

DODGE DART GT REVISITED

a second look at a mellow stormer

ROAD TEST BY
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It is rare that we get two shots at testing the same car. As a rule we feel lucky to have any car long enough to gain a strong impression of what it is like in routine driving situations as well as in our performance tests. Our other problem is that cars are either so new we must put mileage on them to loosen them up before testing, or have so much prior mileage in unseen hands that it is difficult to evaluate whether the car has a genuine fault or if this particular vehicle has simply been thrashed like a child out of Dickens.

Eureka! Millenium! Saints preserve us! It finally happened that we got to test a car when it was nice and fresh, then got another shot at it after 11,000 miles had been logged. Not another car of the same make and model, mind you, but the very same car.

The way it came about was that early last September before Dodge had introduced its '67s to the public, we arranged to performance-test a Charger and a Dart GT convertible. These were trucked under cover to the drag strip at Carlsbad—as they couldn't be driven on the street yet—and put through their paces. Our sole opportunity to gain driving impressions was on the strip's Nurburgringesque return road—an appetizer, but far from a hearty mouthful as far as finding out what either car was like.

Due to editorial space problems, the Dart GT story was postponed several

times. When we finally scheduled it, we tried to get a Dart for more thorough driving impressions, only to discover that the self-same car was in the hands of our Petersen playmates at *Sports Car Graphic*. Thus it came to pass that we got a second shot at it, fresh from a 600-mile dirt road rally, driven with great zest by SGC's Jean Calvin.

Dropping the 273-cu.-in. 180-hp V-8 into the hole meant for the usual 6 would have made an impressive performer out of the Dart; using the 4-bbl., 235-hp version takes it yet another step beyond expectation. Performance is all relative, of course, but using the 383 Charger we tested on the same day as a measuring stick is a fair method. The Dart stayed about even with the bigger car in 0-30, 0-45 and 0-60, then whupped it handily in the quarter—16.52 and 87.37 mph to 16.85 and 82.72.

The Dart GT also showed exceptional staying power. As the lights and timing equipment were operating, we made more runs than we do when hand-timing. Test cars often get "tired" due to heating after a few runs, so even if technique at getting off the line improves with practice in the car, the best run is usually reached early and then nothing improves times. This was true of the Charger, which peaked on the third time through. The GT, with its 4-speed box, required more finesse than the automatic Charger. For one thing, the spring load in the shift lever sometimes caused us to jump from 1st to 4th if we weren't concentrating like Einstein doing his income tax. With very low mileage, everything was pretty stiff, so we took some time screwing our courage (or gall) to the sticking place about sticking the tach to the 5200-rpm red-line and using some brute force making quick shifts. As we got progressively better, the times kept going down until the best was reached on the 11th time through the lights.

Passing speeds were largely dependent on the relative laziness or enthusiasm of the driver. Our best 40-60, 3.8 seconds was achieved by dropping down to 2nd gear and winding over 5000 rpm. Using 3rd gear, the time increased by a full second to 4.8, and lugging up in 4th took 7 seconds. The 50-70 time in high gear took 7.8 seconds; shifting down to 3rd dropped this to 5.4. In no case did we exceed the rev limit of 5200, but we sometimes used just about all of it.

The stopping tests gave us a puzzle to work on, which wasn't really solved until our second sojourn with the car. At 30 mph it required 45 feet to stop—at least 10 feet more than we would have expected with the front disc brakes. At 60 mph, however, it took a

very excellent 133 feet. The secret is that the discs suffered from reverse fade; they needed to get pretty hot before reaching optimum performance.

And with that we concluded our brief afternoon with the Dodge Dart GT until our reacquaintance 11,000 miles later. At that time we had to accept some things as atypical, since the car had clearly not been driven by a retired school teacher from Pasadena. The state of tune, we were assured, had been better before the rally and we believed it.

The installation of a Halda Speed-pilot necessitated an unaccustomed grip on the non-stock wooden shift knob to avoid bashing our knuckles grabbing 3rd. Haldas are not necessary for getting to the office on time unless you play the thing pretty tight.

For all its mistreatment, the GT was more rattle-free than most new convertibles, which made a long weekend trip more pleasant than anticipated. The vinyl upholstery and carpeting were like new, though the simulated-wood stick-on dash trim was coming loose in places.

The situation at Carlsbad gave us a very limited opportunity to evaluate the handling of the GT, but even then we got the message that a compact with power steering is a very agile animal. This was reinforced the second time around in congested traffic, the overcrowded Petersen Publishing Co. parking lot and other places where maneuvering room is at a premium. Power steering also makes it possible for the driver to ignore the extra weight of the V-8 on the front end. Our test car had Firestone Wide Ovals which gave us lots of confidence, while the ride was both comfortable and stable.

Bucket seats and a console settle any discussion about how many people sit up front in the Dart GT. The back seat has adequate, but far from luxurious, foot room and trying to put more than two people back there takes the fun out of any trip farther than the local supermarket. Trunk space, however, was surprisingly generous. We had no trouble packing in enough for two people to survive a long weekend at the sportscar races, including all the variations of clothing necessary to protect against the vagaries of weather, plus two bags full of camera equipment. We even had room in the trunk for sleeping bags and blankets in case there was no room at the inn. And nothing had to go in the back seat.

It was a rare chance, and one that probably won't come again soon, getting two views of the same car. This was especially so because the Dart GT is such a lively performer. Of course, a 318 wouldn't take any more space than the 273, and if it's that lively now, why...

/MT

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration (2-aboard):	
0-30 mph (secs.)	3.6
0-45 mph (secs.)	5.8
0-60 mph (secs.)	9.0
0-75 mph (secs.)	13.2
1/4-mile from rest (secs.) & (mph)	16.52 & 86.4
Time & Distance to Attain Passing Speeds: (secs.) & (feet)	40-60: 3.8 & 278.2 50-70: 5.4 & 475.2
Speeds in Gears:	
1st (mph) @ (rpm)	43 @ 5000
2nd (mph) @ (rpm)	59 @ 5000
3rd (mph) @ (rpm)	81 @ 5000
Mph per 1000 rpm:	22.67
Stopping Distances:	
From 30 mph (ft.)	45
From 60 mph (ft.)	133
Speedometer Error:	
Calibrated speedometer 30 45 50 60 70 80	
Dart GT speedometer	31 47 52 62 73 84

SPECIFICATIONS

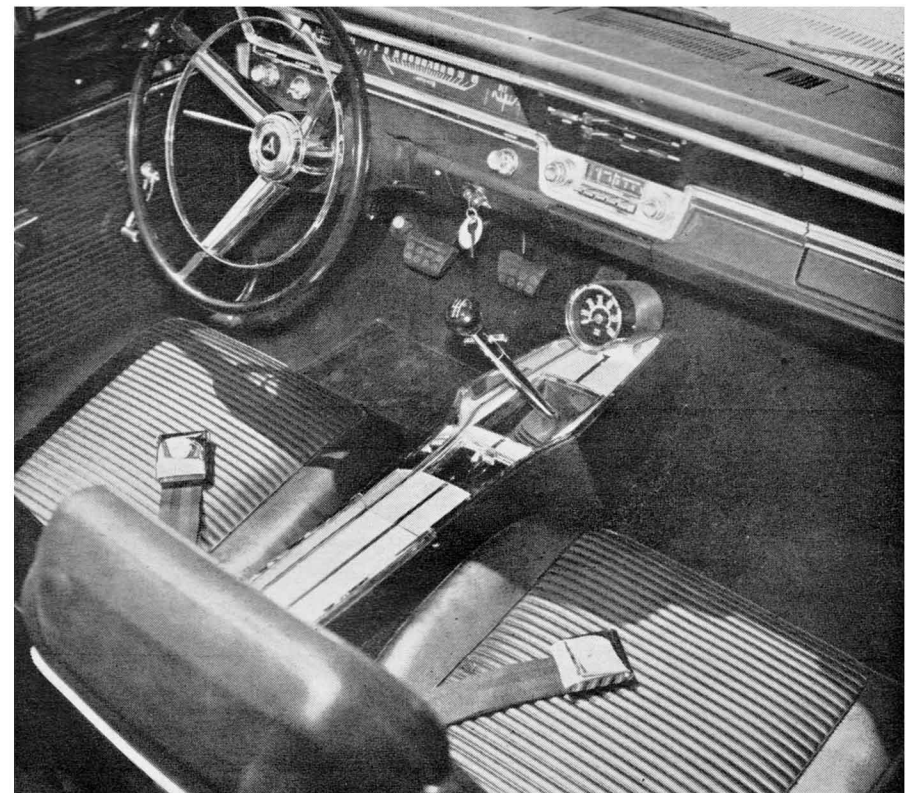
Engine:	
Bore & Stroke (ins.):	3.63 x 3.31
Displacement (cu. ins.):	273
Horsepower @ rpm	235 @ 5200
Torque (lbs.-ft.) @ rpm:	280 @ 4000
Compression ratio:	10.5:1
Carburetion:	4V
Transmission:	
Type: 4-speed all-synchromesh manual	
Ratios: 2.66, 1.91, 1.39, 1.00; 2.58 reverse	
Final drive ratio:	3.23
Steering:	
Type: Circulating ball	
Turning dia., curb-to-curb (ft.)	38.7
Turns lock-to-lock:	3.5
Wheels:	
Type: Steel disc	
Size: 5.5J x 14	
Tires:	
Type: Nylon 2-ply, 4-ply rated, Wide Oval	
Size: D70-14	
Brakes:	
Type: Disc front, drum rear, power assisted	
Front dia. (ins.):	10.79
Rear dia. (ins.):	10 x 1.75
Effective lining area (sq. ins.):	102.3
Fuel Capacity (gals.):	18
Mileage Range (mpg):	10.9-15.8
Curb Weight (lbs.):	3180
Wheelbase (ins.):	111.0
Front Track (ins.):	57.4
Rear Track (ins.):	55.6
Length (ins.):	195.4
Width (ins.):	69.7
Height (ins.):	53.4
Suspension: Independent front with torsion bars. One piece rear with parallel longitudinal leaf springs.	
Body & Frame: Unit construction	

PRICES AND ACCESSORIES

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail:	\$2860
Options & Accessories:	
273-cu.-in., 235-hp engine	\$ 97.30
4-speed manual transmission	179.15
Automatic transmission	180.90
Rallye Package, (includes power disc brakes, heavy-duty rear springs, heavy-duty torsion bars, sway bar, wide rim wheels, and Wide Ovals)	146.45
Dart Radio Group	142.65
Air Conditioning	318.50
Clean Air Package	25.00



Heavy-duty rear springs, front torsions bars, sway bar and disc brakes, are part of Dart's Rallye Package, do wonders for its safety and handling as seen here.



Posh and durable GT interior is seen here when new. After 11,000 miles it was just as fresh looking. Optional headrests did not interfere with rear vision.



Mellow yellow Dart GT styling is simple and uncluttered. Big surprise was the ragtop which stayed as tight, smooth and rattle-free as a hardtop, despite use.