished that the designers had finished the good job they started. The speedometer on the test car was undecided and inaccurate; the other four gauges sit so low that they can't be read in a hurry. The windshield distorts badly near its corners, affecting even the side mirrors; and the otherwise near-perfect dash-mounted mirror has double vision at almost all speeds.

This is not an automobile that insists you turn it loose on a highway without a speed limit. Many high-powered cars hack and grumble till you let them out, but here is a well-mannered car in traffic. Except for comparative widths, no European car has been more willing to stay in its lane on expressways, and to go exactly where you want it to.

When you do let go, of course, it's even more fun. Vibration is present at most speeds: it comes from the stiff shocks and need not cause concern. Wide open, the car is still glued to the road. Also, it still responds to a flick of your finger (if equipped with power steering) so for health, pay attention! This one won't return to its former course if a child grabs at the wheel. Of course a child has no business in the front seat of a car unless he's belted in, but the point remains that a margin of safety is lacking in such sensitive steering.

A crowned road won't pull you off to the right in the D-500, and wind seems to affect it hardly at all. Going in or out of a cut, the car will swerve unless you correct for the gusts. No matter how high the wind elsewhere, it won't change your car's direction for you.

The wheel doesn't vibrate; the generalized vibration is visible in the center of the low front seat, where padding is necessarily thin; it is a direct transmission of road variations to the driver and passengers, without becoming repeated shock. The feel is comparable at times to that of a stiff classic.

Does the Roadability Match the Handling?

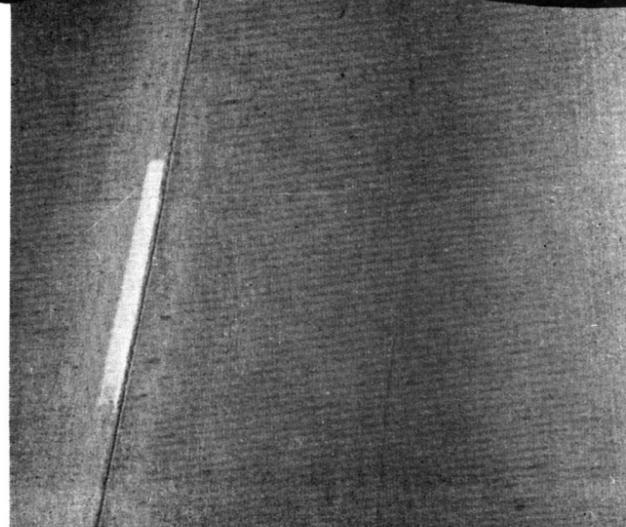
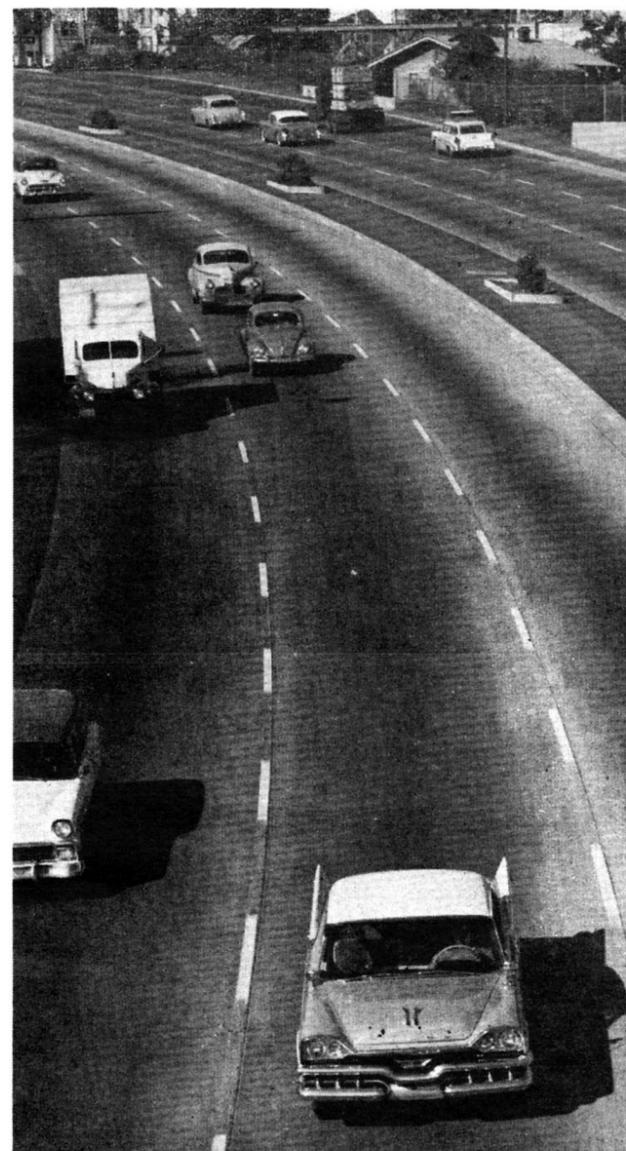
Yes. We have yet to try a U.S. car that can match this one. The other hot Chrysler cars, Plymouth Fury, DeSoto Adventurer and the ultimate 300-C should be as good; see "Spotlight," and there'll be more on them next month.

Weight distribution on the Dodge is far from the 50-50 ideal, so we were prepared for the disconcerting nose-heaviness that so often comes from a heavy powerplant. It was simply not there despite the 2300 pounds plus on the front wheels.

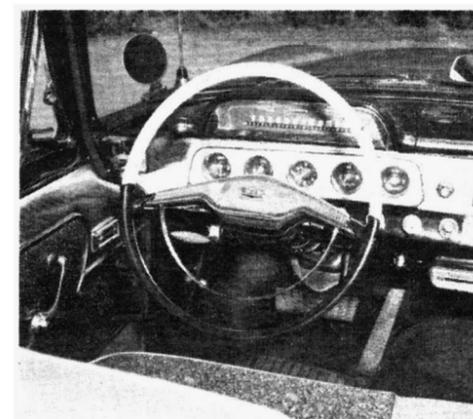
Highway dips won't slow down your progress in this car. We were able to bottom it once in a very deep, ditch-like trough. Most drivers would never bottom this car during its lifetime. Even in this trial, control was never lost due to the total absence of any rebound or tendency to veer right or left. We took rutted and grooved roads in the High Sierra with stability, and the same went for smooth snow. On roads not totally cleared, it was a cinch to pass other cars that had either snow tires or chains. One minor slip was corrected easily, though the power steering pump had ceased to function and there was considerable play at the wheel's rim. (More on this later.)

Even ice or an ill-advised departure from the pavement should not snatch command from your hands. It's pretty easy to get into trouble in any car, if you set your mind to it. This one

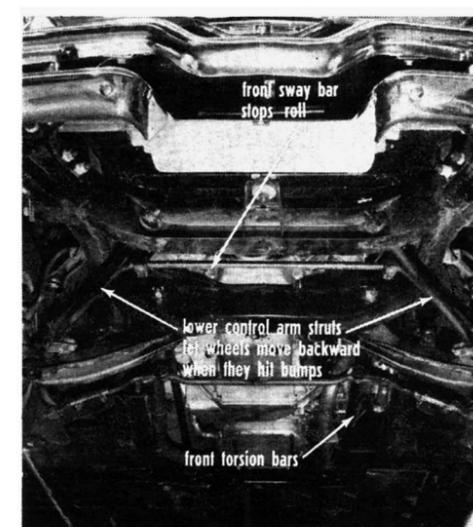
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STIFFER SHOCKS mean startling difference from other Dodges in both handling and roadability.



DRIVER has broad but distorted vision, can control tiny steering wheel with a finger if he likes.



UNDERNEATH the D-500, the picture is similar to that of all other '57 Chrysler Corp. cars.

ROAD TEST

continued from preceding page

had to put up with a lot more guff from us than we would ever think of giving most test cars, and it came out with a close-to-perfect record. If you do push it too far on a curve it will drift like a sports car, and a nudge of the throttle will bring it back in line like the obedient servant it is.

Has It Much More Go Than Other Dodges?

This "little" D-500 surprised us in the acceleration department in various ways. To begin with, the engine is the original

DODGE

ROAD TEST

Chrysler overhead-valve V8 design, with hemispherical combustion chambers and double rocker arms, and we expected a lot. When both the standing-start and passing-speed figures turned out unremarkable in comparison with other cars, we tinkered around a bit. Removing the air cleaner and wiring open the economy device that ordinarily cuts out the extra two barrels resulted in a notable gain. It was then possible to break the nine-second time regularly in the 0-60 runs, and to beat 17 seconds and clear 81 mph in the quarter-mile. Since these runs were not done with the car in stock condition, they are not included in the data on page 33.

Sharp curves to the left still will wash out the carburetor, diminishing driving enjoyment and even safety at times.

The big thorn in the side of the car's performance, however, is TorqueFlite's mandatory shift to the unaided torque converter just above 60 mph. There's no top limit on LOW (the No. 1 button), so after winding up to a scream and dropping into 2, it's exasperating to experience a slow but sure shift to DRIVE without being consulted. This had better be changed before Daytona Speedweeks this month.

Is It Expensive to Feed?

It's not bad. The most notable feature of its drinking habits was the sharp drop in fuel economy at higher speeds in the steady runs, where a big and powerful mill like this one might well be expected to put out effortless and fairly economical power for cruising. Instead, consumption rose to nearly twice as much at 75 as it had been at 30, and the average at the higher speed was a prohibitive 11.8 mpg.

Our tank mileage in highway driving was much better, as borne out by the steady-speed figure at 60, showing an easy 3 1/2 miles farther on each gallon than at the higher speed.

Like all cars of this nature, this one will give you what you ask for in a performance-economy combination. It was gratifying to find that the sensitive handling could provide as much pleasure in its own way as the acceleration and speed could. Compromise driving of this no-compromise car was a good way to get enjoyment at a price.

Are the Brakes Up to the Rest of the Car?

No. As on all domestic cars, they fade too soon. Fade showed up very slightly on the fourth of our 12 slow-downs from 60 to 20 mph. The pedal required a small extra pressure to maintain the deceleration rate of 15 feet per second per second. No. 5 was a duplicate of No. 4, and No. 6 required a little more; it was on No. 6 that a burning odor was first noticed. No. 7 again duplicated No. 6, but on the eighth stop the pedal went all the way to the floor and it was possible to maintain a deceleration rate of only 13 feet at 40 mph. On the ninth stop the 15-foot rate could be held (barely) and the car swerved to the right. The last three stops were much worse: On No. 10 the car darted to

the right and then to the left; only a 10-foot rate could be held from 45 mph down to 30. A spongy pedal on No. 11 permitted a 13-foot rate while the car darted right and the left front brake then grabbed. The last stop was distinguished by a wild swerve to the right, followed by another to the left. A 13-foot rate could be held as the car stopped, and the smell was exceedingly bad. Cooling off did not take long.

There's rather a long push with the boosted brakes before they take hold, and they then become rather sensitive.

Intelligent use of the No. 2 button on the TorqueFlite makes mountain driving a pleasure and reduces the load on the brakes.

What's the Story in the Engine Room?

A good one, at least up near the front. Even with full power equipment, there's room to maneuver between the radiator and the block. Oil dip sticks and filler neck are handy. If you have to get at the distributor or the rear engine bolts, the situation is more cramped, and it isn't helped by the heater blower that sticks out over the engine.

Does It Ride Well?

If you like a controlled ride, you'll agree that it does. Those who favor a pillowy form of transport won't like it much, but will prefer the stock Dodge with its ride-and-roadability combination. Passengers who don't care to be tossed about like feathers may unexpectedly find that a firm foundation is not so uncomfortable as they thought.

Room, quite sufficient in the front seat, is somewhat limited in back. Better check your passenger-carrying needs carefully here. The middle position in either the front or the back seat is on the second-class side, there being no room for adequate springing between the driveshaft and the low seat cushion.

What's Different About a Dodge?

A fresher feel than you'll notice in most '57 cars, made up not only of the finny styling but of the lower driving position and additional vision. There's also nothing much easier to drive (Plymouth is slightly more compact) when you consider the full-time power steering and the pushbuttons to operate the TorqueFlite. The D-500 is even easier to drive than the softer-riding Dodges because of its split-second response at all times.

This is a lighter car than the others tested in this issue, and it feels it. This impression is partly gained from the finger-light handling, but extends through the sound of the doors when you shut them. It's not an appealing trait but is more a psychological hazard than a physical one.

Chrysler Corp.'s exclusive suspension now seems to be capable of satisfying many buyers. The stock setup will appeal to many Dodge lovers because it retains the traditional soft, smooth ride. The D-500 type will be preferred by fun lovers.

Comments on the styling of this most extreme new Chrysler product seem to have changed since introduction time. Then, we heard mostly "Too wild!" and adverse opinions about the "added-on" fins. Ideas have changed in a short time, and our swept-wing sedan won lots of praise.

Is It Well Built?

The test car was not, containing many a rattle and squeak. Interior paint was sloppy (Dodge should invest in a roll of better-quality masking tape if it insists on two-tone dash panels). An upholstery button came loose, burrowing into the drivers' backs until an infuriated tester tore it off. And that's only a part of the story. We had gone a mere 400 miles when the power steering pump failed (a pin sheared off the shaft at the impeller). The sudden shift from full to no power could easily have gotten us into serious trouble, and we feel that this is an inexcusable failure. In fairness to Dodge, this could have happened on many '57 cars, but the lesson is the same. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, we'll say again that Detroit is not even trying to put most of its products together right.

continued on page 56

'57 (285-bhp engine)

REAR-WHEEL HORSEPOWER

Clayton chassis dynamometer showed:
102 road hp @ 2500 rpm and 82 mph
116 road hp @ 3000 rpm and 115 mph
148 road hp (max.) @ 3700 rpm

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

Read 35 at true 30, 50 at 45, 57 at 50,
68 at 60, 85 at 75, 90 at 80

FUEL CONSUMPTION

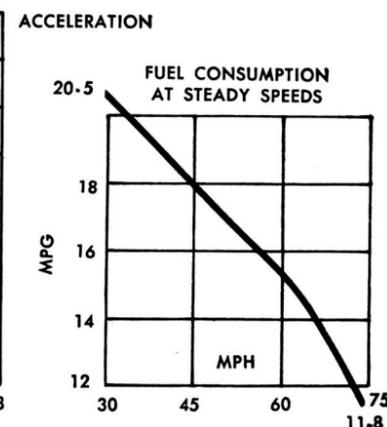
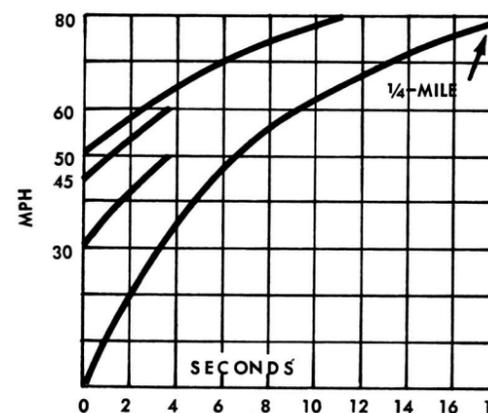
Using Mobilgas Special
Steady Speeds
20.5 mpg @ 30 18.0 mph @ 45
15.2 mpg @ 60 11.8 mpg @ 75
Stop-and-Go Driving
10.6 mpg tank average for 94 miles
Highway Driving
16.6 mpg tank average for 275 miles

OIL CONSUMPTION

One quart added in 1858 miles

ACCELERATION

From Standing Start
0-45 mph 5.7 0-60 mph 9.4
Quarter-mile 17.2 and 79 mph
Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 3.7 45-60 mph 3.7
50-80 mph 10.9



Specifications

ENGINE: Ohv V8. Bore 3.69 in. Stroke 3.80 in. Stroke/bore ratio 1.03:1. Compression ratio 9.25:1. Displacement 325 cu. in. Advertised bhp 285. Bhp per cu. in. 0.877. Max. bmep 160 psi. Max. torque 345 lbs.-ft.

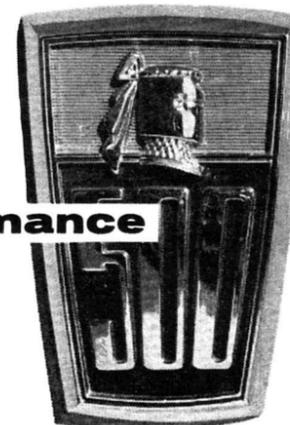
TRANSMISSION: Standard transmission is three-speed synchromesh with helical gears. Automatic transmission is TorqueFlite, three-element torque converter with planetary gears; ratios 2.45 x converter ratio, 1.45 x converter ratio, 1.00 x converter ratio. Maximum converter ratio at stall 2.7 @ 1870 rpm.

REAR-AXLE RATIOS: Synchromesh 3.73, automatic 3.36.

STEERING: Turning diameter 43.8 ft. Turns lock to lock 3.4. Overall ratio 19.8:1. Type: mechanical, worm and three-tooth roller; power, symmetrical idler arm, equal length tie rods.

WEIGHT: Test car with gas, oil and water, 4190 lbs. (56% front, 44% rear). Test car weight/bhp ratio 14.8:1.

Performance

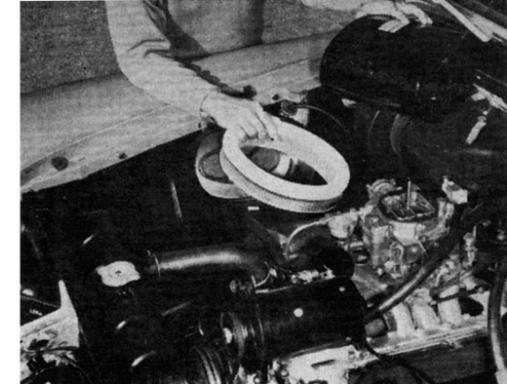


'56 (260-bhp engine)

Motor Trend did not run a complete test on the '56 D-500

From Standing Start
0-60 mph 9.5

Passing Speeds
50-80 mph 12.0



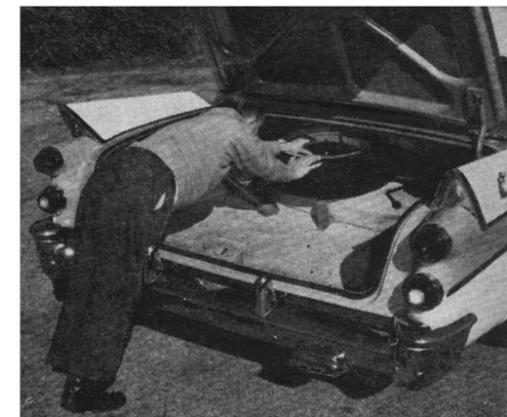
AIR CLEANER is new paper type, gives little intake obstruction, can be tapped clean.



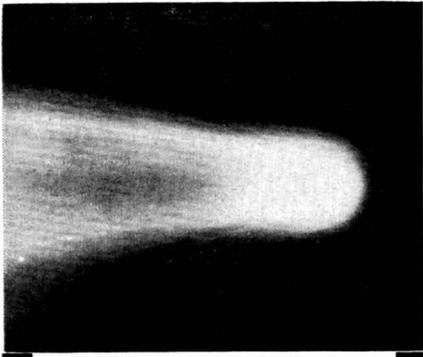
NOT TRUE DUALS, Dodge lights have new look, may be replaced by twin headlights later.



MOST FAMILIAR view on the highway will be this one. D-500 insignia is on trunk.



SPARE demands nearly impossible stretch.



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BUICK

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Is There Confusion Under the Hood?

Yes, if you want to do much more than check the battery or your oil level. Only an expert will be able to remove even the spark plugs without clearing away a maze of plumbing from the power steering and power brake pumps, tubing, etc. The heater blower also obstructs No. 4 plug on the right bank. In case you lose the coil and distributor, remove the air cleaner. And don't forget, if you need a quart, to have the attendant put a pint in the right and a pint in the left filler.

What's Different About a Buick?

A great feeling of weight and size, both understandable in light of the facts. Wonderful smoothness from Dynaflo, especially pleasant when accelerating. One of the softest rides available today. Small features like the step-on parking brake (you'll especially like it if your hydraulic system should ever fail and you have to drive for some distance), and the keyless ignition switch that makes it possible to

leave your car in a parking lot while you keep the key to the locked trunk or glove compartment.

You may want one of the buzzers that you can set to go off—and keep buzzing—at any speed you like.

Will It Stay New?

Look around you and you may be surprised by the age of some of the clean-looking Buicks you see. Owners tend to stick with the make, so must like the service they get. Watch out for a hum from the rear end in the car you pick; the test car had this familiar feature before 1000 miles showed on its odometer. If you buy a hardtop, particularly a four-door like the test car, check all doors and door windows for fit and smooth operation: the right rear window on ours hung up occasionally.

The Other Buicks

The Buick line begins (pricewise) with the popular Special, whose three-holed hardtop is in the bottom photo. A comparatively low compression ratio of 9.5 to 1 with Dynaflo still demands premium fuel; a stick-shift version, recommended

DODGE

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The two Dodges shown are both Custom Royal Lancers, a two-door (above) and a four-door below. Either body shell can be bought in less luxurious trim as a Royal or a Coronet; both have the Red Ram V8, with powerpack at extra cost. Since the D-500 engine and suspension are only \$72 extra, they're a good buy.



OLDSMOBILE

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The non-Super, or Golden Rocket, 88 (bottom photo) is essentially a less dressy version of the Super 88. Consequently, it's 50 pounds lighter. Only important mechanical variation is in rear-axle ratios:

the Super's 3.42 to 1 means more feet per second in acceleration and the plain 88's 3.23 to 1 gives more miles per gallon. (Both of these are with Hydra-Matic.)

As for the bigger and ultra-ultra 98 (top), it comes equipped with Hydra-Matic, power steering, and power brakes. Using the rear axle of the Super 88 but with 300 pounds more heft to haul, it should produce slightly less performance, less gas mileage, and presumably more envious looks from your friends.

About Those New Triple Carburetors . . .

As you read in MT last month, the system consists of three dual-barrel carburetors. You use only the middle one unless you push the throttle past the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark, when the other two cut in.

Initial plans are to make the three-pot setup available on Super 88 models. We may assume they can be added to the 98 models also. Only engine change with three carburetors is a compression ratio boost to 10 to 1; this raises horsepower to 300 at

