

RALPH POOLE PHOTOS



*A Pointed Departure  
From Our Normal  
Testing Procedure*

ANY AUTOMOBILE TESTER worthy of his slipstick knows that he cannot permit himself to become emotional over his mounts. He must remain detached, objective and disinterested as he measures, senses and describes. However, as we first stood before the dominating prow of the Dodge Safari Super Sport and began sizing up its sandalwood-hued enormity for our initial impression, we felt the early stirrings of an unmistakable emotional response: abject fear.

Our uneasiness was not so much due to the fact that the WM-300 Power Wagon's headlights were navel-high to a tall Indian, that its bracket seats (they swung smartly forward on front-mounted hinges) were covered in durable, ever-popular olive drab, that it was the embodiment of certain spine-cracking military vehicles of less-than-fond memory, nor even that it was

fresh from disconcerting triumphs of salvation after the Los Angeles flood. Rather, it was because we knew this machine represented one of our too-often-presented theories come home—either to perch proudly on our shoulder like the eagle, or to hang soddenly around our neck like the accursed albatross.

The theory, often heard from car nuts like ourselves, is usually stated as, "A sports car is just a little car that handles like a truck: show me a truck and I'll show you a big sports car!" No question about it, we were faced with complete proof or denial—this was a truck among trucks.

The exterior styling (actually, with the top down *all* of the WM-300 was exterior) was undeniably exciting, though somewhat contradictory. The body designer's hand had laid on the vertical lines, flat planes and right an-

gles with lavish freedom, yet had cleverly softened the overall impact of his classically simple creativity with an occasional delicate styling touch—like that supplied by the graciously formed 8-in.-deep, 5-ft.-wide, 98-lb. front bumper. We felt that the flat-face cowl also delivered a rather exquisite artistic message, as did the two jolly 9 x 5-in. rear "bumperettes." Too, the flowing lines of the rear trailer hitch (or "pintle hook") were more than a little moving—especially so, we suppose, to trailers.

The designer had taken care to incorporate the modern trend toward fastback styling—we found the back of the WM-300 to be exactly as fast as the front.

The body workmanship of the Super Sport was as uncompromisingly forthright as its styling. While many current automobiles attempt to conceal every evidence of joinery and boltery, as though the marks of honest workmanship were somehow shameful, the Super Sport made no such pretense. We took much pleasure in tracing out the strong, high-beaded welds that held the body together, and nodded approvingly over the easy visibility and availability of nuts, bolts, hinges and wiring, as well as every other part of the vehicle.

At about this point in our inspection, we were struck by the sudden realization that if the Power Wagon ever should be somehow incapacitated (unthinkable!), it contains so much steel that it could be simply left where it was and mined on the spot—like the Mesabi Iron Range.

The shock absorbers, in particular, were fully and reassuringly visible under the front fenders, standing there at a defiant angle, thick, proud and obviously ready to turn the Grand Canyon into a mere rut. We felt that if the great San Francisco earthquake had been channeled through these dampers, it would have been subdued to a tremor.

With a growing awareness that this was a no-nonsense vehicle, we were not at all surprised to find that the engine compartment really was occupied by an engine, rather than being given over to such modern decadence as luggage stowage. The Super Sport's motivating force, however, turned out to be a 251-cu.-in. 6-cyl. engine, a development which we found a little distressing. Somehow we had expected to see a huge V-8 in such an obviously dynamic machine, and we found ourselves looking upon the 125-bhp 6 cyl. with somewhat the same amused condescension as one who has found a mouse on a treadmill connected to the propeller shaft of the USS Enterprise.

Our pity could not have been more completely misplaced. The two great equalizers turned out to be the 4-speed manual transmission and the transfer case. With the transmission in 1st and the transfer case in its low range, supplying power to all four wheels, we found that top speed was just 2.5 mph. However, after a few hours' experience over outrageous terrain, we became totally convinced that in low-low and given reasonable traction the Safari Super Sport could be driven right up the side of the Empire State Build-

ing—and at exactly 2.5 mph. In fact, it occasionally seemed to us that the WM-300 Power Wagon was not so much a vehicle as an elemental force of nature—never to be entirely tamed, and capable of almost infinite good or mischief.

One office wit called the Safari Super Sport, not without respect and affection, "the Flying Front Porch," and it was generally agreed by the staff that this particular Porch delivered more sensual pleasure than anything else on wheels—on 6.50 x 16 rims, that is, and to masochists.

The stimulating and stylish open-cab configuration of the Safari Super Sport had, as might be imagined, certain disadvantages. One of these was the fact that at the same time the driver was out in the fresh air, the fresh air was in upon him. Though delightful in pleasant weather, come rain, hail, or

even a chilly breeze, the heaterless cab of the Safari became Spartan City. One ameliorating effect, however, came from the flat and vertical windshield which, at over 5 mph, created a zone of relative comfort behind itself which was something like the eye of a hurricane; still, peaceful and surrounded by violence.

The windshield, incidentally, acted as the biggest rearview mirror in the world. Its huge flatness gave a complete and panoramic, if quivering, picture of all that lay behind the WM-300.

Traction, of course, is a necessity to a dreadnaught like the Super Sport, and during our automotive exertions it proved capable of almost incredible feats of G-R-I-Psmanship. As the Power Wagon's purveyor put it, "The 9.00-16 special 8-ply snow, mud and sand tires give you a definite feeling of security



# SAFARI

## SUPER SPORT

INTREPID TESTERS take time out to check front axle; co-driver notes the big-bore shockers.



EASY FILL gas tank (with quick-fill cap) is conveniently located behind right rear fender.



# SAFARI SS



**AGILE AS A mountain goat, the Safari SS fairly bounds over little rocks and rills. With strong suspension, leaps like this were commonplace and not harmful to our test car. Tires are max. traction 9.00-16 8-ply militaries, best suited to mud, flood, snow and other workaday situations.**



**HOISTING THE Armstrong-power top was little trouble, although it took the test crew nearly a whole cloudburst to do it. First, the various pieces of the substructure (left) must be pre-assembled, then (right) it is gently urged into its proper place. Result is draft-free enclosure.**

**GRADABILITY IS EXCELLENT** in both 2-wheel-drive and 4-wd. In 4-wd, with Grandma (low transfer) engaged, it seemed as if it would climb Kilimanjaro. Best-suited for the more rugged circuits, the Safari SS no doubt could distinguish itself in World Championship rallye events.



on or off the highway." We never had a moment's doubt. The WM-300 needed additional traction like Jean Paul Getty needs a credit card. Whether hammering, whining and thudding down the freeway at a brisk 50 mph (which felt like 100 mph), or doing the Irresistible Force bit at 2.5 mph (which felt like 2.5 mph) on a dirt slope just this side of vertical, the great rubber lugs of the 9.00-16s never ceased to bite, and thoroughly masticate, whatever portion of the landscape we fed to them.

One theory regarding the manner in which the Power Wagon moved along gained some currency during our tests. Briefly, and perhaps stated too simply, it was that the vehicle did *not* move about over the ground—it *simply stood still and pulled its destination toward it*. Our Mother Murphy's Car Testing Kit lacked both a radar set and the interurban-survey options, so we were unable to prove or disprove the theory, though it did seem to us that the distances between towns changed considerably when traversed in the Safari Super Sport.

Most drivers of the Dodge WM-300 reported that its rock-solid suspension actually seemed to have a degree of therapeutic value, though they agreed that its purchase for this purpose alone might be regarded by some as conspicuous consumption. A very few minutes at the helm always had a clearing effect on the eyes, ears, nose and throat, along with producing a rich tingling in the viscera which increased in intensity as it fanned out toward the extremities, where it finally became a violent shaking.

Testing of the WM-300 took place over a considerable period of time, over a fantastic variety of surfaces and was accomplished by a small band of men whose courage and devotion are almost beyond belief. Certain discrepancies of literary style will be noted in the following driving impressions, as they are a composite of hasty, often shaky—even tremulous—notes made by these several individuals. Among them were a beefy hot-rodder and a tweaked aficionado. We felt the reader would be best served by including this material without alteration and letting it present its own messages of excitement and/or fright.

To test the specimen at hand, we found it necessary first to attain the driver's seat, a position of some eminence and altitude. Dismissing as ridiculous some observers' suggestions that

climbing rope, pitons and ice axe might be helpful, we reached up, firmly grasped the lower edge of the steering wheel, placed one foot up on the running board, and nimbly scaled the side of the Super Sport.

Keeping in mind the old axiom never to look down from great heights, we shook off a slight dizziness, stuck the key in the ig-lock, jerked out the choke to thicken the soup, stamped the go-pedal twice to prime the bang-chambers, de-clutched to free up the power-train, snapped the crashbox into its center gate, spun the key to feed juice to the spark-tubes, then gave it an extra turn to rev the dynamo. The in-line mill coughed, hawked, spat, belched, grunted, strained, grumbled deep in its throat, and then began to bark out a savage, unrestrained song of power.

We suddenly realized that this was no golf cart. This mill was souped and beefed (sort of a mechanical consommé) to deliver big torque to the beefy cog-box, which gunned stepped-down power through the beefed-up transfer case, spun it into the beefy

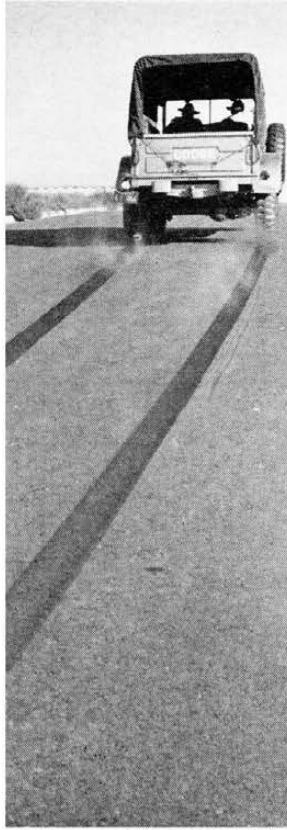
*"THERE JUST ain't no thrill, Charley, like pounding down the pike—engine roaring, gearbox whining, transfer case howling, steering jerking, rear seats banging and driver bouncing—flat-out at 50.2 mph!"*

—Tom McMolehill

propeller shaft, differential and axles, and poured power-beef into the beefed-up wheels and tires. We had already noted that the wheel nuts had good stud beef. Only a gourmet would have stewed over beef like that, so, feeling that we were well equipped with steer-power, we poured the charcoal to the 6-banger and herded her into the street. For one vagrant moment we felt like a drover rather than a driver.

Incidentally, during our tests, the tallest member of our staff found it impossible to drive the WM-300—not from a lack of headroom, which was unlimited (at least vertically), but due to the fact that the altitude brought on recurrent severe nosebleeds and general malaise, hardly conducive to spirited road testing, or even automobile testing, for that matter.

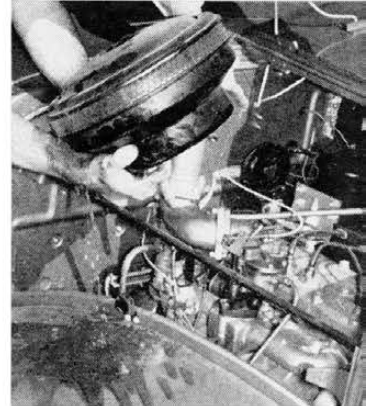
Acceleration proved pleasingly spirited in the lower gears, and we moved off in sporting fashion. The gear-change lever fell readily to hand, permitting us to begin rowing ourselves down the street, but the emergency brake handle was not quite so handy, requiring that the driver rest his forehead on the fascia to reach it, if his arm was less than 5 ft. long. The two trans-



**ACCELERATION AND BRAKING** characteristics were unbelievable. Power-mad power-wagon laid beautiful peel marks in 2-wd, but in 4-wd shortened the quarter-mile to  $\frac{3}{4}$ ! Monstrous brakes were heavy but effective, readily hauling the S-SS down to a quick stop, even from top speed!



**FRIENDLY NATIVE** supplied nutrients at local oasis where Safari SS created considerable comment from drivers of hopped, chopped, dropped and popped domestic vehicles.

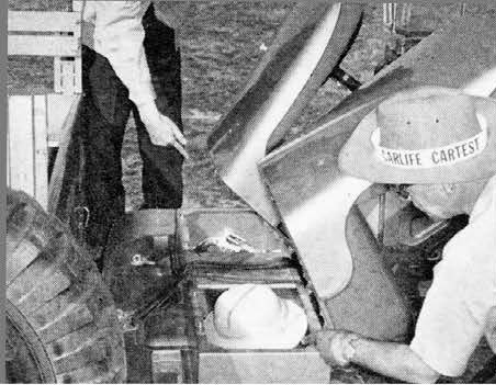


**FLAT-HEAD** mill had interesting method of keeping air clean, but jug needed hopping.

**USEFUL CAPACITY** of 2-plus-10 seating was helpfully demonstrated by a pack of natives. Note generous amount of leg and hip room, spacious head room.

**RADIO ANTENNA**, another bit of optional equipment, had an amazing range, although it was a bother to manipulate.





**HANDY LOCKERS** under bracket seats can hold a lot of miscellaneous equipment, such as these normal, miscellaneous test items.



**SHIFT LEVERS** were designed for the wear-and-tear of competitive work. Lower set of sticks stirs up the transfer case and front-wheel-drivers.



**PINTLE HOOK** option is handy hauling item, but rugged bumperettes are hard on cars behind during interurban parking maneuvers.

# SAFARI SS

fer-case operational levers fell readily to the right foot, though we nearly fell readily right off the seat once when our foot slipped.

It was rather easy to fault the syn-

chros, producing both expensive noises (including "graunch," "munch," "grack" and "\$\$\$\$\$") and a strong desire in ourselves to begin double-clutching and thus avoid the purchase of a new gearbox. This we did and soon found ourselves spinning along, hairy flatters, down the pike. At speed (a somewhat doubtful term in this case) the WM-300 turned out to be quite forgiving of driver error—it sim-

ply bludgeoned its way on through any difficult situation—but we turned out to be unforgiving of the WM-300; it was nearly impossible to heel-and-toe while downshifting, and this of course is unforgivable to the *pur sang* enthusiast.

The appurtenances of the driver's office were entirely satisfactory otherwise, however, with not an idiot light in sight, a full complement of instru-

**QUIET, COMFORTABLE** and handsome, the Safari SS looks just as much at home cruising the boulevard as it does smashing the rallye circuit. No slouch at either, it holds the road like a locomotive and corners as if on rails.





**TOOL BOX TEST** shows off acres of luggage space in Safari's trunk when occasional seats are folded against sides.



**GOOD TRACTION** was demonstrated when testers tackled the local swimming hole; no problems of excessive flotation were observed in this section.




**HOOKING UP THE** eighth wheel to assure accuracy of speedo calibrations and the acceleration runs. The natives were beginning to get a bit restless.

ments, and even instructions on car care ("Tire inflation pressures: highway, 45 lb.; cross country, 45 lb.; mud, sand or snow, 15 lb." and "Gasoline minimum octane No., 68"). To us this latter information was a dead giveaway that the engine had not been, as yet, tweaked.

Traction and roadholding were incredible, acceleration was almost instantaneous from 0-2.5 mph (the neck

business was cracking good at the company chiropractor's during test week) and the styling was traditional beyond belief—in short, the Dodge Safari Super Sport was indeed nothing less than a *king-sized sports car!* Our theory had been overwhelmingly vindicated!

One final message to non-Safari drivers: One day while motoring smoothly and silently down the boulevard you may gradually become aware

of a huffing, grunting, rattling and howling to the rear. At first, sheer terror will prevent use of the rear-view mirror, but eventually your eyes will be drawn irresistibly to the enormity of that great steel presence leaping and surging just behind your rear window. Above the ornamental ironwork of its monstrous grille will be the one word: "Dodge." Don't try to be a hero—do it. 

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



### 1964 DODGE Safari Super Sport

#### SPECIFICATIONS

List price	.....\$3140
Price, as tested	.....4097
Curb weight, lb	.....4965
Test weight	.....5315
distribution, %	.....54.6/45.4
Tire size (Military 8-ply)	.....9.00-16
Tire capacity, lb	.....@ 45 psi 9200
Brake swept area sq. in	.....528
Engine type	.....IL-6, sv
Bore & stroke	.....3.44 x 4.50
Displacement, cu. in	.....251
Compression ratio	.....7.1
Carburetion	.....1 x 1
Bhp @ rpm	.....125 @ 3600
equivalent mph	.....64
Torque, lb-ft	.....216 @ 1200
equivalent mph	.....21

#### EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Special body, special paint, front tow hook, bumperettes, pintle hook, convertible top, kidney belts.

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	.....126.0
Tread, f and r	.....64.8
Overall length, in	.....197.9
width	.....77.8
height	.....80.5
equivalent vol., cu. ft	.....718
Frontal area, sq. ft	.....34.8
Ground clearance, in.	.....15.5
Steering ratio, o/a	.....n.a.
turns, lock to lock	.....5.5
turning circle, ft. (est.)	.....45.0
Hip room, front	.....2 x 19.5
Hip room, rear	.....2 v 93.5
Pedal to seat back, max.	.....40.0
Floor to ground	.....28
Luggage vol, cu. ft	.....n.a.
Fuel tank capacity, gal	.....20.0

#### GEAR RATIOS

4th (1.00) overall	.....5.83
3rd (1.65)	.....9.64
2nd (3.42)	.....19.9
1st (15.3)	.....89.3

#### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (2800), mph	.....50.2
Shifts, @ mph (manual)	.....7.0
3rd (2800)	.....27
2nd (2800)	.....14
1st (2800)	.....3

#### ACCELERATION

0-10 mph, sec	.....2.8
0-20	.....7.0
0-30	.....13.4
0-40	.....23.2
0-50	.....40.2
0-80	.....n.a.
0-100	.....n.a.
Standing 1/4 mile, sec	.....29.3
speed at end, mph	.....45

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg	.....6-10
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#### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

10 mph, actual	.....10
20 mph	.....22
40 mph	.....44

#### CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	.....42.4
Cu ft/ton mile	.....97.3
Mph/1000 rpm	.....17.9
Engine revs/mile	.....334.0
Piston travel, ft/mile	.....2660
Car Life wear index	.....94.0

#### PULLING POWER

40 mph, (4th) max. gradient, %	.....2.0
20	.....(3rd) 10.0
10	.....(2nd) 12.6
Total drag at 30 mph, lb	.....150

