

With top up or down, on or off the highway, our Dodge Polara 500 convertible was fun to drive.

# DODGE POLARA 500

by Jim Wright, *Technical Editor*

**AFTER A COUPLE** of not-so-good years, Dodge seems to be really hitting their stride with their all-new 119-inch-wheelbase model. First-quarter reports show that the Big D is doing somewhere between 60 and 65 per cent better in sales than it did last year. This, to our way of thinking, is just as it should be, because we think the Dodge is one of the more honest cars. It doesn't suffer from an excess of frills or gimmicks, either in its makeup or in its advertising.

The Dodge is available with either the Slant Six or V-8 engine in three series: 330, 440, and Polara. The top-of-the-line Polara 500 comes only with a V-8. Nine different body styles are offered, including two- and four-door sedans and hardtops, six- and nine-passenger station wagons (wagons are still built on the 116-inch-wheelbase chassis), and a convertible coupe. The Polara 500 comes only as a two-door hardtop or convertible coupe. There are enough engine and power-train options available to give the buyer any degree of economy or performance he wants.

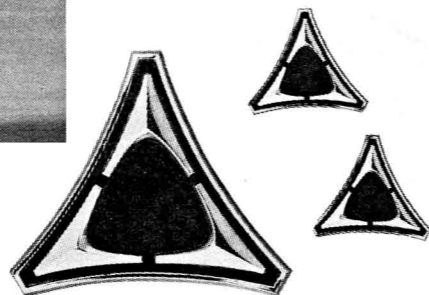
MOTOR TREND's test car was a Polara 500 convertible, equipped with just about everything but air conditioning and the all-out "426" Ramcharger engine. Wanting to check out the top power options (one we felt would most interest the average performance-minded buyer), we chose the 330-hp engine coupled with the (new this year) Warner T-10 four-speed manual transmission and Sure-Grip differential. During our test, we found this a hard all-around combination to beat and one we'd be inclined to order in our own car.

For the buyer who has economy in mind, Dodge offers the 225-cubic-inch Slant Six engine. With 8.2-to-1 compression and single one-barrel carburetor, the Six puts out 145 hp at 4000 rpm on regular gas. The standard V-8 offering at 318

cubic inches would also fall into the economy class. This one has a 9-to-1 compression ratio (also a regular burner), single two-barrel carburetor, and is rated at 230 hp at 4400 rpm. Last year's mid-range engine, the 361-cubic-incher, has been dropped this year in favor of the 383-inch job, with single two-barrel carburetor and 10-to-1 compression. This one needs premium gas to pump out its 305 hp. The high-performance option, as installed in our test car, takes the 383-incher, adds a single four-barrel carb, a camshaft with more timing and overlap, and dual exhausts to get 330 hp at 4600 rpm. For drag racing only, they're offering the hard-to-beat 426-cubic-inch, 425-hp Ramcharger.

Barring the all-out drag-strip engines, there aren't many that can stay with the 330-hp "383" in acceleration. The test car could consistently run the 0-30, 0-45, and 0-60-mph tests in 3.1, 5.2, and 7.7 seconds. The quarter-mile was charged in 15.8 seconds, with a terminal speed of 92 mph. Considering that our test car had only a 3.23-to-1 rear axle — definitely not a drag gear — and had a test weight of approximately 4400 pounds, these times become very impressive. Top speed on the Riverside backstretch was an actual 116 mph, as recorded on our fifth-wheel speedometer. On our high-speed runs, the Sun tachometer touched 4800 rpm and the engine wasn't quite through winding yet. It felt as if it could go to 5000 or even 5200 rpm, which would place the top speed of the Polara somewhere between 120 and 125 mph.

When driven in a normal manner, the "383" is as docile as an economy Six, with no roughness at idle or any other behavioral quirks. Due to the engine's very wide, high torque curve (425 pounds-feet at 2800 rpm), it's very flexible. In traffic, it won't protest if you let the rpm drop down as low as 750 in top gear, and it'll pull hard from this point clear to top speed with no apparent flat spots anywhere in the



At the top of the regular Dodge line and just below the 880 stands the snappy Polara 500





*Down the back straight of Riverside's track, our Dodge turned 92 mph through the quarter-mile and hit a 116-mph top speed.*

## DODGE POLARA 500 *continued*

curve. With the gearing we had in the test car, the torque peak at 2800 rpm corresponded to the legal highway cruising speed of 65 mph. This means that from this point up to 85 or 90 mph, there's plenty of high-gear punch for passing or emergencies.

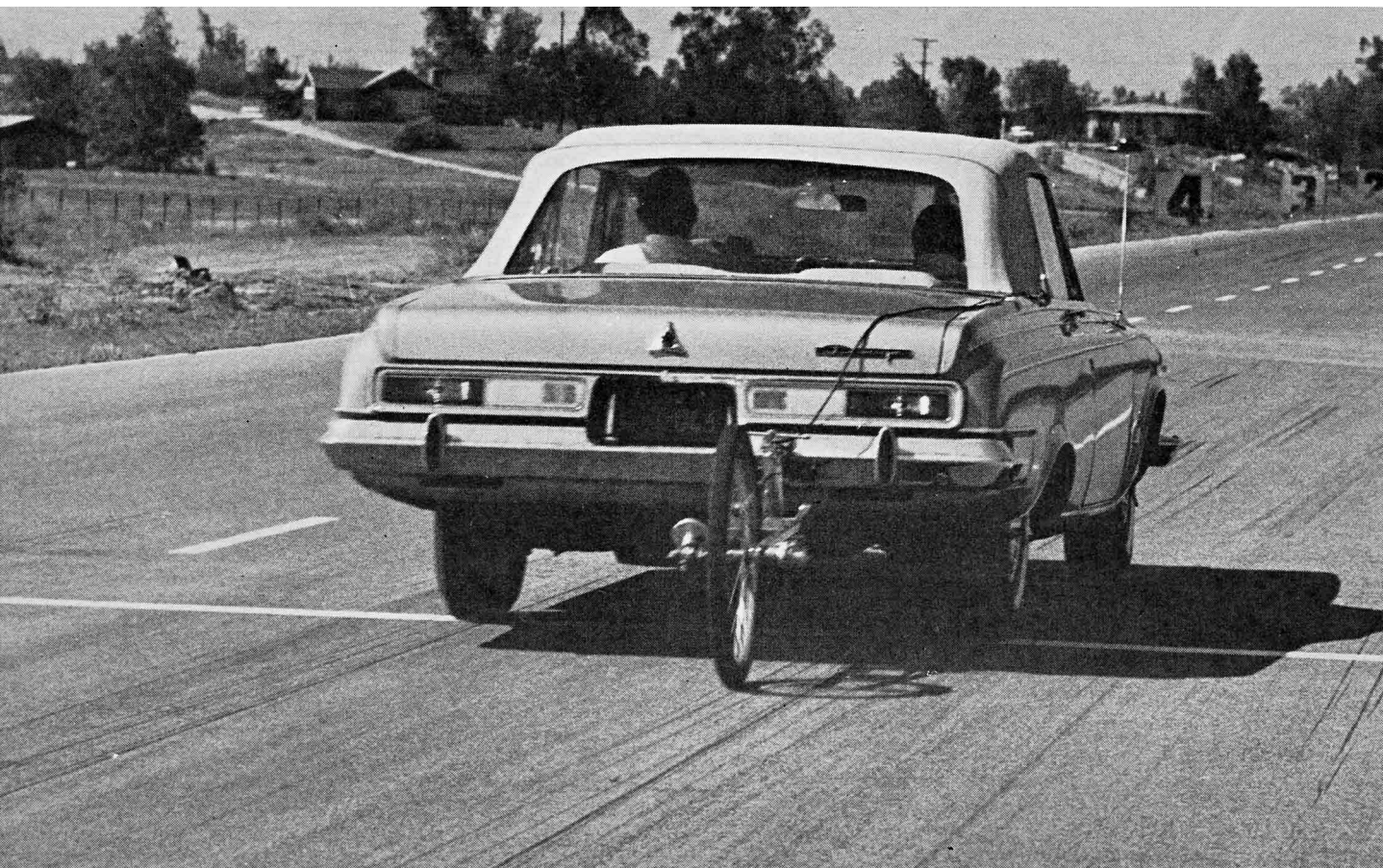
The Warner T-10 four-speed used with the big "383" is the one with the 2.20 low gear, while the lower-powered "318" and "318" engines use the 2.55 low-gear unit. A standard three-speed and optional Torqueflite automatic are also available with all engines. The four-speed is silk-smooth and handles the torque of the "383" very well. Of course, much of its apparent smoothness is due to the Hurst-Campbell shift linkage that Dodge (and other Chrysler products) installs as standard equipment with their four-speeds. The action is completely precise and positive and will allow even a novice to get through the gears like an expert. Action

of the heavy-duty 10.5-inch clutch is light, yet positive. The stock tires were easy to break loose coming off the line during our acceleration runs, so we had to feather the throttle a little to get quick times. There was no tendency of spring wrap-up during hard acceleration.

We put 1200 miles on our test car and had an overall mileage average of 10.6 mpg. Around town, the car delivered a consistent 11.5 to 12.5 mpg, and out on the highway we ran one tank through at a high of 15.5. As with any four-barrel-carburetor engine, we got the best mileage running on the primaries as much as possible. When driven hard around town (like leaving it in the lower gears longer than necessary and flooring the throttle to use all four barrels), our 11.5- to 12.5-mpg average fell off to eight and nine mpg.

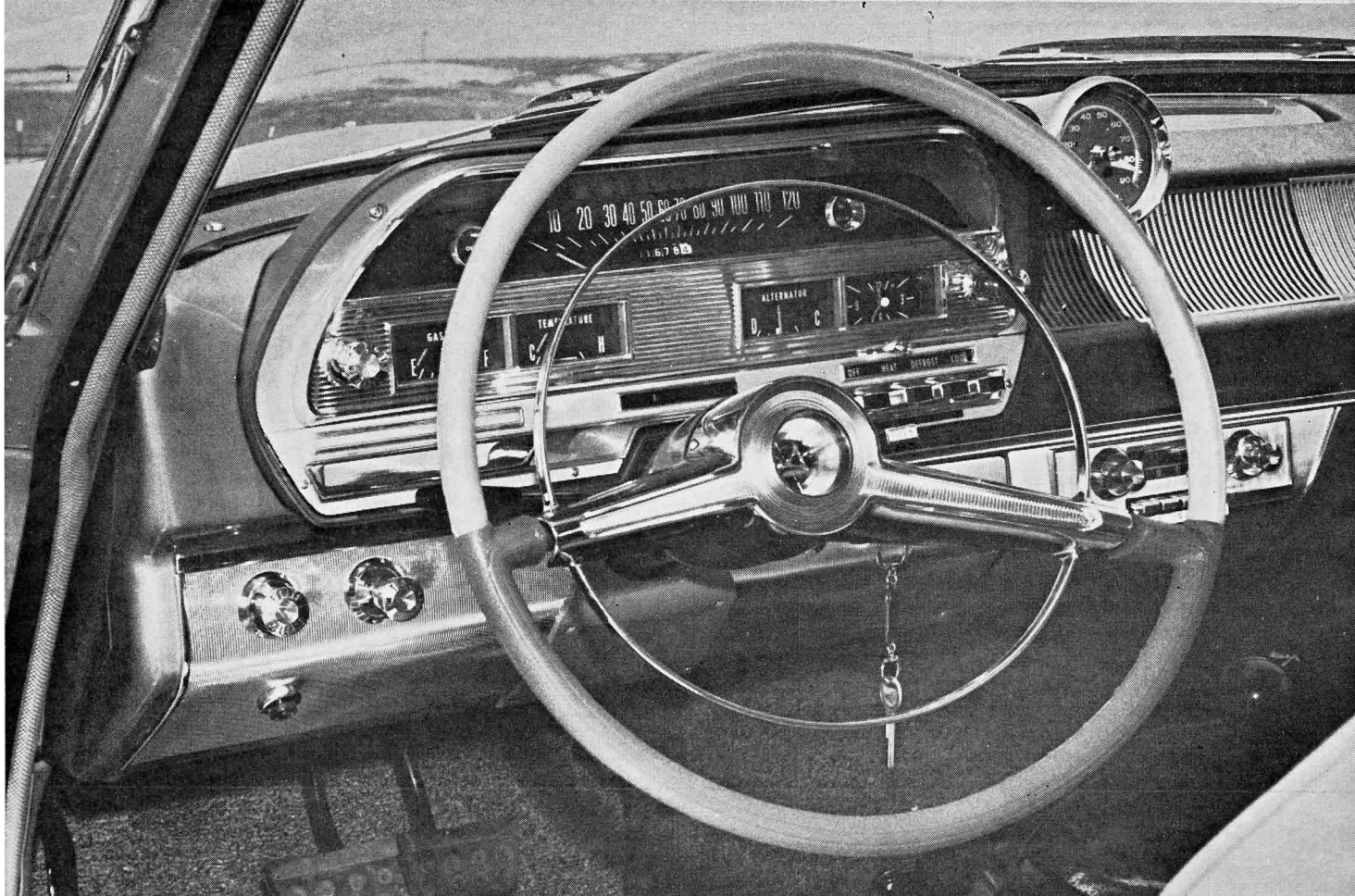
On the whole, the test car had what we'd call average brakes. Our car had the optional 11-inch drums, which give more lining area than the standard 10-inchers. They survived two successive maximum-effort stops from the 92-mph speed at the end of the quarter-mile runs before they faded to the danger point. From the top speed of 116 mph, they took a long time to bring the car to a complete stop, but they hadn't faded completely. During our regular 60-mph panic stops (after the brakes had cooled down from the high-speed runs), we found that if the brakes were locked up too long (usual practice for quickest stopping distances is to apply full pedal until brakes lock, then release quickly and apply pedal again — kind of a pumping action), severe wheel hop would occur. This meant we had to use lightning-fast steering wheel and brake pedal corrections to keep the car from swapping ends. A situation like that would make for some interesting happenings on a crowded freeway.

If this were our personal car, we'd cure it simply by installing heavy-duty shocks and stiffening the rear half of the rear springs, or by installing Traction-Masters. In their stock

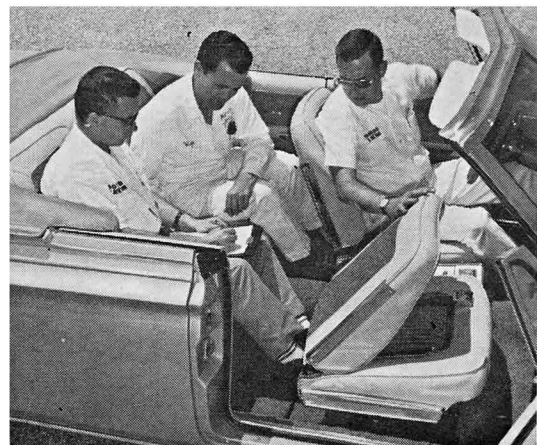


*Using molded asbestos linings, bonded to the shoes, optional 11-inch brakes on our Polara proved adequate. But the long,*

*weak rear halves of the rear leaf springs couldn't take heavy panic braking loads, allowed some rear-wheel hop and swerving.*



DODGE HAS GLARE-FREE, EASY-TO-READ INSTRUMENTS (INCLUDING TACH), AND WELL PLACED WHEEL. ALL CONTROLS ARE WITHIN EASY REACH.

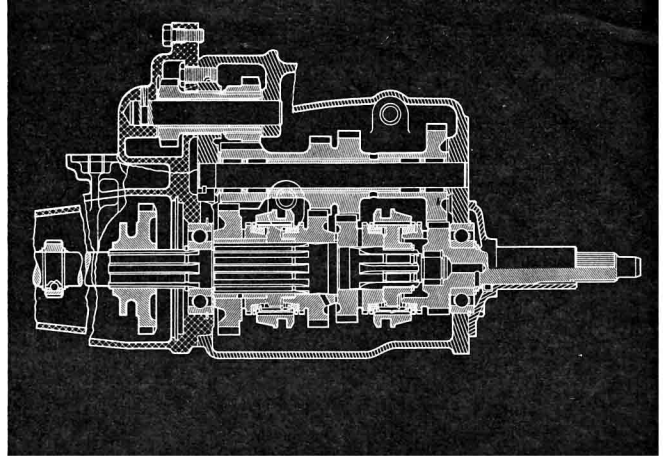


PHOTOS BY BOB D'OLIVO



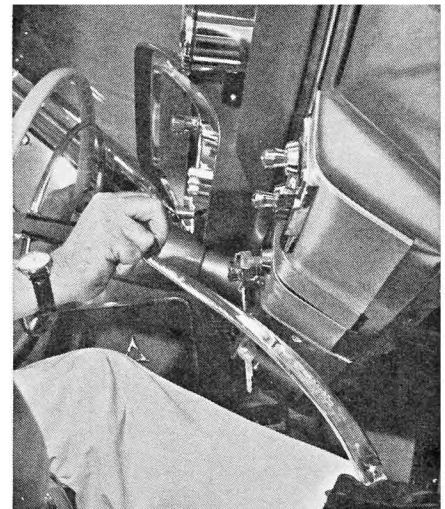
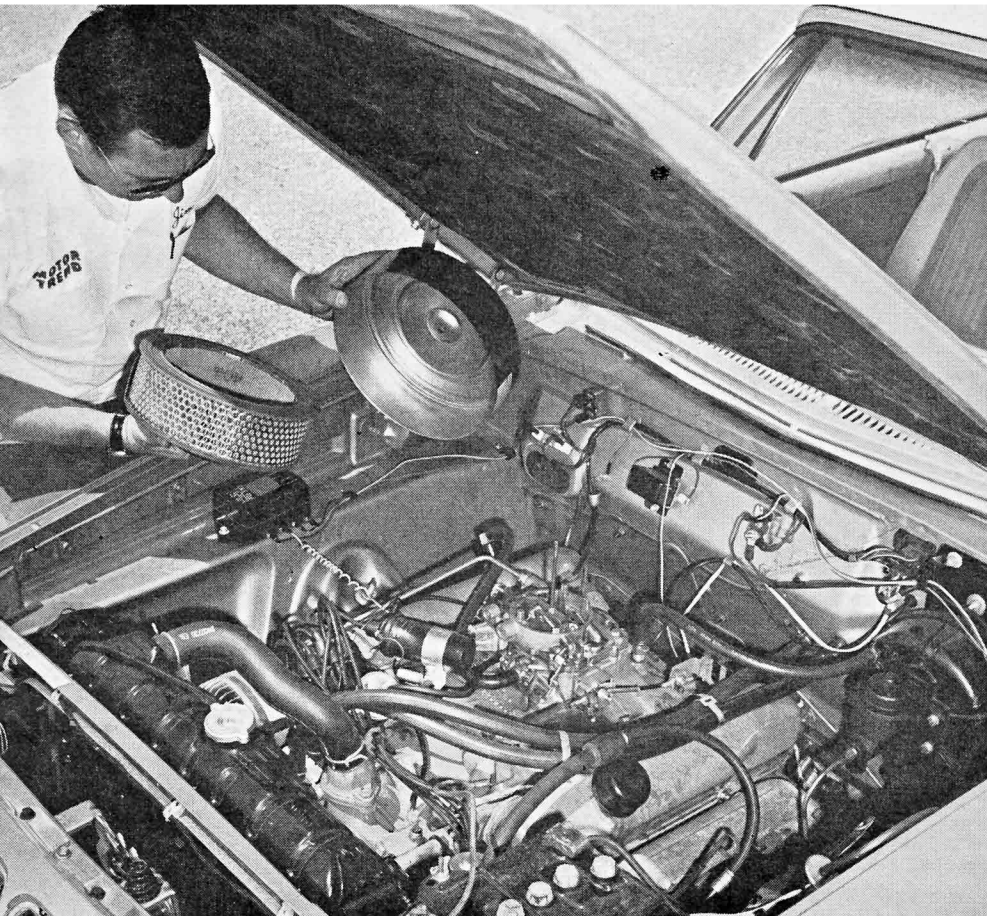
*We liked the functional interior of the Polara 500. Seats are comfortable and firm, with front buckets fully adjustable for rake and height, as well as fore and aft. Center console is roomy and lockable, and no one has to stretch for gearshift lever.*

*With torsion bar front suspension, leaf springs in the rear, the Polara had above-average handling on all highway surfaces.*



**(ABOVE)** Borg-Warner T-10 four-speed transmission is available with "318" and "383" engines. Standard rear axle ratio on Polara 500 with four-speed is 3.55, with 3.23 optional. The Sure-Grip differential gave our test car additional traction.

**(LEFT)** Roomy trunk is wide, fairly deep, has lots of usable space for luggage and equipment of all sizes and shapes. The flat-mounted spare is easy to reach, partly because of low lip.



**(ABOVE)** Man-sized Hurst-Campbell shift lever and linkage proved sturdy, smooth, and precise throughout test range. It's located right where it should be for comfortable driving without stretching for third gear (as required by some units).

**(LEFT)** Powerful 330-hp Dodge engine uses cast-iron block and heads, with aluminum pistons and a five-main-bearing crankshaft. Four-barrel Carter carb lets engine breathe deeply, rev beyond 4600-rpm power peak to above the 5500 red line.

## DODGE POLARA 500

2-door, 5-passenger convertible

**OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED:** "383" engine, 4-speed transmission, Sure-Grip differential, power steering and brakes, electric windows, AM/FM radio, heater, Sun tachometer, seat belts, misc.

**BASIC PRICE:** \$3196

**PRICE AS TESTED:** \$4265.79 (plus tax and license)

**ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST:** 1444 miles

**RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE:** 5500 rpm

### PERFORMANCE

#### ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph.....	3.1 secs.
0-45 mph.....	5.2
0-60 mph.....	7.7

Standing start 1/4-mile 15.8 secs. and 92 mph

Speeds in gears @ 4500 rpm

1st .....	60 mph	4th .....	116 mph
2nd .....	78 mph	(actual top speed @ 4800 rpm)	
3rd .....	100 mph		

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading .....	30	47	52	63	75	86
Weston electric speedometer .....	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear .....23.5 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 33 ft.; from 60 mph, 167 ft.

### SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

#### Engine

Ohv V-8  
Bore: 4.25 ins.  
Stroke: 3.38 ins.  
Displacement: 383 cu. ins.  
Compression ratio: 10.0:1  
Horsepower: 330 @ 4600 rpm  
Torque: 425 lbs.-ft. @ 2800 rpm  
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.86  
Ignition: 12-volt coil

#### Gearbox

4-speed manual, all-synchro;  
floor-mounted lever

#### Wheels and Tires

5-lug, steel disc wheels  
7.50 x 14 4-ply tubeless tires

#### Differential

Hypoid — semi-floating  
Installed ratio: 3.23:1

#### Steering

Rack and sector, with  
integral power  
Turning diameter: 40.8 ft.  
Turns: 3.5 lock to lock

#### Suspension

Front: Independent; lateral  
non-parallel control arms with  
torsion bars and direct-acting  
tubular shocks  
Rear: Rigid axle, with 6-leaf  
semi-elliptic springs and  
direct-acting tubular shocks

#### Driveshaft

One-piece — open tube

#### Brakes

Hydraulic, duo-servo; self-  
adjusting; cast-iron drums  
Front and rear: 11-in. dia. x  
2.5 ins. wide  
Effective lining area:  
234.1 sq. ins.

#### Body and Frame

Unitized  
Wheelbase: 119.0 ins.  
Track: front, 59.5 ins.;  
rear, 57.5 ins.  
Overall length: 208.1 ins.  
Curb weight: 3985 lbs.

form, the rear springs just won't take severe braking forces. The short, stiff front half of the spring can handle the torque of hard acceleration forces very well, but the long, weak rear half of the springs (while they deliver a nice, soft ride) can't handle *all* their job.

The famous Chrysler torsion bar front suspension is still used. Every year, rumors persist that it'll be dropped in favor of cheaper-to-manufacture coil springs. Boulevard ride is soft without being too spongy, and the overall handling characteristics of the car are still among the best in a domestic car (and superior to a whole lot of imports we could name). Our test car was equipped with optional four-ply tires (not two-ply, four-ply *rating*), because we feel the stiffer sidewall of this tire best suits our particular style of driving. Power steering is light and quick at 3.5 turns at full lock.

The bucket seats of the Polara 500 give good lateral support and are comfortable on long hauls without being too soft. They're fully adjustable six different ways — fore and aft, up and down, forward rake, rearward rake. Any size owner can get the exact seating position he wants with a minimum of effort.

Instruments (everything but oil pressure) and controls are conveniently grouped, and the steering wheel's well located — not too high nor too low, neither too far away nor too close. The glove box is a nuisance, because if it's full and you don't open it carefully, the contents are likely to spill all over the floor. The console contains a lockable compartment that's more convenient for the driver to use. Interior and exterior finish and detailing are comparable with others in this price class. Five adults fit with ease, and the back seat has plenty of leg room. Trunk space is also generous.

While the top-of-the-line Polara 500's price is solidly in the medium bracket, the prices of the other Dodge models extend way down into the low-price bracket — depending on the options ordered.

/MT



DODGE WAS ALWAYS LIGHT, RESPONSIVE, AND CONTROLLABLE. EVEN WHEN WE PUSHED IT HARD THROUGH CORNERS, IT DIDN'T LEAN MUCH.