



Photos by Dean Moon

Three pictures show some of handling and braking maneuvers DeSoto underwent during testing of 1955 FireFlite four-door.

ROAD TEST

DE SOTO FIREFLITE

It's new and different, with performance to match the luxury and ease of driving

DE SOTO has the new "forward look" inside and out for 1955, along with extensive engineering changes in the chassis and engine compartment. These all add up to a distinctively different car from the one that bore the same name in the previous year.

Newest name in the DeSoto lineup is the FireFlite, the top series that features more luxury, refinements and power than anything else DeSoto has offered in a big production model during its 27-year history. So it was the natural choice for a road test in the popular four-door sedan body type.

The FireFlite's fresh styling can be noted in the photos, while the basic specifications are contained in the box on the opposite page. Performance figures, too,

can be checked at a glance. But none of these tell the whole story, so let's get behind the wheel and go.

A heftier 200-hp version of the V-8 engine obviously effects a reduction in acceleration times over previous years. Most of the punch, however, appears in the middle speed ranges. Runs under the clock starting alternately in drive and low produced no significant results. When floorboarding the gas pedal with the selector lever in low, it was noted that the FireFlite peaks out at an actual 70 mph.

Since the DeSoto was loaded with power accessories, such as steering, brakes and so forth, the testers conducted a modest experiment. Disconnecting the power steering, for instance, showed an improvement of one to two seconds in

the time for the quarter-mile from a standing start. It points up the penalty an owner has to pay for the comforts of such conveniences on any car.

The increased performance has been obtained from the V-8 without changing the compression ratio from last year's 7.5-to-1, which causes economical regular gasoline to remain the recommended fuel. Instead, DeSoto engineers chose to boost the displacement by nearly 15 cubic inches, employ larger intake and higher-lift exhaust valves, and go from a dual to a four-barrel carburetor. Maximum torque is now 274 ft. lbs. at 2800 rpm, in contrast to the previous 255 at 2400. Advertised horsepower is 200, a gain of 30 horsepower over 1954.

At top speed, which averages out to

105 mph, the DeSoto moves easily and handles well. A four-inch wider tread and lower center of gravity, plus the streamlining of the new body style, make the chief contributions to control and security. The full-time power steering helps iron out the road bumps and very little shock is transmitted to the driver's wheel.

Handling during sharp cornering and on winding roads also is a big improvement over the 1954 models. The design changes which influence this include a lower spring rate, new steering gear, widening the rear spring mounts and improving the Oriflow shocks. This makes the DeSoto ride soft, while tightening up on the roll and sway.

During the panic-stop tests for braking effectiveness, the DeSoto screeched to a halt in a distance that was average for its weight and class. And nosedive obviously had been reduced. Pedal pressure actuating the power brake system was soft, without sudden grabs, while the pad surface was wide, designed for either right or left foot use, and on a plane close to the throttle pedal for easy pivoting.

From behind the wheel, the DeSoto's seating, among the best in the business, is ideal for long-distance over-the-road cruising. Aided by the power seat, the driver has good vision over the lower

SPECIFICATIONS	
Engine type	<u>OHV / V-8</u>
Displacement	<u>291</u> cubic inches
BHP	<u>200</u> @ <u>4400</u> rpm
Compression ratio	<u>7.5-7.0-1</u>
Bore	<u>3.27</u> Stroke <u>3.34</u>
Torque	<u>274</u> ft.-lbs. @ <u>2800</u> rpm
Transmission	<u>POWERFLITE</u>
Rear axle ratio	<u>3.54</u>
Wheelbase	<u>126</u> inches
Dry weight	<u>4300</u> lbs.
Turning circle	<u>46</u> feet
Steering lock-to-lock	<u>3.5</u> turns

PRICES	
Car	<u>\$2498</u>
Transmission	<u>POWERFLITE</u>
AUTOMATIC	<u>\$178</u>
Radio	<u>\$110 - \$128</u>
Heater	<u>\$92</u>
Power Steering	<u>\$113</u>
Power Brakes	<u>\$40</u>
Air Conditioning	<u>\$567</u>

wheel and through the distortion-free curved glass. Nice touch: positioning the electric window lift controls well forward to reduce cramping the arm to reach them. Like other Chrysler Corporation cars, the selector quadrant and gear lever are on the dash—a step in the right direction which other manufacturers will follow, with further refinement eliminating present minor blind spots.

Since the DeSoto features an entirely new body, a close look reveals improvements made other than styling. Major changes in dimensions are three inches increase in overall length, a two-inch reduction in height, and a 4.5-inch increase in interior hip room. Wheelbase and overall width are about the same as 1954. Despite reduction in overall height, there's practically no loss in interior headroom.

Exit and entry, front or back, is easy with doors that open wide. Door handles are a novel touch (see photo). Other interior appointments are colorful and lush. Neat trick is concealment of the forward cigarette lighter within the ash tray. Location of the clock could be improved by recessing it into the dash; otherwise, the dash arrangement is excellent, with a style unlike any other car and one that should be retained. Glove compartment is near center, is deeper and has recessed bottom to prevent contents from spilling when door is opened.

With a full load of accessories and equipment, the FireFlite's cost per pound, according to DeSoto, makes it less than such staple items of food as steak and coffee. The comparison is a good one, since DeSoto is a lot of car for the money and any driver will find plenty of pleasure in every ounce. •

MOTOR LIFE ROAD TEST

CAR TESTED: 1955 DE SOTO
FIRE FLITE 4-DR. SEDAN

TEST CONDITIONS

Altitude 200 feet
 Temperature 66 degrees
 Wind 14 mph
 Gasoline MOBILGAS PREMIUM

ACCELERATION AND TOP SPEED

MPH 0-30 0-45 0-60 30-50 40-60
 Seconds 4.5 2.4 12.5 5 6.2
 Standing 1/4 mile 19 seconds
 Fastest one-way run 107.2 mph
 Top speed avg. 4 runs 105 mph

SPEEDOMETER CORRECTIONS

Car Speedometer	Actual Speeds
20	<u>17</u>
30	<u>28</u>
40	<u>36</u>
50	<u>45</u>
60	<u>54</u>
70	<u>65</u>
80	<u>72</u>
90	<u>83</u>
100	<u>-</u>

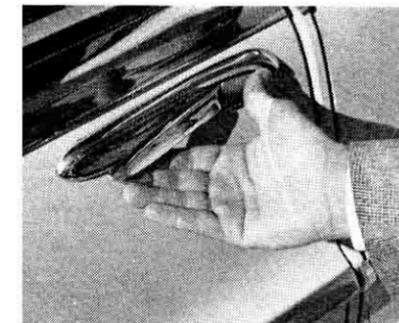
BRAKING DISTANCE

MPH	Stopping Distance
30	<u>41</u> feet
45	<u>87</u> feet
60	<u>139</u> feet

FUEL CONSUMPTION

MPH	Average
30	<u>20</u> mpg
45	<u>18.5</u> mpg
60	<u>17.5</u> mpg

REMARKS: BRAKING AND ACCELERATION TESTS MADE ON DRY PAVEMENT.

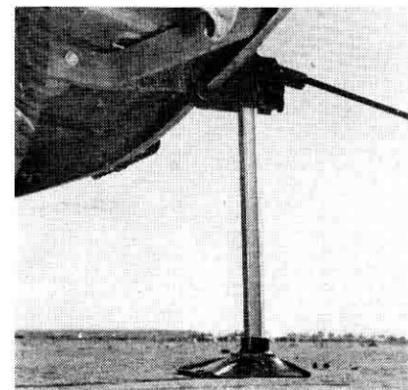


Door handles are recessed. Pressure on button causes lever to project for opening. One of many novel touches on car.



DeSoto gets good mileage on regular gasoline, with compression ratio the same as last year. Body is longer, lower.

Jacking car for tire changes is important. On DeSoto it's easy with notched locations for secure grip to avoid slip.



Dash is genuinely unique in styling, has sporty look. Glove compartment is deep and located just to right of radio dials.

