



PALOMINO PICKUP'S CORNERING ABILITY IS ON A PAR WITH SPORTS CARS', WHILE RIDE COMES NEAR RIVALING MOST PASSENGER VEHICLES'.

DODGE Palomino **SPORT PICKUP**

by Carl Isica

THERE'S A BRAND-NEW ONE from Dodge that'll appeal to the suburban family in an unusual way. They call it the Sport Pickup—a jazzy, clean-lined, hopped-up truck for freeway commuting or highway towing. It turns out to be a refreshing approach to an old design.

Pickups have climbed fantastically in popularity. Over a million of them now ply the streets of California, for instance. Nationwide, the tally is rocketing. Biggest influence in pickup sales stems from sportsmen. Light trucks have evolved to a point where they're less bouncy and far more attractive. Pickups offer a lot for the money, as millions of buyers have discovered these past few years.

Dodge's new Palomino, as ours was called, is a stimulating change. Gone are the boxy lines. Racy styling, simulated hood louvers, even black-and-white striping are standard equipment.

Open the door, and the potential buyer gets a real jolt. No park bench in this cab. Plush black vinyl bucket seats grace the cockpit, separated by a chromed center console. Handsome floor carpeting, pushbutton transmission selector, dual arm rests, and dual sun visors make this truck a real stopper. The luxury treatment even extends to the fuel tank, partially hidden behind the bucket seats. In the Sport Pickup, tasteful fabrics cover the tank area and blend with rugs and buckets in one attractive cab package.

Viewed from the side, Dodge's sport truck is a low-silhouette, smartly styled unit, with an eight-foot bed and whitewall tires. Grille, roof molding, and front bumper are chromed. In short, it's hard to think of the Dodge Sport as a truck. Interior comfort matches that of many sedans. The bucket seats, for example, are right off Dart GT production lines.

Under the hood, our test truck had the 202-hp "318" V-8. For all-out performance—either cruising or towing a trailer—Dodge offers the 413-cubic-inch engine, with 470 pounds-feet of torque and 360 hp. Other full-sized trucks will now have to offer larger engines for those who demand power in a light truck. It's a change long overdue.

Dodge's decision to make this new sports model pickup was probably the result of considering the total market. In this one unit, you get the following features: 1) A rugged, heavy-duty truck for hauling coach campers. 2) Plush, comfortable cab for the most demanding twosome. 3) Tasteful styling—it'll be at home in any neighborhood. 4) Power and performance to suit any lead-foot driver.

One of the most noticeable features is the extra leg- and knee room in the cab. The buckets are firm but comfortable. The Palomino's road feel is solid, like a sport car. One annoying factor, though, is the high steering wheel. In view of the large windshield area and ample overhead space, the bucket seats could be raised a full two inches to improve driving position.



Hood louvers, chrome grille, and black racing stripes make up standard trim items, with the eight-foot pickup bed optional.



Interior uses Dart GT bucket seats and console, with carpets covering floor and gas tank. Steering wheel could be lower.

(BELOW) ENGINE CHOICES INCLUDE SLANT SIX, "318" AND "413" V-8s. AUTOMATIC, THREE- OR FOUR-SPEED GEARBOXES ARE OFFERED.



Acceleration, even with the rather conservative (by Dodge standards) 318-cubic-inch engine, wasn't just brisk—it was pleasantly alarming. Tires chirped at the shift from LOW to SECOND even on normal starts. The three-speed automatic in our test truck wound out as far as we wanted to take it, thanks to the dandy lock-in feature. All we had to do was punch and lock the 1 or 2 range buttons. But around town, there was no need for long-winded runs. DRIVE range provides runaway performance. Three-speed and four-speed manual boxes are also available, as is a Slant Six engine.

Stop-and-go driving revealed good traction. Though we made no timed runs, acceleration seemed on a par with a very light sedan equipped with a healthy V-8. Curb weight of this sport truck wasn't given, but tracking and cornering reflect the same lightness noted in small, sporty coupes.

The pickup draws attention everywhere. The jazzy striping, louvered hood, and tire-screaming starts aren't for the faint-hearted. It's different, it's fun to drive, and not at all fatiguing on long hauls. Shock absorbers front and rear, 7.10 x 15 tires, and extra cab insulation against heat and noise make this unit unusually smooth.

Rough-road testing showed the sound-proofing to be good. But with windows rolled up, we collected plenty of dust in the cab.

Wheelbase of this Dodge Sport Pickup is 122 inches. Our test truck had the eight-foot bed, called the Sweptline model. Axle ratio was 3.91 to 1, with anti-spin differential. Capacity of the front axle was 2500 pounds; the rear axle, 3600 pounds. Brake lining area of 293.2 inches provides plenty of stop for towing a boat or plying the freeways.

The sport truck is available in either half- or three-quarter-ton models. For camper hauling, the larger unit would be preferable. For all-around sporting use, we'd prefer the half-ton model.

We couldn't help wondering about the performance potential of this machine. Fitted with the wild 413-cubic-inch engine (developing 470 pounds-feet of torque at 3200 rpm), you can get a truck powerful enough to tow a freight car—or lift eyebrows at drag strips. The "413" develops 360 hp at 4800 rpm in the single-four-barrel-carburetor version. Coupled with the light body, heavy-duty suspension components, and four-speed optional floorshift, the Palomino offers a maverick choice.

Whether it's towing a travel trailer or hauling a Little League ball team, this new model will give owners plenty of action. There's currently no competing pickup offering the power and comfort options matching Dodge's new model.