

**THOSE  
SPORTY,  
SWINGING  
SPECIALTY  
CARS!**

WITH OVERALL NEW CAR SALES running nearly 20% off the pace of a year ago, and production schedules being cut by every maker, it is gratifying to note one segment of the marketplace that is growing by great leaps in the face of general decline. This segment is occupied by cars variously called "sporty," "sports/personal," "specialty" or "American Sports." It was created in a grand manner by the Mustang, which, from early 1967 returns, still looks like it will outsell all of its competition combined.

And competition it now has! Directly in the battle, price for price, is an enlarged and completely restyled line of Barracudas and Chevrolet's Camaro. Competing against loaded Mustangs, as well as among themselves, are the new Cougar and Firebird. Dodge's Charger and Rambler's Marlin are for those who have Mustang money but must seat a family of five in reasonable comfort. And then, where performance and not money is the object, it can become Ferrari-like in either the Corvette or the Shelby GT with service still around any corner.

Since April of 1964, when the Mustang first made its bow, the field has proliferated to a total of nearly 40 models, if you count basic body and engine options as one each. The businessman or school teacher can commute stylishly but economically behind six cylinders in all but four of the nine basic makes if he so chooses. No one knows what's under the hood, but the sporty image is still there. Or he can take the same basic car and put up to 375 horses ahead of him (up to 425 in the Shelby GT) and have a boss machine that doesn't threaten to *boss him*.

What kind of people are buying these cars and what kind do they buy? For our answers, we went to Chevrolet head, E. M. "Pete" Estes, who started his extensive, statistically sound survey as soon as his Camaro hit the streets.

Over 60% have some college or are college graduates. The median income is \$10,400 which, incidentally, is higher than all Chevrolet buyers except Caprice and Corvette in 1966. About one out of three is single. For one-fourth of the buyers, the Camaro was their first new-car purchase. And for almost one-half, it was their first Chevrolet. Ownership is almost equally divided between single- and multiple-car households, and the median age of all buyers is 31 — youngest of any Chevrolet line except Corvette.

We were more than a little amazed at these figures, not because we had expected anything different, but because in most respects they strikingly parallel a recent subscriber study of the typical MOTOR TREND reader. So you can see that it is not entirely coincidental that we think you will be interested in the first complete buyer's guide to sports/personal cars . . .



## SPORTY SPECIALTIES

# MARLIN & CHARGER

**C**AUGHT IN THE MIDDLE, but far from homeless, are the Marlin from AMC and Dodge's Charger. Neither has the compactness of the basic sports-personal archetypes such as Mustang and Camaro, nor the posh elegance to social climb their way into the company of the luxury-personals: Eldorado, Riviera, et al. Nor, it should be added, do they attempt to.

Each is looking for its own home in this fast-growing market. Most likely competition (in philosophy rather than sales volume) comes from Cougar and Firebird, both upgraded variations of smaller cars but with more of a performance image. Both aim at the driver who wants a sporty-type car, but who doesn't want to give up room and comfort and isn't ready to move into the more expensive category.

Charger assumes that the man interested in such a car also wants performance and will spring for bigger engines. American Motors takes a more conservative view of Marlin's prospective buyer, believing him more interested in the sporty look rather than the sporty reality. Both are large cars which fill *all* of the average marked parking space but neither drives like a monster, so they have some justification in claiming the sporty image.

The Charger, which had a late introduction in 1966, makes no external changes for 1967. The Marlin has been with us since 1965, when it received a

rather chilly reception from the buying public. To offset this and to restore the sense of freshness it has an all-new front-end treatment but still retains the tapering fastback so reminiscent of the Tucker.

Seeking a corner of this market untouched by the competition, AMC emphasizes Marlin as a sports-personal car for the entire family. This isn't quite the contradiction in terms that it seems, for the head of the family spends a fair part of the day alone in the car. It is the only sports/personal car capable of transporting six adults, so a family with several children does not have to be a 2-car family, though it probably will be anyway.

Neither has shied away from controversial styling. Both are fastbacks, considered to be the sportiest shape and the most "in," thanks to the Sting Ray and several generations of Ferrari. They have their own distinctive interpretations of the form, and as with anything different, provoke much dispute over what is really a matter of personal taste. Not even the Camaro-Firebird shell inspires such a polarization of opinion.

### Powertrain & Performance

Competition-oriented Dodge built up Charger's image as a hot one on both the NASCAR and USAC circuits in 1966 and moves that image to the street with engine options including the 426-cu.-in. Hemi that sometimes terrorizes Ford on

the super-speedways. The sound of the 425-hp Hemi when fired up is unmistakable; it gives goose pimples to enthusiasts and fits to the competition. It isn't really loud, just powerful and authoritative. Only the Shelby GT 350 and 500 offer a comparable sound.

With barely enough miles on the clock to permit high-speed driving, we turned the Hemi-Charger loose on the drag strip at Carlsbad. E.T.s ran in the mid-14-second bracket and our best trap speed was 100.33. All of this was in a genuine, unprepared street machine without benefit of cheater slicks. For comparison, the same car with the standard 318-cu.-in., 230-hp engine was more than four seconds and 25 mph away. The 383-cu.-in. engine option produced a 16.5 quarter at over 86 mph. The very rare 440 option ran close to the Hemi and may be a bit faster out of the hole.

We had the most time in the 383 and found it to be a very reasonable compromise. Ours had the 4-bbl. carb and, while it didn't burn any rubber unless we really made it do so, we were never starved for power with 325 horses. In 2-bbl. form, the same engine claims 270-hp which burns less gas, but isn't nearly as exciting to drive. This doesn't mean the smaller engines are slugs; they do take some of the charge out of the Charger, but even the 318 is peppy. The 318, for example, has enough power to cruise all day as fast as the law allows, taking most changes of gradient in

stride, even if it can't accelerate as fast as the Hemi. The driver of a 318 is more aware of steep hills and must be more judicious about passing than his Hemi-mounted friend, although neither may care about standing quarters and stoplight-winternationals.

American Motors, which has eschewed any kind of competition in the past (but may change its mind under new management), offers nothing bigger than 343-cu.-in. in 235- and 280-hp versions. This puts the hottest Marlin in about the same class as the Charger with the 2-bbl. 383, a thought borne out by the performance tests. There was little to choose between them on the strip. The standard Marlin V-8 is a 200-hp engine of 290-cu.-in.

However, AMC has recently introduced a hot cam kit consisting of a high-lift, long-duration camshaft, competition-type hydraulic lifters, heavier valve springs with dampers and other valve train components for Olivers who want to twist more out of the V-8s. There are occasional rumors of a 390-cu.-in. engine being offered, but this hasn't come to pass.

Unlike Charger, Marlin offers a 6. In fact, they offer a pair of them. The difference between the 145- and 155-hp versions is a 1- versus 2-bbl. carburetor; both displace 232 cubic inches. The performance of these engines in our tests will start no rush of hot rodders to AMC showrooms, but they were not intended to. It was flat-out impossible to burn rubber (not surprising, since the biggest V-8 couldn't either), which made for a long, thoughtful 20-second plus ride down the strip. Even more thought-provoking is the problem of trying to accelerate into a hole in another lane of expressway traffic.

Who would buy such an engine? Someone who wants a sporty car, but belongs to the growing legion which commutes ever increasing distances from the suburbs to the city, while paying more and more for gas. So far, however, these people seem more inclined to solve their dilemma with a Mustang 6 or an import — and Marlin 6 sales are very low.

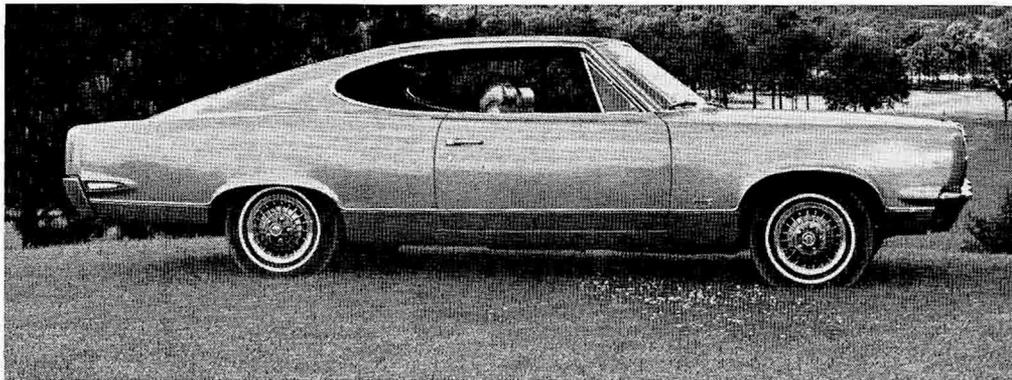
### Handling, Steering & Stopping

Getting a Charger or Marlin around a turn is no great problem. Neither is a real sports car in this respect, but they don't throw the driver any curves either. On the straight we were pleased to notice that both were suitably shocked. There was none of the wallow that makes a long trip seem even longer.

If one of the cars is better than the rest, it is the Charger 318 by virtue of its weight distribution. With the small V-8, it comes very close to 50-50 distribution. Going to the bigger engines steals some of this, but even the Hemi version, which adds over 300 pounds to



*Performance is part of the Charger image. Here our Hemi-powered test car is shown charging out of the hole at the drag strip. Stopping power was equally impressive.*



*Marlin profile shows how esthetic qualities of fastback are employed on a larger car.*



*From this angle Marlin (above) and Charger look almost identical. Biggest difference is the Charger's better rear visibility, thanks to full-width rear window, but both are restricted compared to notchbacks despite great glass area. Charger has bigger trunk.*



# MARLIN & CHARGER

continued

the front end and more than 400 to the whole car, had no strong tendency to push the front end.

The Marlins also handled well compared to the opposition and far better than the other AMC products we've driven. Again, weight distribution is a major part of the story, for the 6 felt better than the V-8, at least going into a turn. But, lack of torque sometimes gave us a moment getting out of the turn.

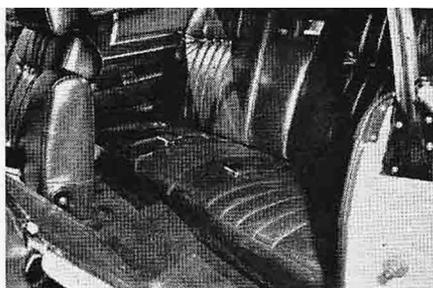
Stopping the cars was an interesting problem. We've often found that a small-engine car with drums stops better than the same car with a bigger engine and discs. This proved out in the Marlins where the drum-braked 6 pulled up slightly shorter at 60 mph than the V-8 with power discs, though not as straight.

The Dodges were even more interesting and less predictable. The 318 stopped in an almost straight line in 147 feet; eight less than the best Marlin. This was with drums. The 383, also with drums, took eight feet more, the same as the Marlin 6. No surprise so far. The Hemi-Charger with discs did the same test in an amazing 133 feet, despite its greater front-end weight. The only conclusions we'll attempt to draw are that the bigger engine cars really need discs, and don't count on being able to stop faster than the car in front of you unless you know his engine and brakes.

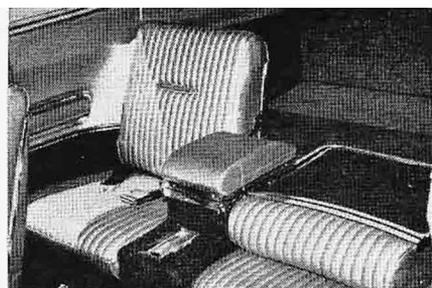
## Space, Comfort & Convenience

Both Marlin and Charger have done better than average by the driver and front-seat passenger. All the seat and upholstery variations we tried were comfortable, although we would give the edge to the Charger's buckets over the full-width seat that permits the Marlin to bill itself as a 6-passenger personal car. We also have some second thoughts about the fancy cloth that is standard in the Marlin. How fancy will it look in two years or so? The vinyl upholstery in the Charger has the texture and feel of real leather. The vinyl in the Marlin has a basket weave embossed on it which leaves room for some air to circulate and gives a non-skid effect. Instruments and controls are well laid out on both cars.

The problem of headroom for rear-seat passengers is the petard on which the fastbacks of the '40s were hoisted. The concept of the sports-personal car is that the rear seat will be used only occasionally. We might add that that occasional passenger had better be less than 5-foot-8 and forget about wearing a hat. This was equally true of both cars, although part of their total bulk is



Marlin rear seat (above) was meant to hold three. Charger has rear buckets, but



various fold-down combinations lend versatility to luggage/passenger capacity.

doubtless due to the attempt to give the back-seat passenger as much room as possible. Neither does he have much foot room; he fairs better in the Marlin.

As far as luggage space is concerned, it's less a space problem than it is getting to it. The deck opening in the Marlin is very small to fit inside the trim strips. We were just barely able to load our 5th wheel through it and getting at the space is also tricky. Charger has a bigger deck lid, but a combination body stiffener-sill intrudes into the opening.

## Best & Worst Features

The best feature of the Charger is that it offers stages of performance geared to attract the largest possible number of buyers. The bottom of the range has been chosen so as not to detract from the performance image by providing an engine no smaller than the majority are likely to want or be happy with, while putting engines at the top of the range as hot as any offered. Marlin has gone the other way and stuck with smaller, more economical engines. For the buyer who must be practical they

have given him something more exciting than the 2-door sedan he is used to.

Other appealing features were the Marlin's reclining seats, well worth the extra \$44.65 to anyone who travels long distances on a forced-march schedule, and Charger's fold-down rear seats which augment the luggage compartment for those who hate to travel light. Both cars have excellent instrument lighting with shrouding that eliminates all straight-ahead glare.

Both suffer another fastback curse; restricted rear visibility. Rear windows are large, but the sloped angle limits the view to a slim slot. The Charger, with a wider window, has a slight edge, but neither is as good as the Mustang.

Even with their biggest engine options, neither has the pretensions of sports car performance that the Sting Ray or Shelby cars (or even the hot Mustangs, Camaros and Firebirds) can claim. Both hedge short of being luxury cars. But even being betwixt and between, each seeks a special part of the market, though not the same one.

—Bob Schilling

## Charger

BODY STYLES	.....2-dr. fastback coupe
WHEELBASE	.....117.0 ins.
TRACK	.....59.3 ins. front; 58.5 ins. rear
OVERALL	.....Length: 203.6 ins.; width: 75.3 ins.; height: 53.8 ins.
TURNING DIAMETER	.....40.9 ft. curb-to-curb
GAS CAPACITY	.....19 gals.
SUSPENSION	.....Independent front with torsion bars; 1-piece rear axle, leaf springs
BRAKES	.....Drums standard; front discs optional
CONSTRUCTION	.....Unitized body and frame
ENGINES	.....230-hp V-8, 318-cu.-in. standard, 270- and 325-hp V-8s, 383-cu.-in., 375-hp V-8, 440-cu.-in. and 425-hp V-8, 426-cu.-in. Hemi optional
TRANSMISSIONS	.....3-spd. manual standard, 4-spd. manual and 3-spd. automatic optional

## Marlin

BODY STYLES	.....2-dr. fastback coupe
WHEELBASE	.....118.0 ins.
TRACK	.....58.6 ins. front; 58.5 ins. rear
OVERALL	.....Length: 201.5 ins.; width: 78.4 ins.; height: 53.8 ins.
TURNING DIAMETER	.....39.0 ft. curb-to-curb
GAS CAPACITY	.....21.5 gals.
SUSPENSION	.....Independent front, 1-piece rear axle; coil springs all wheels; heavy duty optional
BRAKES	.....Drums standard, front discs optional
CONSTRUCTION	.....Unitized body and frame
ENGINES	.....145-hp L-6 232-cu.-in. or 200-hp, V-8 290-cu.-in. standard; 155-hp L-6, 232-hp, 235- or 280-hp V-8, 343-cu.-in. optional

MANUFACTURER'S SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE \$3128.00

## Performance

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)				
	318	383	440	426 Hemi
0-60	10.9 secs.	8.9 secs.	8.0 secs.	7.6 secs.
1/4-mile	18.6 secs., 76 mph	16.5 secs., 86.4 mph	15.5 secs., 93 mph	14.4 secs., 100 mph
BRAKING from 60 mph: 147 ft. 155 ft. 140 ft.* 133 ft.* (*disc front brakes)				
MILEAGE — Avg. city: 13.3 mpg 12.1 mpg 11.7 mpg 11.7 mpg				
Avg. highway: 17.9 mpg 15.2 mpg 14.4 mpg 14.6 mpg				

TRANSMISSIONS ....3-spd. manual standard, 3-spd. manual with o'drive, Flash-O-Matic, Shift Command, or 4-spd. manual optional

MANUFACTURER'S SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE \$2859.00

## Performance

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)			
	L-6, 232-cu.-in.	V-8 343-cu.-in.	
	155 hp	289 hp	
0-60 mph	.....15.4 secs.	9.6 secs.	
1/4-mile	.....20.3 secs., 68 mph	17.6 secs., 82 mph	
BRAKING ...from 60 mph: 156 ft. 161 ft.			
MILEAGE ...Avg. city: 17.3 mpg 15.3 mpg			
Avg. highway: 20.4 mpg 17.6 mpg			