

# CHRYSLER 300-J

ONE OF THOSE cars which we look happily forward to testing each year is the alphabet series Chrysler 300—it represents, to us, an upper strata of multi-passenger vehicle design. Each year we reacquaint ourselves with this big, bucket-seated brute and each year we report the same conclusion: The 300 is one of the best open-road cars around today. This evaluation, however, must be ameliorated for the 300-J; while we still rate it as a good road car, it doesn't quite match the example set by its predecessors.

Where earlier 300s impressed us with their no-nonsense springing and vastly superior high-speed roadability, the latest example retrogresses to a level of being just a sedan with station wagon springs. It has a bouncy, stiff ride rather than the firm, always-in-control feeling imparted by the previous models. Where we once could blast up a mountain road at 80-90 mph (with the 300-G) without getting seasick or scared, we were limited to 70-80 mph by the tippy, less-fettered 300-J.

Still, the 300-J is a good deal better than the average sedan, and if we had our "druthers," we undoubtedly would make it one of our first choices. Then we would investigate the possibility of putting some larger capacity shock absorbers on the J and, also, we would like to try it without power steering.

Springs, shock absorbers and suspension in general have always been the forte of the alphabet-300s, so it was surprising to find that Chrysler has softened the J over the earlier models. Perhaps aiming at a ride acceptable to a more general public, Chrysler, for the second year in a row, has lessened the ride rate on the 300. This, of course, reduces the roll stiffness and gives what is considered elsewhere as a better ride. A brief look at the relative statistics shows the trend:

	300-G	300-H	300-J
Ride rates, at wheel,			
front, lb./in.	165	130	125
rear, lb./in.	190	160	150
Stabilizer bar, dia. in.	0.75	0.75	0.75
Shock absorber, piston dia.	1.38	1.38	1.38
Rear spring length, in.	57	57	60
Front torsion bar length, in.	40	40	40

There is nothing wrong with a soft ride rate if properly utilized. Indeed, modern road-racing cars use very soft rides; however, their designers control these soft springs with large shock absorbers and thus the wheels spend more time in contact with the pavement. Stiff springing can accomplish somewhat the same goal, plus eliminating a good deal of body lean during

cornering, if it, too, is controlled by compatible shock absorbers. The point is this: the 300-J needs a *softer* stiffer ride!

Although there are numerous detail changes between the 1963 300-J and the 1962 300-H (no one has ever explained what poked out the I), and a complete change in exterior styling, the format of the species has remained unchanged since the 300's inception back in '55: a hot engine, a roadworthy chassis and luxurious appointments.

The 1963 version boasts 390 bhp, an honest top speed of around 130 mph (Nevada's the only state where you can legally try this out), fair roadability and a sumptuous, leather-appointed interior. The exterior styling (although still the same basic unit-chassis as previously used) has been changed, for the better, we might add.

This latest approach to styling of big cars comes off quite well, although other models of the Chrysler line seem to be anointed with too much chrome trim. The use of painted pin stripes as horizontal, side decoration is appreciated, although the stripes on our test

300-J were poorly applied and were flaking off in some areas (the car was two months old and had 6000 miles on its odometer).

We particularly admired the interplay of light and shadow on the sharp-edged planes of the Chrysler, and the retention of the traditional 300 grille work. There are nicely turned out medallions on the roof rear quarter panels and on the trunk lid to announce that this is a 300-J; otherwise, it is virtually identical to the Chrysler 300 non-letter cars which are quite different in mechanical specification.

These latter cars have softer suspensions, less powerful engines, less expensive interiors—and a considerably lower price. The factory advertised delivered price for a 300-J (hardtop only) is \$5177, the list for a 300 hardtop \$3430 (there is also available a 4-door hardtop and a convertible). A 360-bhp 413-cu. in. engine is optional for the 300, and it probably could be ordered with a heavy-duty suspension, too. However, these still do not comprise the complete package to be found in the 300-J. Whether it is worth the

\$1747 differential is up to the individual customer and his particular needs.

The major item of difference, of course, is in the engine. Where the 300 has a standard unit of 383 cu. in. displacement and 305 bhp, the 300-J has 413 inches and 390 bhp. The former is a relatively mild, docile engine designed to do an excellent job in everyday use. The 413, however, has horsepower of a different color. It has mechanical valve lifters, stronger valve springs, a high-lift 268° duration camshaft, a dual-point distributor and dual 4-barrel carburetion. Partially because of the long, sonic-tuned intake plumbing, the 300-J's punch shows up with a wallop at around 3000 rpm. It is slightly fussy at idle, and pulls strongly enough up to 3000, but it is in the 3000-5000 rpm range that it really comes to life. This, interpreted through the standard 3.23 rear gears and automatic transmission (1.45—2nd, 2.45—1st), gives maximum performance ranges of 31-52 mph in 1st, 53-88 mph in 2nd and 76-130 mph in high. ▶



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Obviously, the 300-J is a car meant to be driven with vigor!

The suspension differences follow the same pattern. The 300 has ride rates of 115 lb.-in. at front and 120 at the rear, with a 6-leaf rear spring. Ride rates for the 300-J are 125 front and 150 rear where it has a 7-leaf spring of identical length. Front torsion bars for the 300 are 0.99 in. dia., the 300-J bars are 1.01 in. for increased resistance to twisting. Shock absorbers have 1.00-in. dia. pistons on the 300, 1.38-in. dia. on the 300-J. The 300-J has an 0.75-in. anti-roll bar at the front, the 300 has none unless equipped with a 413-cu. in. engine.

Brakes are one of Chrysler's big improvements in the 1963 models. In an effort to beat the brake-fade problem prevalent among earlier models and to incorporate a self-adjusting feature, Chrysler has forsaken its own center-plane brake system and adopted, entirely, the Bendix duo-servo system used throughout the U.S. automobile industry. This means that all General

Motors, Ford and Chrysler cars are so equipped.

"The 300-H brakes are prone to rapid fade," *Car Life* reported in March 1962. Despite 12 x 2.5 in. drums and 377 sq. in. of swept area, these self-centering power brakes couldn't quite do the job asked: crash-stopping a 4560-lb. (test weight) car twice in rapid succession from 80 mph. The new Bendix units have 414.7 sq. in. swept area and really do the job! The 300-J survived both 80-mph stops and a 100-mph test, too, just for good measure.

The Bendix brakes have 11 x 3 in. drums with massive flange "heat sinks" to draw off and dissipate the heat generated by braking. Self-energizing, the shoes utilize the rotational force of the brake drum to magnify their power. They adjust themselves to take up wear clearance when the car is stopped in reverse.

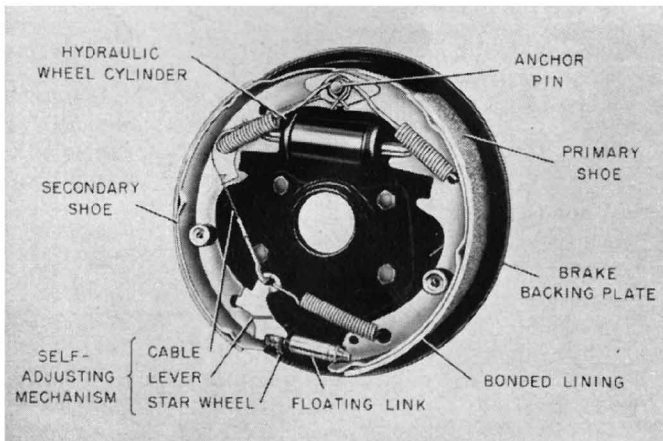
Because of this self-energizing nature in the brakes, less power is required to operate them. In the 300-J application, a vacuum booster is standard equipment and this provides a brake line pressure of 1100 psi at 100 lb. pedal loading (pressure was 1270 psi with the old center-plane

brakes). Despite the size and capacity of these new brakes, we found no adverse sensitivity, no instability in either hard or easy stops, no "hunting" of one wheel over the others, nor a sign of fade. We applaud the change.

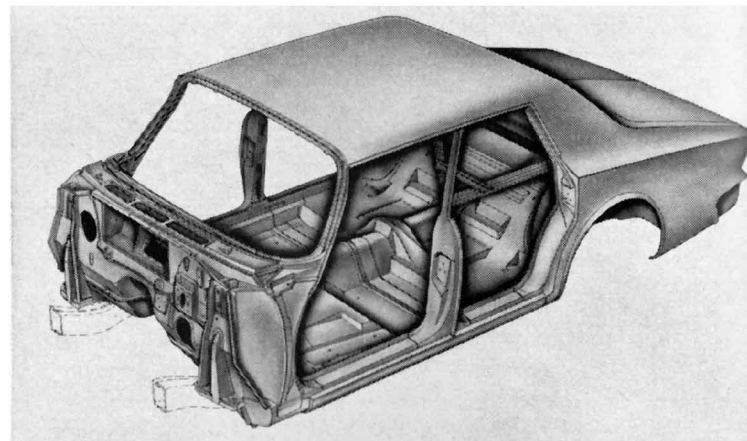
There's a transmission difference between the 300-J and the other Chryslers, too. While a 3-speed manual transmission is standard with the other models, the special heavy-duty TorqueFlite is standard in the 300-J. A 3-speed manual also is available for the J and this has ratios of 2.17—1st, and 1.445—2nd where the regular transmissions have a 2.55—1st and a 1.49—2nd. Ratios are the same in all the TorqueFlites, however, although the J has the heavy-duty unit we examined in the Dodge Ramcharger in March CL. This has a high-speed governor which allows as high as 5300-5600 rpm before upshifts take place automatically, a slightly higher torque converter stall speed of about 1900 rpm and more pressure for harder, quicker shifts.

The push-button controls are arrayed vertically on the left side of the dash, along with a parking lever which is just about the handiest gadget going. When the handle is moved to its up

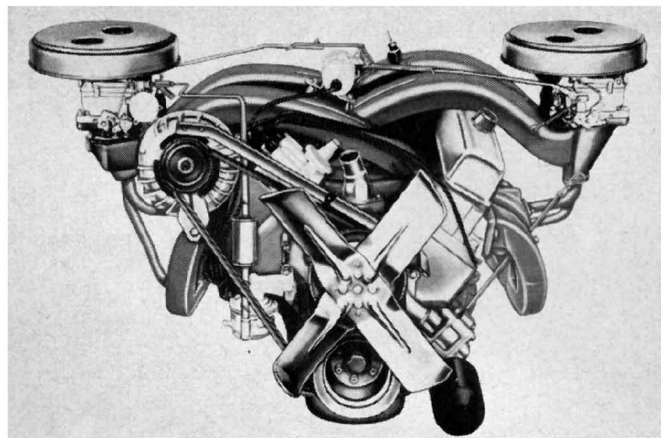
**NEW DUO-SERVO brakes for Chrysler products have self-adjustors, use rotational force of drum to reduce required hydraulic pressure.**



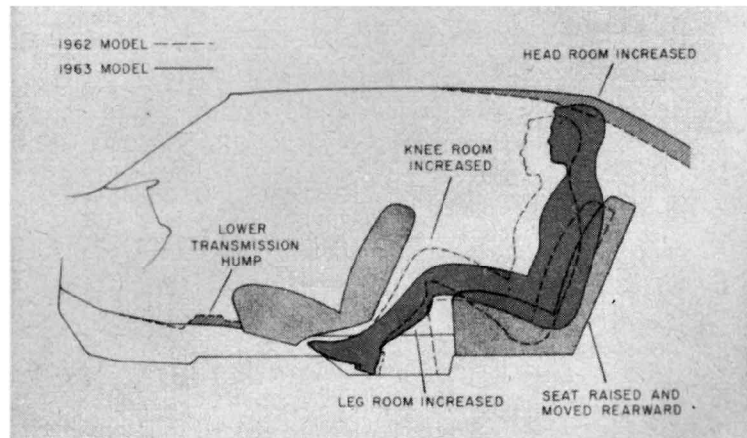
**CHRYSLER FAVORS unitized construction for body, eliminating weight and complexity of separate frame. Engine, suspension mount on sub-frame.**



**300-J ENGINE is a return to the long ram-induction system popularized by Chrysler. Dual 4-barrels are mounted on exhaust-heated pads.**



**USE OF 4-DOOR roof panel on 2-door hardtops gives these more rear seat head and foot room, easier entrance. Seat height has been raised.**





position, it unlocks the transmission buttons, readying them for use. When it is moved down, it "clears the board" by selecting neutral, then drops a pawl to engage the parking sprag on the transmission driveshaft, thereby effectively immobilizing the vehicle. We must add that the push-buttons are easy enough to use; however, we still would prefer to have the transmission control in a right-hand location.

Heater/air conditioner controls of similar design match the drive buttons on the right side of the dash, flanking a generously round speedometer, and four round gauges (fuel, coolant temperature, electrical and chronometer). There is no oil pressure gauge, just a big red warning light. A lovely mechanical-drive tachometer is included in the 300-J's equipment, but it is hidden, nearly out of sight, on the forward end of the console. A pity it couldn't have replaced the clock, as this particular item pointed at 11:45 during the entire road test period.

A better grouping of the electrical switches could possibly have been achieved, too, as these are scattered all over the driver's side of the panel. Power window controls are on the door panel and could just as easily have been atop the console (as with the Olds Starfire we've tested elsewhere in this issue).

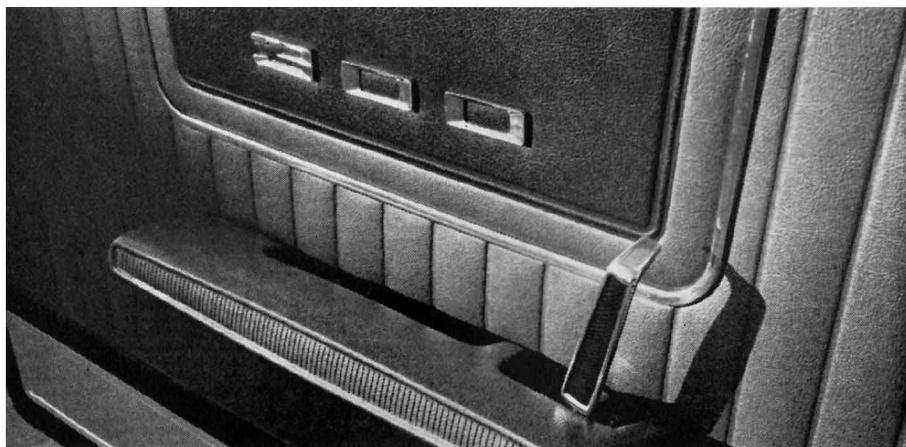
The 4-way power seats are an affection we could do without, although

they do provide more flexibility for suiting all sizes of seating. The 300-J bucket seats themselves are very comfortable, particularly on long drives and, with their leather and vinyl covering, should nearly wear forever. The whole interior appears to be done quite tastefully, and durably, which is another of the letter-series' bonuses.

The 300-J engine and ram-tube induction are not available on any other Chrysler product although most of the pieces and parts are interchangeable with Ramcharger and Super/Stock packages. Last year Chrysler reverted from the ram-induction to a double-runner type of dual 4-barrel manifold

(such as is used on the maximum performance engines) and achieved slightly better throttle response throughout the entire useful rpm range. However, because sonic-tuning can provide an extra bit of punch in a pre-selected range, Chrysler went back to it for '63. And, besides, it makes a fine conversation piece.

What the ram tubes do is this: They utilize reflected induction pulses to provide a slight pressurization (like supercharging) at the intake port. Varying the length of the tube varies the timing of the pulses. In the case of the 300-J, the power begins to arrive, as we said earlier, at around



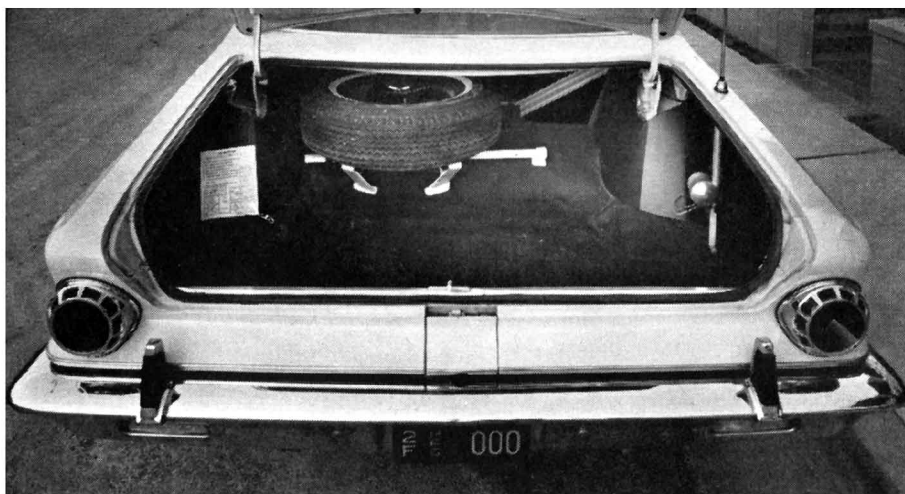
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3000 rpm. Significant is the fact that the torque peak, where the sonic-pulse pressure is at its greatest, occurs at 3600 rpm or about 90 mph, which is where the 300-J is operating at its optimum.

How does it affect accelerative performance? We took the 300-J to the LADS strip in Long Beach, Calif., and found:

	300-G	300-H	300-J
Curb weight	4515	4220	4420
Rated bhp	375	380	390
Intake manifold	ram	runner	ram
0-40, elapsed time, sec.	4.6	4.3	4.9
0-60	8.4	7.7	7.9
0-80	13.8	13.0	11.3
0-100	21.2	21.0	17.6
¼-mile	16.2	16.0	16.5
mph at end	87.4	88.5	97.0

Obviously, the Chrysler 300-J continues its tradition as a big, hot-



performing car, despite a somewhat disappointing softening of the suspension. We were disappointed, too, that there wasn't the notable improvement in quality, detail finish and panel fit

the lesser Chrysler Corporation products have exhibited this year. It still, however, is an impressive car—both on the parking lot and the wide-open highway.

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



### 1963 CHRYSLER 300-J 2-door hardtop

#### SPECIFICATIONS

List price	\$5177
Price, as tested	5805
Curb weight, lb.	4420
Test weight	4730
distribution, %	58/42
Tire size	7.60-15
Tire capacity, lb @ 26 psi	5240
Brake swept area	414.7
Engine type	V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke	4.19 x 3.75
Displacement, cu in.	413
Compression ratio	9.6
Carburetion	2 x 4
Bhp @ rpm	390 @ 4800
equivalent mph	120
Torque, lb-ft	485 @ 3600
equivalent mph	90

#### EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Air conditioning, radio, rear shelf speaker, power antenna, remote control outside mirror, tinted windshield, limited-slip differential.

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	122.0
Tread, f and r	.61.0/59.7
Over-all length, in.	215.5
width	79.0
height	55.6
equivalent vol, cu ft.	548
Frontal area, sq ft.	24.4
Ground clearance, in.	6.1
Steering ratio, o/a	19.2
turns, lock to lock	3.5
turning circle, ft.	43.1
Hip room, front	2 x 24.0
Hip room, rear	60.2
Pedal to seat back, max.	42.0
Floor to ground	13.0
Luggage vol, cu ft.	18.5
Fuel tank capacity, gal.	23.0

#### GEAR RATIOS

3rd (1.00), overall	3.23
2nd (1.45)	4.68
1st (2.45)	7.91
1st (2.45 x 2.20)	17.4

#### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (5200), mph	130
Shifts, rpm-mph, (forced)	
3rd ( )	
2nd (4800)	83
1st (4800)	49

#### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	3.8
0-40	4.9
0-50	6.4
0-60	7.9
0-70	9.5
0-80	11.3
0-100	17.6
Standing ¼ mile	16.5
speed at end	97

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg	11-14
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#### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	30.0
60 mph	57.0
90 mph	89.3

#### CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	12.1
Cu ft/ton mile	122.3
Mph/1000 rpm	25.0
Engine revs/mile	2400
Piston travel, ft/mile	1500
Car Life wear index	36.0

#### PULLING POWER

70 mph, maximum gradient, %	23.1
50	26.0
30	33.5
Total drag at 60 mph, lb	135

