



Flat, firm and really massive, the Chrysler 300-J plays sports car, with only scruffy noises from the tires admitting dismay.

CAR and DRIVER

ROAD TEST

Chrysler

300-J

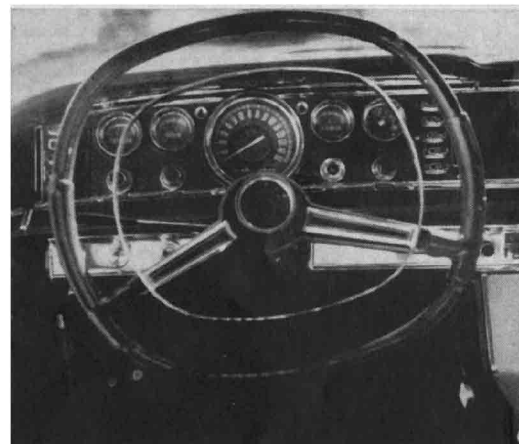
*A more beautiful
brute—crisper lines
and lots of torque*

The 300-J on the road is, at first impression, like nothing so much as a Walt Disney documentary on space flight. The car glides silently at almost any given speed, as if in free fall. When a change in attitude is required, you quickly get the habit of achieving it with a short blast of the throttle—like the external control-rockets on a space capsule—and

then the car subsides into gliding quietness again. The good V-8 noise, a hard rap that just penetrates the lush surroundings, adds considerably to the illusion, and we seemed, particularly in traffic, to proceed in short blasts of wild power and long periods of drifting isolation.

The rocket-like impression is reinforced, of course, by a longer look at the acceleration. With 390 advertised horsepower from 413 cubic inches, and almost frighteningly quick automatic downshifts whenever more of that horsepower is beckoned, the car gathers itself quickly and just goes down the road in a sort of moaning rush. This feeling, of sudden bursts of power which have to be turned off every bit as carefully as they are turned on (don't leave it turned on, Clyde), is enhanced by a great stoutness of the accelerator-return spring that gives an all-on-or-all-off feel to the pedal—and much the same sort of performance.

At one time while we had the car we loaded the back seat full of kids, and found that we could effectively stop the eternal yammering and bouncing about back there by simply pouncing on the gas and pinning the children to the back of the seat until traffic forced us to back off and let them slowly slide down again. If the traffic hadn't done it, the general feeling was that they could have been held in a kind of multi-G suspension until the sound barrier let them escape. In fact, the accelera-



It's instrumentation if not information, and the steering wheel is bloody awful.

tion is so far beyond ordinary driving requirements that for test purposes we contented ourselves with using only the Drive button and no high-rpm starts. So the acceleration times can undoubtedly be bettered. Somehow we just couldn't think of the car as a dragster.

For 1963 the initialed series of Chryslers has adopted the corporation-wide interpretation of the Italian interpretation of what is going on in American styling, i. e., a rather severe attempt to give the impression of lightness as well as formality. The result, externally, is a car with considerable bulk, but still without the feeling of excessive length and overhang that one usually associates with the bigger American automo-

biles. Inside, all is lush and opulent privacy: pseudo-bucket seats, the now-ubiquitous between-seat console, dials, levers, buttons, the works.

In the midst of all that opulence there resided a device that confounded the entire staff. The steering wheel is a vaguely square oval shape. We hate to be retrogressive, but this styling touch is an out-and-out disaster. It does give more thigh-room for the corpulent. But with such a range of seat-adjustment, power-assisted at that, the need seems slight. And the gain in room couldn't be worth the resulting driving chaos. Even with the somewhat faster power steering (3.5 turns lock to lock, and not much lock), a 90° turn of the wheel provides only a few degrees variation from a dead-ahead course, yet disorients the driver—the feeling of going almost straight ahead, with a long, tall steering wheel graphically denoting a ninety-degree warp of the controls, is disconcerting. Oh well, it's an optional extra.

Our test car, surprisingly, was fitted with a hand choke, which didn't help cold-starting much. We violated the gospel according to road-testers once, and drove off with the engine cold—and were rewarded by its stalling at about 30 mph, with resulting discontinuation of everything. It's one thing to get the illusion of being adrift in space in a controllable capsule, and quite another to be put there with brakes and steering suddenly available only at considerable muscular effort.

The power steering is very effective—one learns how effective when it gets turned off, as in the above situation. Normally, however, it is responsive and efficient. Even the lack of road-feel can be overcome to a slight degree if a light enough hand is developed for the controls—a very light sort of fingertip control does give a reasonable indication of what is transpiring up ahead where the front wheels are.

The more realistic suspension of the 300-J (stiffer torsion bars in front, higher spring rates in the rear than other Chryslers) is welcome on the car, and although it thumps sharply on some kinds of tar strips, this is more noise than shock. The suspension is taut enough to belie the 4,000-odd pounds of test car—it feels and handles like 3,000 lbs. and yet rides more like 5,000 lbs. With the tires properly inflated, handling is really pretty good. The car shows traditional American initial understeer and final oversteer, but the two characteristics have been brought

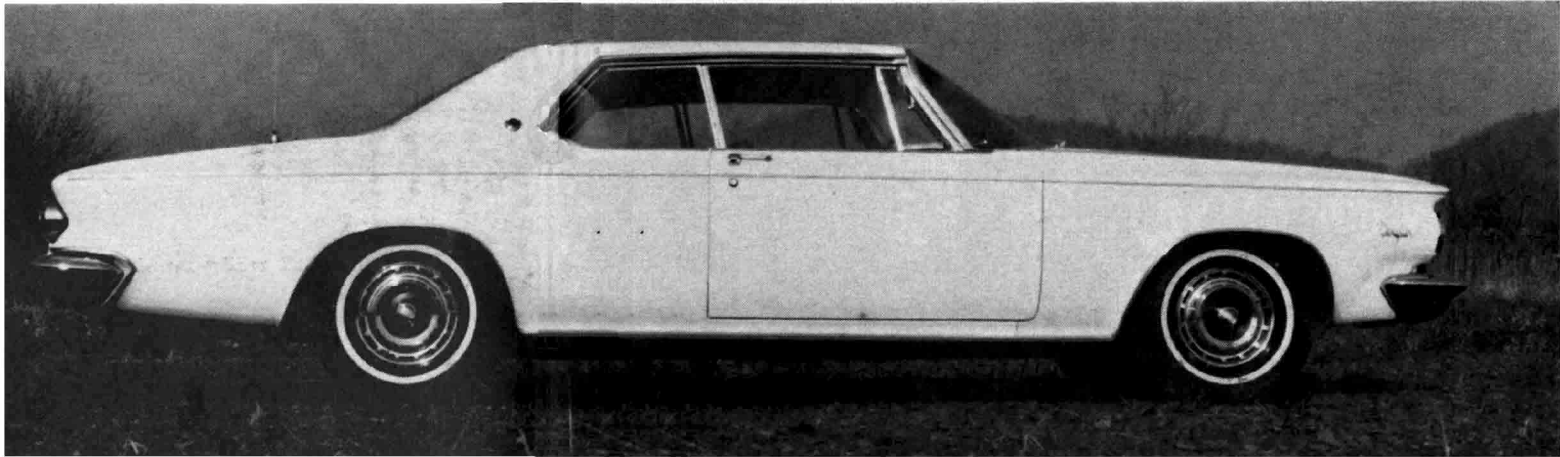
close together, and the car feels pretty much neutral—how much of this feeling is power-steering anesthesia is hard to say. On wet streets, we found the car could be hung out with a burst of throttle, and was very controllable in that attitude. Of course the straight-line down-the-road sort of behavior is impeccable. Turnpikes, si; road course, well, perhaps with courage.

The limited-slip differential was wonderfully welcome. We chanced to spend a lot of time in the car in nasty weather, and in such conditions every bit of traction realized was accepted most thankfully. Once we punched the throttle while cruising down a wet asphalt street at about 30 mph, and to our amazement the tach bounced immediately to over five thousand and then swung right back to a sedate 900. In the brief instant, the car had broken loose, wrapped up to those high revolutions, and dropped back down to regain traction, all without any more lurch than usually accompanied upshifts in the automatic transmission, without any attempt to squirrel sideways, and with no discomfort or hairy moment for driver or passenger.

It is perhaps the nature of the human animal, surrounded by all that luxury, to look for more. The driving position is generally good, but with the seat comfortably back most of the controls are out of reach. The inside control for the external rear-view mirror is a case in point. It is low on the left of the dash, and to operate it one has to lean forward. Leaning forward removes the driver's head from where he wants it to be when he adjusts the mirror. The adjustment, then, takes dozens of trials, leaning forward for a minute movement of the control, then leaning back to check the result. The 150-mph speedometer has such small increments that reading it is mostly guesswork, and the very small tachometer, placed down and forward on the console, is so out of the way as to be of very little use—it serves little purpose in an automatic transmission-equipped car anyway.

All of which carping criticism is in the nature of comments about the taste of the grapes. It is such a comfortably massive car, more controllable than one first expects. It will be interesting, with the demise of the "Detroit Ban," to see whether the 300-J returns to the stock-car wars. The marque once gave Chrysler dominance in the sport, but the way engine performance and option-availability have gone, we would expect the challenge to be picked up by the smaller cars in the Chrysler

Corporation's wide-spread line-up. One of our staff points out that the Detroit philosophy that refuses to quicken steering for fear the ordinary driver won't be able to handle it, then quickens both accelerator and brake response as they have been quickened in this car, has strange ideas about how drivers get into trouble. But the 300-J isn't intended for people who tend to get into trouble unwittingly. It really is precisely what most American luxury-car buyers *think* they got—a fine car that goes like blazes and has good road manners to complement its larger-than-life performance. **clp**



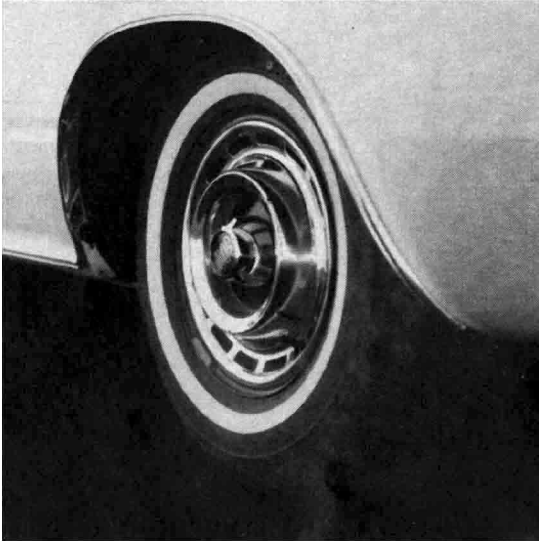
Rear corner posts are wide for privacy,



It comes ready-striped! Inverted trapezoid grille continues the styling theme begun by the early initialled "300" series.



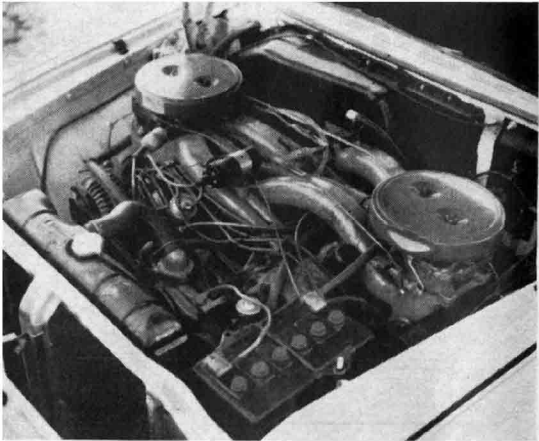
Large, unadorned panels de-emphasize the over-all bulk of the new series Chrysler, while sharp lines define the boundaries.



Don't let anybody kid you, Jack, there's a lot of rubber (7.60 x 15 4-ply) there.



There's room for anything, but you climb into the trunk to get the spare tire out.



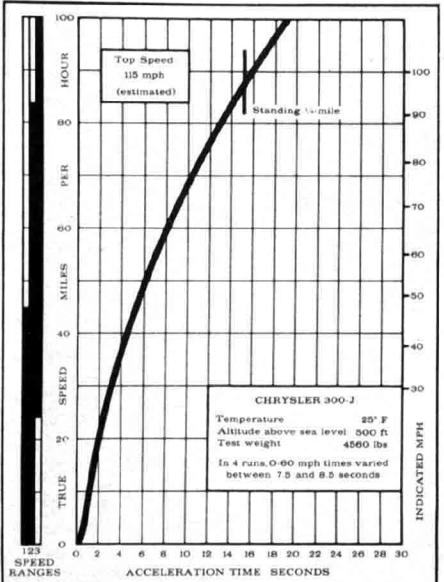
A writhing bed of serpents called ram-induction provides solid low-end punch.

CHRYSLER 300-J

Price as tested: \$5,184.00
Manufacturer: Chrysler Corporation
Detroit 31, Michigan

ACCELERATION:

	Seconds
Zero to 30 mph	3.5
60 mph	8.0
90 mph	16.0
Standing 1/4-mile	15.4



ENGINE:

Displacement 413 cu in, 6,774 cc
Dimensions V-8 cyl, 4.19-in bore, 3.75-in stroke
Valve gear Pushrod-operated overhead valves with solid lifters
Compression ratio 9.6 to one
Power (SAE) 390 bhp @ 4,800 rpm
Torque 485 lb-ft @ 3,600 rpm
Usable range of engine speeds 500-5,500 rpm
Carburetion Dual four-barrel Carter AFB carburetors
Fuel recommended Premium
Mileage 8-13 mpg
Range on 23-gallon tank 185-365 miles

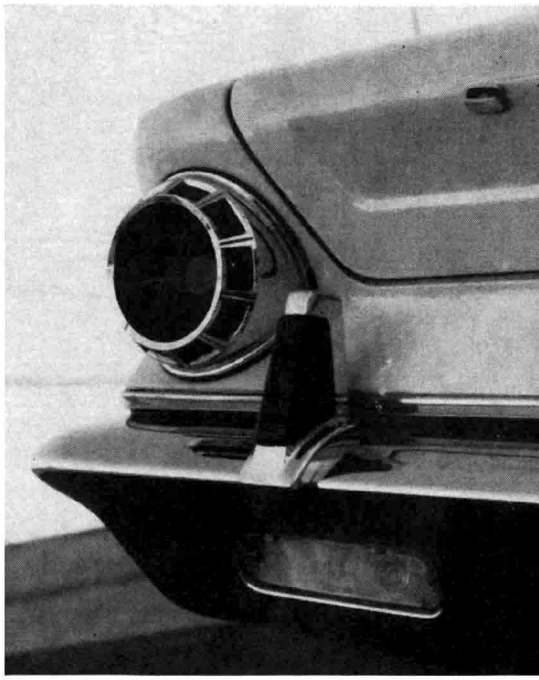
CHASSIS:

Wheelbase 122 in
Tread F 61 in, R 60 in
Length 215.5 in
Ground clearance 6.1 in
Suspension: F: Ind. unequal wishbones and torsion bars, anti-roll bar, telescopic shock absorbers; R: Rigid axle, semi-elliptical outboard parallel leaf springs, telescopic shock absorbers
Steering Rack and sector (power-assisted)
Turns, lock to lock 3.5
Turning circle diameter between curbs 46.5 ft
Tire size 7.60 x 15
Pressures recommended F 24, R 24 psi
Brakes 11-in drums, 414.7 sq in swept area
Curb weight (full tank) 4,235 lbs
Percentage on the driving wheels 46

DRIVE TRAIN:

Clutch Hydraulic torque converter with automatically-operated 3-speed planetary transmission

	Mph per 1,000 rpm
Gear Ratio Step Over-all	
Rev 2.20	7.11
1st 2.45 69%	7.91
2nd 1.45 45%	4.68
Drive 1.00	3.23
Final drive ratio	3.23 to one



At last, a really sensible bumper guard—and some nice detail, well finished.