

'64 Dodge DART road test

by Jim Wright, *Technical Editor*

ONE OF THE WISEST decisions Dodge ever made was to divorce its compact from the ill-starred marriage to the Valiant. Not that there was anything wrong with either — there was just too much similarity between them. The old Lancer's sales suffered as a result.

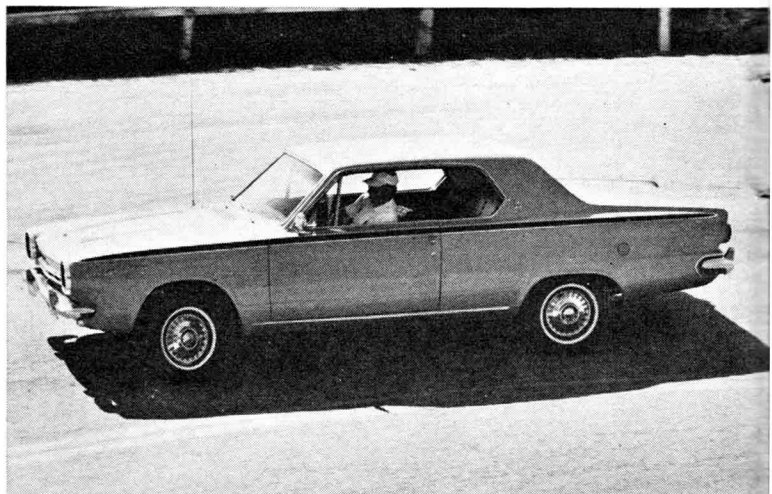
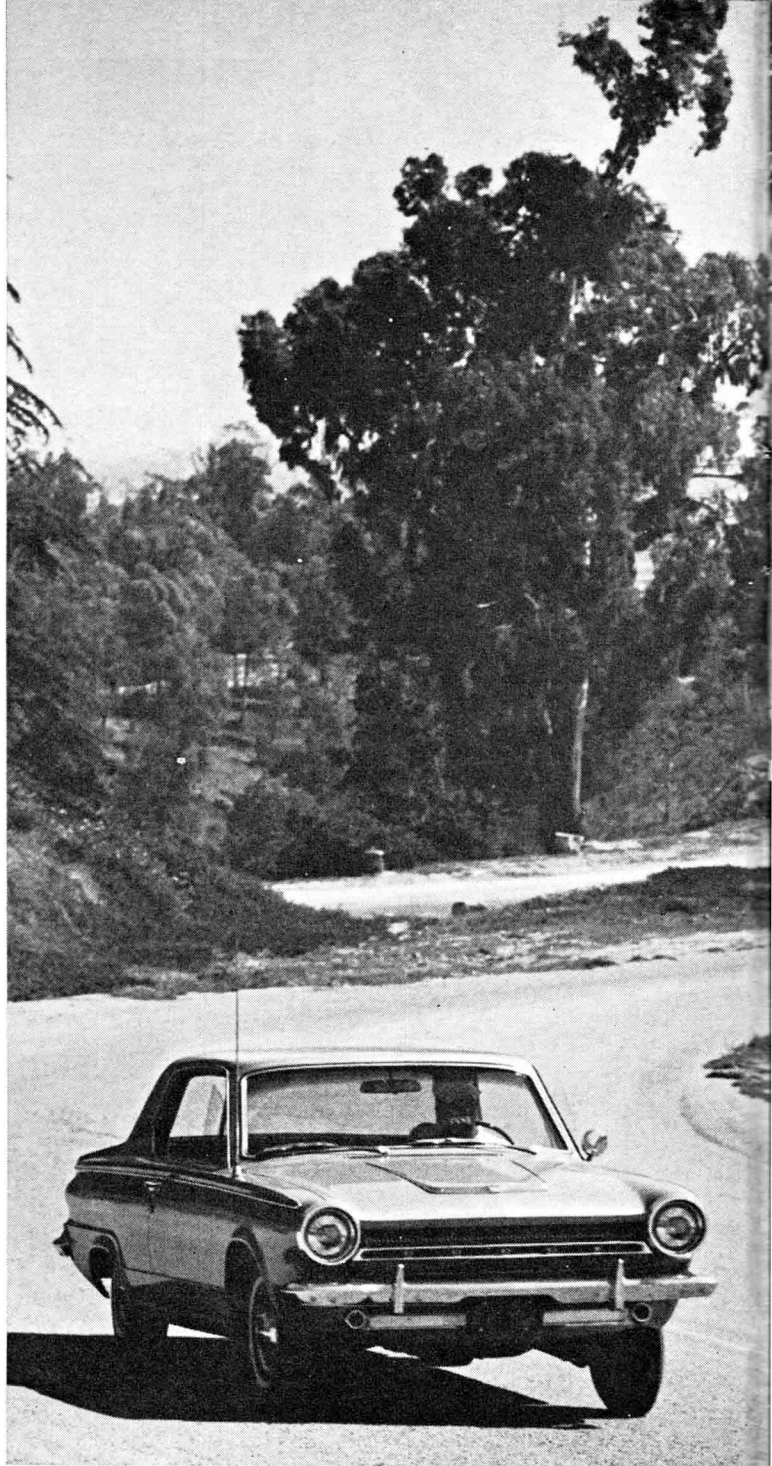
Completely redesigned, restyled, and then renamed, the Dart caught fire last year as sales boomed. Latest figures for the '63 model year, through mid-September, show that Dart sales were running 146 per cent above last year's Lancer's. This figures out to a whopping 146,809 units. The figure breaks down further to show that of total Dodge passenger car sales, 46 per cent go to the Dart.

The second wisest decision: no radical changes in the Dart for 1964. Its basic styling is clean and functional and the car has met with wide public acceptance. It should hold up well for at least a couple of years more.

Our test car, a GT hardtop, looked almost identical to the one we tested last year. The grille is changed and is now slightly convex instead of concave. Hood, side, and deck trim are also different. Biggest noticeable change is the rear window. It's been widened three inches and offers increased vision.

One thing that hasn't changed a bit is the Dart's overall performance concept. In our opinion, there's nothing else around in the Dart's size and price class that can touch it for all-around roadability. It's one compact that can double as a very comfortable road car for extended trips.

The test Dart was delivered to MOTOR TREND practically factory fresh, showing only 80 miles on the odometer. This meant the car had to be broken in before its true character could be evaluated. The factory recommends a maximum of



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60 mph for the first 300 miles, moderately higher for the next 200. Sustained high speeds aren't recommended for at least 500 miles. We followed the book and had no trouble during the break-in period (or during the entire test, which encompassed some 1200 miles of driving).

As is our practice, gas mileage figures were kept right from our first mile through to the last. The first several tankfuls averaged out in the 15- to 16-mpg range. As the engine loosened up, the averages kept improving and were still getting slightly better when we returned the car to Dodge. Toward the end of the test, the range had increased to a consistent 17.5 to 19 mpg at speeds of 65 to 80 mph. Around town, the average improved to 15.5, 15.7, and 15.9 mpg.

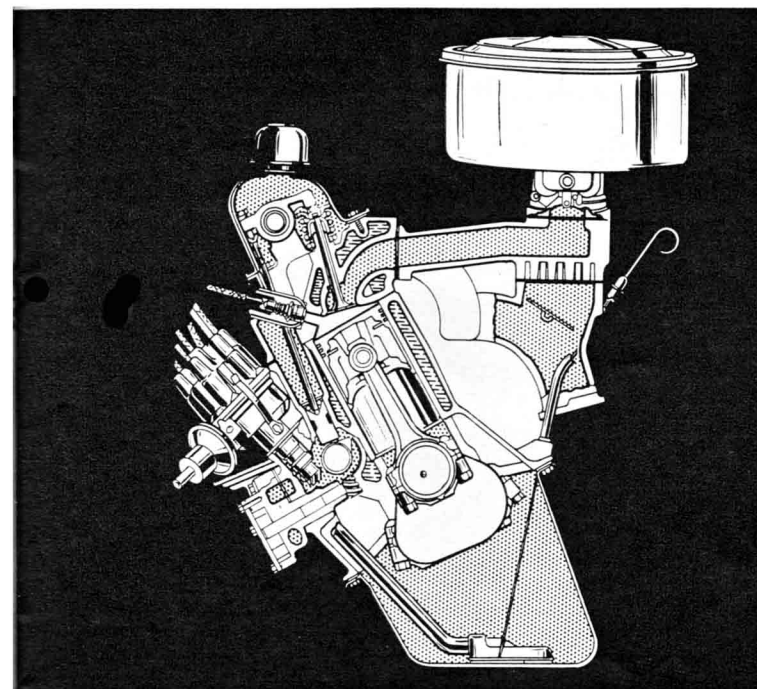
The test car was equipped with the optional 225-cubic-inch engine, automatic transmission, and 3.55 rear axle. With either the standard three-speed or optional four-speed manual transmissions, gas mileage would have been only slightly better. There's very little slippage in the automatic, and its three ratios are well spaced, so the engine doesn't have to overwork during acceleration. The standard rear-axle ratio with the automatic is 3.23 to 1. This would give a little better mileage than the optional 3.55 set in our test car. A further increase could be had with the optional 2.93 gearset.

The standard 170-cubic-inch engine would, of course, offer the most economy. But not without a big drop in performance. The test car, with its "225" engine, had a 0-60 mph time of 14.7 seconds. The last time we drove a Dart with the "170" engine, the best 0-60 time was up around 20 seconds. This is a figure we personally think much too slow for today's traffic. By this, we mean if the car's going to be driven on the highway at all, it wouldn't be satisfactory. It wouldn't have any trouble staying up with 65-70-mph traffic, but there just wouldn't be any reserve for emergencies. The "170" is great as a company car or for a second car, where economy is important but where the car will be driven only around town.

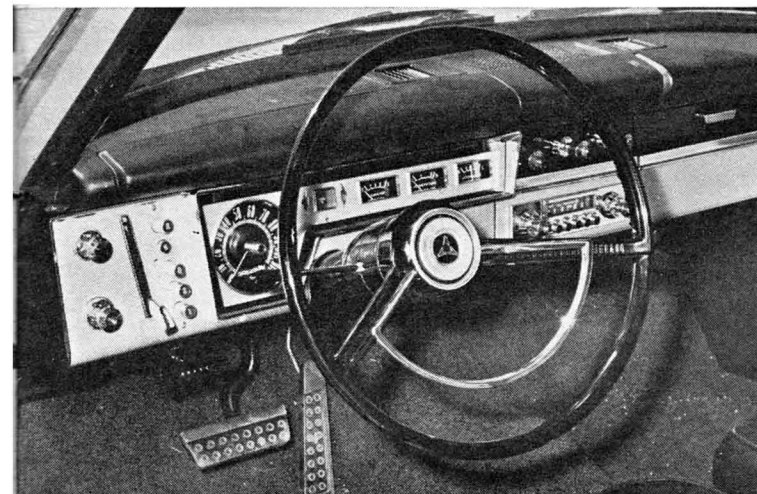
Highest speed with the test Dart was an actual 91 mph. This was recorded at Riverside Raceway. The odometer was reading close to 1000 miles during the Riverside test phase and, with a few more miles on it, top speed would be around 95.

The '64 "225" engine remains much the same as previous versions. Compression ratio is up slightly from 8.2 to 8.4 to 1, but horsepower and torque ratings remain the same. Engine reliability, always good in the past, is bolstered by several accessory improvements. More neoprene rubber is used in the ignition cables to resist the effects of age and high underhood temperatures (as well as providing superior insulating qualities). Ignition cable terminals have a self-locking device to ensure proper and positive spark plug contact.

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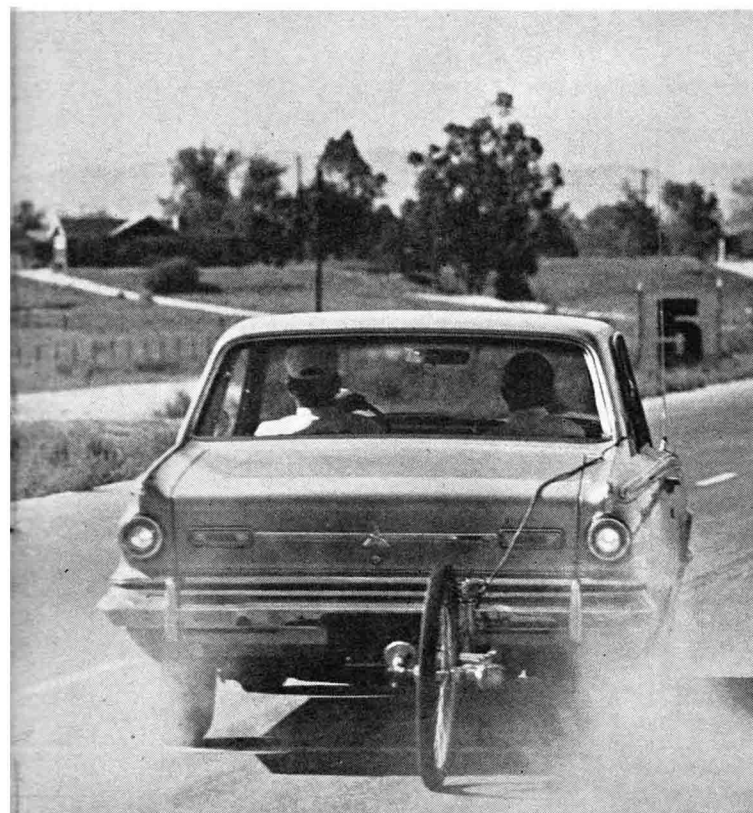
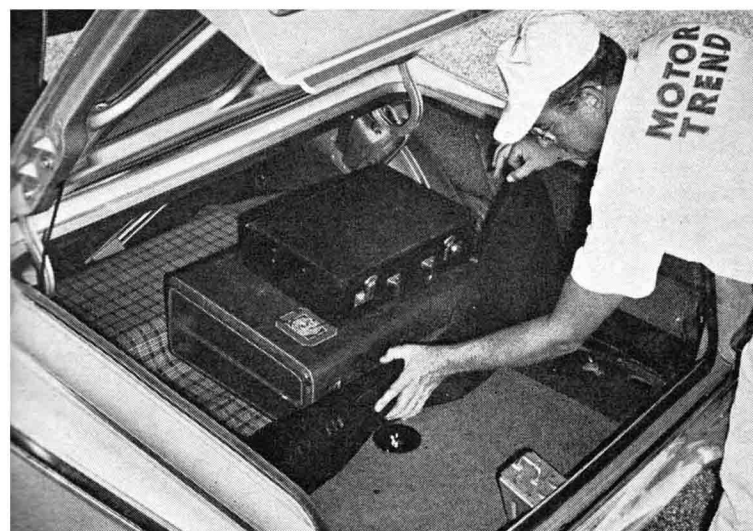
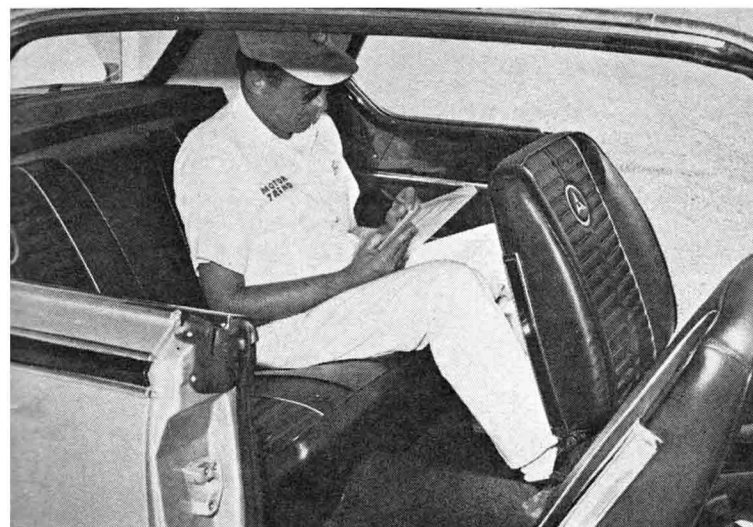
1) Basic styling of the '63 Dart turned out to be one of those rare blends that almost everyone likes. Factory has wisely decided against any major styling changes in the 1964 model.

2) Good looks of the Dart are backed up by good road manners. Overall roadability, performance are excellent for this size.

3) The Slant Six continues as basic engine and is available in two versions. Meanwhile, rumors of V-8 grow more frequent.

4) Except for inclination, the Slant Six follows conventional in-line design practices. One feature is long intake tubes.

5) Dashboard and instrument layout is unchanged except for the addition of more trim. Oil pressure gauge is still not used.

DODGE DART *continued*

The single-throat carburetor is basically unchanged but includes a new automatic choke that's supposed to overcome any tendency to start hard. We drove the test car in temperatures that went as high as 118° and never had any starting problems. The lowest temperature was only in the high 40s, so we couldn't tell how it'd work in colder climates. The new choke uses a vacuum-operated diaphragm, linked by a single arm to the slotted choke lever, to help the thermostatic coil spring open the choke blade during engine warm-up. As the engine cools down, after shut-off, the spring has complete freedom to close the choke blade. The previous parts replaced by the diaphragm and simplified linkage were prone to gum up, which made them operate at reduced efficiency and caused hard starting.

Another improvement worth mentioning, especially if you've owned a car equipped with a crankcase ventilation device, is the new valve used in the Dart's system. These valves have had a tendency to clog up and usually had to be replaced rather than cleaned. Dodge is now using a self-cleaning valve, actuated by manifold vacuum, that should eliminate this annoying source of trouble.

MT gets quite a few letters from Dart owners asking if it's possible to drop one of the smaller V-8s into this chassis or if the factory is going to start offering a V-8 option. At this writing, the factory still hasn't announced anything definite about a V-8. However, rumors to this effect are growing stronger, and it looks as if this might become a reality by the first of the year. If our informants can be believed, it'll be a brand-new engine, displacing approximately 270 to 275 cubic inches. If so, this would make a satisfying package — one that should be very popular.

The Dart's brakes performed well during our on-the-road test, but at Riverside, during the regular braking tests, we felt they were on the unsatisfactory side. There seems to be plenty of available effective brake area for the size of the car (2800 pounds at the curb with a full fuel tank), yet the 60-mph panic stops took about two car lengths too long to complete. This was caused by the wheels locking up too readily (which we think was a direct result of the small 6.50 x 13 tires). They just don't lay enough rubber on the ground to effectively transmit brake torque. On the plus side, the brakes didn't fade too readily, and when they did, the cool-down rate was quick. The test car wasn't equipped with power brakes, nor did it need them. It did have power steering, and its quickness came in handy when the brakes locked up and corrections were necessary to keep the Dart in a straight line.

About 70 per cent of the test miles were logged out of the city over secondary roads and superhighways. The Dart didn't develop any rattles or squeaks, even on the bumpiest roads. Wind and road noises were at an acceptable level with the windows up. Engine noises are also effectively damped out.

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1) Top speed is in the 90- to 95-mph range. Engine proves capable of turning higher, but not with present carburetion setup, which limits top-end breathing in interest of economy.

2) Author Wright is six feet tall, had no trouble finding plenty of leg room, even with front seat all the way rearward.

3) Under-the-floor spare placement allows more usable trunk space, also gives neater appearance. Trunk, whose lip is low, will handle all the needs of an average family on vacation.

4) Test crew judged Dart's brakes to be average. They had a tendency to lock up easily, and it took some fancy wheel juggling to keep the car in a straight line during 60-mph panic stops.

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→DODGE DART *continued*2
→**DODGE DART GT**

2-door, 5-passenger hardtop

OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED: 225-cubic-inch engine, TorqueFlite, Sure-Grip differential, power steering, radio, heater, padded dash, tinted glass, white-walls, seat belts

BASIC PRICE: \$2306**PRICE AS TESTED:** \$2901.10 (plus tax and license)**ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST:** 80 miles**RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE:** 5000 rpm**PERFORMANCE****ACCELERATION** (2 aboard)

0-30 mph.....	4.3 secs.
0-45 mph.....	8.2
0-60 mph.....	14.7

Standing start 1/4-mile 20.0 secs. and 69 mph

Speeds in gears @ shift points

1st31 mph @ 4000 rpm	3rd91 mph (actual top speed)
2nd58 mph @ 4200 rpm	@ 4500 rpm

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading.....30	45	50	60	70	81
Weston electric speedometer.....30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear.....19 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 35 ft.; from 60 mph, 173 ft.

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER**Engine**

Ohv, in-line, Slant Six
Bore: 3.40 ins.
Stroke: 4.125 ins.
Displacement: 225.0 cu. ins.
Compression ratio: 8.4:1
Horsepower: 145 @ 4000 rpm
Torque: 215 lbs.-ft. @ 2400 rpm
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.64
Carburetion: 1 single-barrel
Ignition: 12-volt coil

Gearbox

3-speed automatic (TorqueFlite)

Driveshaft

1-piece, open tube

DifferentialHypoid, semi-floating
Installed ratio: 3.55:1**Suspension**

Front: Independent, non-parallel control arms with lateral torsion bars and direct-acting tubular shocks
Rear: Rigid axle, with 5-leaf, semi-elliptic springs and direct-acting tubular shocks

Steering

Rack and sector, with integral power
Turning diameter: 38.6 ft.
Turns lock to lock: 3.5

Wheels and Tires

5-lug, steel disc wheels
6.50 x 13 2-ply tires

Brakes

Hydraulic, duo-servo; self-adjusting; cast-iron drums
Front: 9-in. dia. x 2.25 ins. wide
Rear: 9-in. dia. x 2.0 ins. wide
Effective lining area: 153.5 sq. ins.

Body and Frame

Unit construction
Wheelbase: 111.0 ins.
Track: front, 55.9 ins.; rear, 55.6 ins.
Overall length: 196.3 ins.
Curb weight: 2800 lbs.



PHOTOS BY BOB D'OLIVO

One of the biggest problems with unitized construction is that any road noises or vibrations tend to be amplified to the point where they become a constant source of irritation to the driver or passengers. It takes quite a bit of tuning to get a unitized shell to resist these outside excitations. Dodge engineers seem to have this problem licked in the Dart.

Dart's suspension offers a good boulevard ride, but it's still firm enough to offer good stability at high cruising speeds. On winding mountain roads, it's a real pleasure to drive because the steering is light, quick, and fairly neutral. The Dart's cornering power is very good for a stock car. Lean is minimal, and it takes an extreme right-angle corner or a hard switchback to produce any noticeable amount of understeer. Heavy-duty shocks would clear up the slight tendency that Dart shows toward excessive wheel tramp on rough or rippled road surfaces.

The interior offers plenty of room and can carry five adults in comparative comfort on extended trips. The bucket seats are roomy and offer good support to the back and upper legs. They're contoured slightly and do give a fairly good degree of lateral support, keeping the driver in place when the car is cornered hard. Adjustment provisions can take care of a variety of different-sized drivers. With the driver's seat adjusted all the way back, there's still plenty of leg room for rear-seat passengers. Steering-wheel location is good, and its diameter is just right. Door openings are wide enough to allow easy access to the back seat.

The instrument panel has an easy-to-read, round speedometer. The gas, temp, and alternator gauges, while also easy to read, are rectangular and somehow don't fit in well with the speedo. A red warning light is still used to signal oil-pressure failure. All switches and control knobs are conveniently located, and none takes any gymnastics on the driver's part to reach. Interior ventilation is excellent, as is all-around driver vision.

In addition to the GT hardtop, the Dart's also available in two- and four-door sedan, convertible, and six-passenger wagon models. These are spread through three series, all reasonably priced.

/MT



1) Torsion bar front suspension and outboard-mounted rear leaf springs give Dart increased roll stiffness, mean less annoying lean in corners plus more overall stability at all speeds.

2) Driver's compartment offers plenty of all-around room and comfort. The bucket seats are contoured slightly to afford good degree of lateral support, are neither too soft nor hard.

3) Dart is easy to control on soft surfaces at faster-than-normal speeds. Ride on rough surfaces is acceptable but may be improved with stiffer shocks for increased wheel control.

4) Viewed in silhouette, the Dart shows one of its few styling weaknesses: those too-small 13-inch wheels. With more rubber on the road, several of its braking problems would be eliminated.