



CAR and DRIVER ROAD TEST

Dodge Charger

It looks like the Chrysler Corporation is flat out in the automobile business again.



PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKE BRADY

Last year, we applauded Plymouth for building what we thought was the best looking Detroit car of 1967, the Barracuda. A remarkable feat, considering the Chrysler Corporation's odd, unstable styling history which, since the Airflow, has been marked by committee-styled cars which, aside from lacking integrity of design, have oscillated between being far out to the point of vulgarity and being timid to the point of sterility—a seemingly endless series of over-compensations for each preceding year. With this background, we were pleasantly surprised by the '67 Barracuda, but quite prepared to wait years before Chrysler came up with a worthy successor. We conjured a picture of designers and stylists lying about their studios, spent from their Barracuda effort, and barely able to create

so much as a new bumper for 1968.

Imagine, therefore, our surprise—again pleasant—when we saw Dodge's new Charger. Working with Chrysler Corporation's 117-in. wheelbase "B" series body/chassis, the designers that we'd imagined were worn out have not only achieved far more than a face-lift, they have easily surpassed the mark of excellence set less than a year ago.

The only 1968 car which comes close to challenging the new Charger for styling accolades is the new Corvette, which is remarkably similar to the Charger, particularly when viewed from the rear quarter. But, we give the honors to the Charger for several reasons. First, the Corvette, being a smaller car in both seating capacity and wheelbase, has a much easier time attaining

the desired sporty image. Second, Dodge stylists have shown that they can create a car in the current idiom with originality, combining just the right amount of tasteful conformity with that novelty and freshness which attracts attention. Originality takes guts in Dodge's position as the smaller division of the number three automaker, but the Charger's aerodynamic wedge theme is not only distinctly new but it is very like the new breed of wind-tunnel tested sports/racing cars which are just now making their debut in the 1967 Can-Am series. Third, while the Charger is a vast improvement over its predecessor, the 1968 Corvette is anticlimactic after the Mako Shark show cars which preceded it.

Chrysler Corporation, then, is flat-out in the automobile business again. The Marlin-

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like Charger of the past (really a Coronet with a hastily added fastback roof), and the similarly makeshift Barracuda were grim reminders of the Corporation's close call with financial disaster in the early Sixties. But the belt-tightening policies of Lynn Townsend—Chrysler's chief executive since 1961, and more recently Board Chairman—combined with his intense efforts to improve and increase the Corporation's manufacturing facilities seem to be paying off. The 1967 Barracuda and the new Charger, each with its own distinctive sheet metal now, are evidence of Chrysler's increasing strength and ability to meet both the financial and creative challenge of the specialty car age.

Specialty cars are conceived from a significantly different planning philosophy than that of the bread-and-butter cars which Detroit used to build exclusively. Bread-and-butter cars are built with the primary intention of offending no potential buyer, rendering the cars largely featureless and unexciting. Specialty cars, on the other hand, are built to please specific groups of

customers. We like the more positive philosophy behind the specialty car, and the Charger is chock-full of features with obvious appeal for the performance-minded enthusiast.

The aerodynamic appearance of the Charger (it's as aerodynamically slippery as it looks, according to Chrysler's engineers) is accented by a rear spoiler combined with a truncated rear end for a Kamm effect—a design approach which has become almost mandatory in modern racing cars. The Charger takes on the nose-down appearance common to both NASCAR and NHRA, and the bulging rear fenders should accommodate the racing tires used in both drag and stock car racing with a minimum of rework. The greenhouse, following the sharply curved sideglass, slants steeply towards the center of the car, very reminiscent of Le Mans Ferraris, particularly when viewed from the rear. A tunnel-type backlight is used instead of a pure fastback (a styling feature fast going out of fashion from over-use). The smaller rear window of the tunnel roof also

gives much less distortion to rear vision than a steeply slanted fastback window.

Further visual performance identity is achieved by the use of a racing-style gas filler cap mounted high on the left rear quarter, and quasi fog/driving/parking and turn signal lights mounted low in the front bumper. Matte black paint is used extensively in the grille and around the tail lights. Full wheel cut-outs, fat tires on 6-inch rims, and simulated engine compartment exhaust vents in the hood (which also house turn signal indicator lights, like the Mustang GT) and at the leading edge of the doors complete the Charger's complement of visually "in" features.

The interior of the Charger carries the GT theme further, with bucket seats, map pockets in the doors, and a well-padded dash with a full complement of instruments set in a matte black background. The tachometer and speedometer are directly in front of the driver while the smaller engine instruments are to the right of the driver, but angled towards him.

With all this performance image going for the Charger, we just had to order an engine to go with it—and when you're talking a Chrysler product, the performance engine is the Hemi. There just isn't more honest horsepower available off the showroom floor than you get from this bright orange monster. While there are larger displacement engines to be had (Dodge offers a 440 cu. in. V-8 option for the Charger for less money than the 426 cu. in. Hemi), none of them can be had with two 4-barrel carburetion.

The Hemi, despite its high performance carburetion, comes very close to meeting smog control regulations without any modifications, hence, has had only minor alterations to the carburetor and distributor calibrations to meet the new laws. The carburetors feed the hemispherical combustion chambers through huge ports and 2.25-in. intake valves with thin (.309-in.) stems, all calculated to put as much fuel/air mixture in the Hemi as possible. The exhaust system is as efficient, with 1.94-in. valves, thin stems, and cast headers leading to a 2.5-in. dual exhaust system.

The rest of the Hemi is just as tough, with cross-bolted caps for three of its five main bearings; a specially heat-treated, forged steel crankshaft; big, husky connecting rods; forged domed pistons; solid lifters and heavy duty pushrods; and a dual-breaker distributor—in short, a racing engine. And that's what it was originally designed for.



The only 1968 car which comes close to challenging the new Charger for styling accolades is the new Corvette, itself remarkably similar to the Charger, particularly when viewed from the rear.

When Chrysler decided to sell the Hemi as an option, they found it was cheaper to carry over the racing parts into production, in most cases, than to tool up for cheaper, street parts. For all-out competition, about all you need is the high compression pistons (same basic design, but more pop-up), a longer duration camshaft, and a set of tubular headers. For stock car racing, there is a very special "ram-tuned" intake manifold and a giant Holley 4-bbl. carb.

Our "street" Hemi was more than powerful enough for any use an ordinary citizen might find. Rated conservatively at 425 hp and 490 lbs./ft. of torque, the Hemi propelled the Charger through the quarter-mile traps at just over 105 mph, covering the distance in 13.5 seconds—not bad for 4346 lbs. test weight and a "cooking" engine. The drag racers buy a 500-lb. lighter 2-door sedan, and do some of the tuning we mentioned above, to go through the traps at close to 130 mph—just in case you had any doubts about our engine being in street tune.

Some of you may have had a Hemi before, and may have experienced some problems with it, particularly in the area of oil consumption. For 1968 the Hemi has undergone some changes to fix this problem and to insure against some others. New valve stem oil seals have cured the oil consumption problem, an oil pan windage tray has permitted the addition of an extra quart of oil to the sump to make sure that the oil pick-up never sucks air, and a fuel vapor separator has been added to the fuel line to prevent vapor lock (which can make hot starts difficult). A slightly longer duration camshaft is also new. Although the peak rating hasn't changed since 1967, the new cam improves the shape of the power curves. We suspect, however, that the camshaft and the windage tray are responsible for the Charger's extra one mph at the end of the quarter-mile, compared to the Plymouth Hemi Satellite we tested in April, 1966.

The Satellite we tested was a 4-speed manual, and we remarked at the time that we'd rather have had an automatic, so we ordered our Charger with one. We were right; the automatic is the plan. Driving through the special high-stall-speed torque convertor which comes with the Hemi, you can either shift manually, winding the Hemi right out to 6500 rpm, or leave it in Drive, where the TorqueFlite shifts for you at

*(Text continued on page 81;
Specifications overleaf)*



DODGE CHARGER

Manufacturer: Dodge Division
Chrysler Corporation
7900 Joseph Campau
Detroit, Michigan

Number of dealers in U.S.: 3128

Vehicle type: Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive,
4-passenger sports sedan with
all-steel integral body/chassis

Price as tested: NA
(Prices for the 1968 models had not been re-
leased by the manufacturer at press time)

Options on test car: Hemi engine, automatic
transmission, power steering, power disc
brakes, HD suspension, limited-slip differen-
tial, 15-in wheels and tires, sports console,
floor-mounted gearshift, AM radio, vinyl
roof, rear window de-fogger, special paint

ENGINE

Type: Water-cooled V-8, cast-iron block and
heads, 5 main bearings
Bore x stroke: 4.25 x 3.75 in, 108.2 x 95.2mm
Displacement: 426 cu in, 6981 cc
Compression ratio: 10.25 to one
Carburetion: 2 x 4-bbl Carter
Valve gear: Pushrod-operated overhead
valves, mechanical lifters
Power (SAE): 425 bhp @ 5000 rpm
Torque (SAE): 490 lbs/ft @ 4000 rpm
Specific power output: 0.99 bhp/cu in,
61.1 bhp/liter
Max. recommended engine speed: 6500 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission: 3-speed automatic
Max. torque converter ratio: 2.1 to one
Final drive ratio: 3.23 to one

Gear Ratio	Mph/1000 rpm	Max. test speed
I 2.45	9.7	63 mph (6500 rpm)
II 1.45	16.5	107 mph (6500 rpm)
III 1.00	24.0	139 mph (5800 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase: 117.0 in
Track: F: 59.5 in, R: 59.2 in
Length: 208.0 in
Width: 76.6 in
Height: 53.2 in
Ground clearance: 5.7 in
Curb weight: 4035 lbs
Test weight: 4346 lbs
Weight distribution, F/R: 55.5/44.5%
Lbs/bhp (test weight): 10.2
Battery capacity: 12 volts, 78 amp/hr
Alternator capacity: 445 watts
Fuel capacity: 19.0 gal
Oil capacity: 6.0 qts
Water capacity: 18.0 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., unequal-length wishbones, torsion
bars, anti-sway bar
R: Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs

STEERING

Type: Power-assisted recirculating ball
Turns lock-to-lock: 5.3
Turning circle: 41 ft

BRAKES

F: 11.0-in vented disc
R: 10.0 x 2.5-in cast iron drum
Swept area: 387.8 sq in

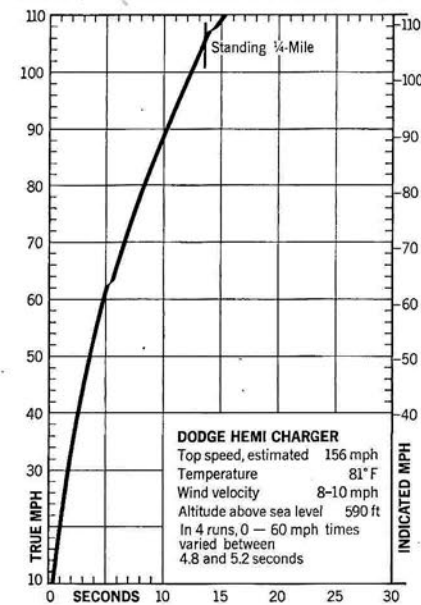
WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size and type: 6.0JK x 15-in, stamped
steel wheel, 5-bolt
Tire make, size and type: Goodyear F70-15,
2-ply nylon, tubeless
Test inflation pressures: F: 30 psi, R: 30 psi
Tire load rating: 1280 lbs per tire @ 24 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	1.7
40 mph	2.5
50 mph	3.5
60 mph	4.8
70 mph	6.0
80 mph	8.5
90 mph	10.0
100 mph	12.5

Standing 1/4-mile: 13.5 sec @ 105 mph
80-0 mph panic stop: 274 ft (0.78 G)
Fuel mileage: 9-12 mpg on premium fuel
Cruising range: 171-228 mi



CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting: Fair
Response: Very Good
Vibration: Good
Noise: Fair

DRIVE TRAIN

Shift linkage: Poor
Shift smoothness: Good
Drive train noise: Very Good

STEERING

Effort: Excellent
Response: Very Good
Road feel: Poor
Kickback: Excellent

SUSPENSION

Ride comfort: Good
Roll resistance: Very Good
Pitch control: Very Good
Harshness control: Fair

HANDLING

Directional control: Very Good
Predictability: Very Good
Evasive maneuverability: Very Good
Resistance to sidewinds: Very Good

BRAKES

Pedal pressure: Very Good
Response: Good
Fade resistance: Very Good
Directional stability: Good

CONTROLS

Wheel position: Good
Pedal position: Very Good
Gearshift position: Very Good
Relationship: Very Good
Small controls: Very Good

INTERIOR

Ease of entry/exit: Very Good
Noise level (cruising): Good
Front seating comfort: Poor
Front leg room: Very Good
Front head room: Excellent
Front hip/shoulder room: Very Good
Rear seating comfort: Good
Rear leg room: Good
Rear head room: Very Good
Rear hip/shoulder room: Very Good
Instrument comprehensiveness: Excellent
Instrument legibility: Excellent

VISION

Forward: Very Good
Front quarter: Good
Side: Excellent
Rear quarter: Fair
Rear: Good

WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater/defroster: Excellent
Ventilation: Excellent
Air conditioner: —
Weather sealing: Excellent

CONSTRUCTION QUALITY

Sheet metal: Very Good
Paint: Very Good
Chrome: Very Good
Upholstery: Very Good
Padding: Very Good
Hardware: Very Good

GENERAL

Headlight illumination: Excellent
Parking and signal lights: Excellent
Wiper effectiveness: Excellent
Service accessibility: Fair
Trunk space: Very Good
Interior storage space: Excellent
Bumper protection: Very Good



DODGE CHARGER

(continued from page 47)

about 5500 rpm. If you keep your foot in it that long, the 2-3 shift has you doing well over 90 mph. If you cool it, the automatic lets you drive the Hemi like the 230-hp, 318 cu. in. (standard equipment for the Charger). It would take a fairly sharp mother-in-law to suspect that you had anything but the most docile of powerplants underneath the hood.

We were prepared to not like the brakes on our Charger, as the brakes on Chrysler's "B" body cars have previously fallen short of our standards, but things have changed. We ordered the disc brake option, wanting all the stopping power we could get to go with the Hemi's go power, and found the brakes to be very satisfactory. Directional stability was good, and our stopping distances were right around 274 ft. (.78 G), a perfectly acceptable figure, considering the mass of the car. We did encounter fade once, early in our braking tests, which we attributed to "green fade," a phenomenon that new brake pads go through once before they settle down. Afterwards, we experienced no fade in five successive panic stops from 80 mph.

Handling was dominated by the Charger's inherent understeer characteristics, a function of both the massive Hemi engine in the front of the car and the large front anti-sway bar. The understeer tendency was strong enough that once the limit of adhesion was reached and the front end began to plow, only instant full throttle in the lower gears would get the rear end out. A gentle increase in throttle would only increase the amount of understeer. By anticipating breakaway, we could coax the Charger into a 4-wheel slide with a flick of the wheel and a simultaneous increase in throttle. This induced power-slide was fairly easy to control, but it took up a lot of the road. Generally, the Goodyear F70-15 tires gave good performance and allowed fairly fast cornering without breaking traction—the only way to go, on the street; other maneuvers we restricted to the test track. The Charger assumes a fair amount of body lean when cornering, despite the giant anti-sway bar, stiff springs, and heavy-duty shock absorbers—all of which come with the Hemi.

The Hemi Charger's ride, while harsh by most standards, will be called appropriately firm by most enthusiasts. There will be those who will argue that a Pontiac GTO or an Olds 4-4-2 handles as well without the attendant harshness. But both of these cars suffer from a certain amount of axle hop under hard braking and acceleration, something we didn't encounter with the Charger. It's all a question of how hard the rubber bushings are, and, in the case of the Charger, how many leaves the rear springs have. We'd rather suffer a harshness than axle hop, if a common solution to both problems can't be found. Much of the harshness we felt resulted from the 30 psi tire pressures that are recommended

with the Hemi.

While we are discussing handling, we ought to point out that unless your Hemi Charger is going to be used strictly on the drag strip, power steering is a must, not only for its ease of operation—you've got to be a weight lifter to park a manual steering Hemi—but also because of the faster steering ratio in the power unit. The manual steering has an overall ratio of 28.8-to-one while the power gear is 18.8-to-one—almost twice as fast.

Our main objections to the Charger were on the inside. The seats are terrible—they just don't do anything right. Our unhappiness concerned not so much the seat cushions themselves, but the position of the seat in the car and the angle between the seat proper and the seat back. The seat is very low, relative to the steering wheel, and the seat back—not adjustable—seems to be almost perpendicular to the seat cushion, forcing us to sit bolt-upright. The guys who design seats should have to sit in them while they work at their drawing boards.

We also didn't like the shift lever in the optional console we ordered. Not only is it ugly and out of place in the context of the rest of the Charger's interior, but the detent button is directly on top, making for an unnatural motion when shifting manually. Of the levers we've seen, the T-handle with the button on the side, like the Cougar and the Mustang, or the "goal-post" shifter used by Buick and Oldsmobile, where one squeezes the crossbar to release the detent, are both excellent. We'd settle for either in place of the Charger's (which is shared by all Chrysler console shifters).

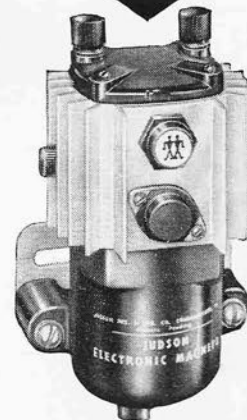
With the exception of the rear quarters, vision from within the Charger is good, and we aren't prepared to sacrifice the attractive tunnel-roof wings for visibility. We do, however, recommend a right-hand outside mirror to compensate.

We don't care for (and didn't order) optional belt-like stripes around the rear quarters that Dodge is emphasizing this year. Stripes—like fastbacks—are out in any form; matte black anti-glare paint on the hood is in now, and a good design could be worked into the Charger's hood vent sculpturing.

The Chrysler Corporation is opposed to ventless door windows, on the grounds that there really isn't a practical flow-through ventilation system. So the Charger still has vent windows, and we suspect that Chrysler might just be right. Time will tell. We were glad to have them on our Charger, because air-conditioning is not available with the Hemi engine—it just won't fit.

To add frosting to the cake, the new Charger is 165 lbs. lighter than the old one, and while at this writing prices were as unavailable as peace in Vietnam, we suspect the new Charger will be cheaper than the old one. These days, when you get something better for less, snap it up. ●

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selling
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system
on the
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