

DODGE CHARGER



The Dodge Charger is being heralded as an "all-new" car. Although less than that, it is still a lot newer than some others with restyled bodies.

A little over two years ago, Dodge started showing a special one-of-a-kind show car called the Charger II. This experimental prototype had a full-width grille, disappearing headlights and a long, sloping fastback roofline that ended in pointed rear fenders that stuck out some six to eight inches beyond the rear deck. The automobile that evolved from it is as much like a prototype show car as a production model could possibly be.

Bill Brownlee, Dodge's chief stylist and Burt Bouwkamp, chief engineer and product-planning manager had a lot to do with it and the Charger reflects their outlook, as well it should. Brownlee is a young man who likes the outdoors. One of his favorite hobbies is riding motorcycles. He likes bikes that are light, responsive and have maximum performance; these characteristics are reflected in his Charger. He also likes mechanical things that are functional as well as being beautiful.

If Dodge employees had been allowed to compete in a recent "Press Gymkhana" held to introduce the Charger to West Coast automotive writers, Burt Bouwkamp would have won first prize. As it tran-

spired they didn't allow his time around the course to count so managing editor, Dick Brashear took top honors. But Burt is a first rate driver and can handle a wheel with the best. He knows what he wants in an automobile and, as product planner, he usually gets it.

These are two men, among many responsible for the Dodge Charger. Although it's not a completely new automobile; (it shares many components with the popular Coronet, an already good automobile). It has its share of innovations and should have a wide appeal in the much sought after Specialty car market.

WHERE IT FITS

The Charger is squared off against the Mustang GT, Fairlane GT and GTA, Comet Cyclone and all the GM Things, (4-4-2, Skylark GS, Chevelle SS, and Pontiac GTO). Dodge dealers are biting off a big chunk and comparing it with such specialty cars as the Riviera, Thunderbird, and Toronado in their local newspaper ads. In the realm of yes or no comparisons of maximum horsepower, transmission options, torsion bar suspension, unibody construction, safety rim wheels, battery-saving alternator and 5-year/50,000-mile warranty, only the Mustang has more than one

"yes" answer. Of course this is what's called selective reasoning, but it does show where dealers are setting their sights and the Charger is priced way below all cars mentioned except the Mustang.

Why, in this specialty car field would prospective buyers pick a Charger over the others? Its base price of \$3146.00 F.O.B. Detroit places it competitively in the market, but if you want power steering, windows and brakes, you'll have to up that to \$3372.00. Air conditioning will bump the price another \$338.00. And that price is with the standard 318 cubic-inch V-8 engine and standard 3-speed manual transmission. Albeit an all-new, all synchromesh unit. For the Chrysler 4-speed manual or Torqueflite, you'll have to pay even more out of the old tin can you've got buried in the back yard.

WHAT IT HAS

One thing Charger has, (or more correctly, will have soon) is the much touted 426 cubic inch Hemi-head V-8 that claims a modest 425 horsepower. The ROAD TEST staff feel that this is a bit much for the average car buyer, even in this specialty car idiom. Unless you just have to blow off every thing else on the road; and have no doubts that the Hemi will do just that, you'll be much happier with Dodge's

other choices; which are the 361 265 hp and 383 325 hp cubic inch V-8s.

We doubt that many buyers will order the 318 or the 426 engines. The 426 Hemi has oodles of power, but it's all at the high end, right along with the torque. Keeping the revs up is mandatory and this kind of driving just isn't going to lend itself to stop and go conditions. The "GO" boys will, however, love it.

As sure as taxes, the 361 and the 383 will be the engine you'll see most often when a Charger's hood is raised. But the great image of the Hemi shines overhead, regardless of what lies under the hood.

By the same token we probably won't see more than a handful of Chargers with the standard 3-speed manual transmission; it just isn't that kind of car. Most buyers won't think twice before ordering the optional 4-speed manual gearbox at \$184.00 or Chrysler's excellent Torqueflite automatic for \$206.00 extra. Dodge's 4-speed manual transmission is both ahead of, and behind those offered by the competition. In strength, positive feel and quietness, it's ahead. Ford and GM's boxes tend to be weaker and to loosen up after hard use in the area of linkage. On the other hand, theirs shift a bit easier and have a shorter throw. We rate the Dodge unit as about equal in the overall picture.



Flow-through fresh air system uses adjustable front vents and slot under deck lid for entry and exit. Rubber flaps cover holes in deck frame.

Now, when it comes to automatics, there isn't a finer, more positive, more responsive, or smoother unit on the market. It shifts exactly at the right time, gives perfect engine-to-wheel coordination on exact command from the throttle and has very little slippage.

The Charger's suspension system is the well-proven Dodge configuration of torsion bars in front and leaf springs at the rear. Even though there's a stiffer suspension package offered as an option, the ROAD TEST staff can, for once, recommend the standard suspension for almost any kind of driving.

The standard suspension Charger is perfectly predictable in all situations, at all speeds and its spring balance is nearly perfect. In corners it has a lot of body roll, but this has little effect on its predictable handling characteristics. It does nothing out of the ordinary when pressed hard in turns and gives the driver a feeling of sureness and stability. At the same time, there isn't too much harshness in the ride. It is quite comfor-



Novel interior has full-length console over driveshaft tunnel, individual seats which fold down for additional luggage space. Interior communicates with trunk.

table over most any surface.

Suspension action during braking is notable without much nose-dive and with good control as is shown with our recorded deceleration rate of 26 ft./sec.²

The 383 cubic inch, automatic transmission Charger tips the scales at 3990 pounds. With 2170 pounds of this on the front wheels and 1820 pounds over the rear for a 54.5/45.5 weight distribution. When compared with the 4110-pound Chevrolet Caprice that puts 2330 pounds of its weight over the front wheels (57/43) the Charger looks well-balanced by comparison.

The Charger standard brakes are drums of ten-inch diameter with 2½-inch width shoes which give it a total swept area of 314 square inches. Somewhat ahead of cars of similar weight and size in lining area the Charger also profits



Handling of Charger is notable for vehicle in this class. Stiffer suspension than stock model (shown) is available but is not considered mandatory. Deceleration rate and braking attitude rate "good." Larger (7.75) tires are recommended to improve overall character.



Full-circle instruments are used in Charger. Tachometer, which can be read easily, oil pressure gage and ammeter are included.



Peak deceleration rate of 28 ft./sec.² was recorded during brake tests. Big drum brakes are used on standard models, larger Chrysler brakes will be fitted to 426 cubic inch "Hemi" model.

by the extra cooling benefits of its brake drum location. Lots of cooling air gets to these units and they are acceptable brakes—for drums. A peak stopping rate of 28 ft./sec.² was hit and would have been better with more rubber on the ground. Brake fade wasn't a factor and it isn't often we can say this. Optional 7.75 x 14 tires would have been superior to the 7.35 x 14 tires that are standard.

Dodge is working hard to come up with a set of optional disc brakes for the front end of their intermediates; Coronets and Chargers. Since discs are available on Darts and full-sized Dodges, it shouldn't be long before they're offered on the more popular Coronets. Hemi-engined Chargers will come with the extra-large Chrysler or "Police" brakes in addition to the reinforced heavy-duty drive train and suspension that comes standard with the Hemi engine. Metallic linings are extra-cost options.

You can't get disc brakes on any GM Thing except the Corvette, but the Mustangs, Marlins, Barracudas and Thunderbirds have them either as options or, in the T-Bird's case, as standard equipment.

INTERIOR APPOINTMENTS

When it comes to utility, the Charger stands alone. It sits on a longer (117-inch), wheelbase than any of the other fastbacks and has a bigger load-carrying capacity and more room for stuff.

Each of its twin rear bucket seats will fold down for loading such trivia as skis, surfboards or extra-bulky items, and its extra length means you can get



Bucket seats in Charger appeal to staff because of maximum thigh support. Rear seats are identical to front rate high. Relationship of brake pedal to throttle is proper for quick transfer of foot. Clutch release and engagement is exceptionally smooth, shift lever is long, 4-speed action is firmer than other transmissions.

that expensive sporting equipment inside, and lock it up. If you're carrying extra-long objects like surfboards, one passenger can still ride behind the driver with the bulky objects occupying the other side of the car. Unlike the Barracuda, the Charger doesn't have a rail that keeps luggage from sliding forward, but the bolsters of the carpeted rear seatbacks serve to keep things from sliding too far forward.

So, the Charger can either carry two people and lots of luggage or four people and a little less. Which-ever way you go you can surely "take it with you" in a Charger, especially if your sporting interests run toward skiing or surfing, or, perhaps you just like a car that you can stretch out and sleep in if the mood moves you.

Another plus in the Charger's favor is its use of Chrysler's unit-body construction. The reinforced body structure around that big rear window helps make it a rattle-free automobile. You can also expect less cowl shake, hood vibration, but somewhat more road noise than GM cars with their separate body-frame construction.

Another Charger feature is its interior ventilation system. Front vents pressurized the cabin and stale

air exits through small openings covered by rubber flaps, in the trunk partition and a vent under the deck lid. The trunk is sealed by a rubber extrusion and has a fold-down "security panel." This lets owners either hide some smaller items from sight or open the entire area by folding the panel down for more storage room in the fully carpeted area immediately behind the rear seats.

When it comes to interior room the Charger is a cut above its competition. Four people ride comfortably in four bucket seats with adequate head, leg and hip room in back and more than enough in front. Both pairs of seats are separated by consoles.

The Charger's dash is in keeping with its sporty nature. It is completely different from the standard Coronets with four, big, round chrome trimmed dials right in front of the driver. A tachometer, right where you can see and use it, is standard. Instrumentation isn't perfect, but it isn't the worst—especially at night when the numerals light up on tach and speedometer and the bright red pointers show against a blue glow of numbers.

That's when the disappearing headlights come out too. An over-riding switch is provided for those who



Glove compartment in Charger is above average in size. Rear seat headroom is adequate, fastback gives impression of much more space. Spare is hidden beneath neatly carpeted trunk floor.

want to show their lenses all the time. Should either, or both of the rotating electric motors fail for some reason you can manually lock the headlights in open position by loosening the screws on the motor mounting straps and do the job by hand.

Chargers use a new one-piece headliner of molded fiberglass panel that has improved sound-deadening qualities. Scratch and soil-resistant the material is easily cleaned with soap and water. This shows good thinking in product planning since this body style lends itself to carrying things much more so than standard sedans and is more likely to be subjected to gouges and scratches on the headliner.

When it comes to visibility the fastback design has inherent weak points; mainly the blind spot created by the right-hand panel behind the right rear window. A standard outside rear view mirror helps out on the left side. The rear window goes all the way across the car, sweeping up slightly on each side and incurs a minimum rear vision problem for this type body configuration. However, objects placed behind the rear seats readily reflect in the almost flat backlight window and make it difficult to see through. A rear window defroster is an extra-cost option on the Charger.

HOW DOES IT RATE?

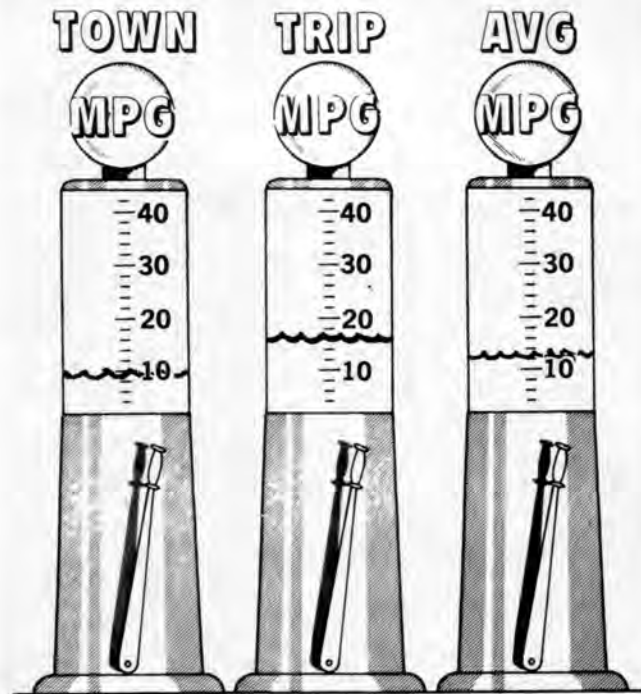
The ROAD TEST staff feels that the Charger represents a better than average buy when compared to what the competition has to offer. Its extremely wide

range of engines from 230 hp, 318 V-8 to 425 hp Hemi-head and its three choices of transmissions plus a wide variety of rear axle ratios help lend it to the specialty car buyer with performance uppermost in his mind.

It is still a Coronet, but its unusual front and rear-end treatment sets it apart. Evolving from the pre-war fastback and torpedo style schools, the Charger concept of automotive design combines utility with a sporting flavor. A well-balanced automobile, the Charger handles in a predictable manner and has better than average brakes with stronger options in the offing. Its trunk opening is larger and more useful than that of Marlin and its inside dimensions and carrying space "one-up" the Barracuda and Mustang fastbacks in both passenger comfort and utility. Thus far GM intermediates have no ammunition to fight back with and still stick to their half-fastback design with a trunk and a back seat, but no attempt to combine the two.

Ford is supposed to have a fastback in the offing, but it looks like the Charger has the jump on the market.

The Charger concept is one designed by men of action for others from the same mold. Although it isn't named after an animal or race course where it will never compete, the Charger is setting the stage for the competition as the first of the intermediate fastbacks. At a total price of around \$3500.00 for the average unit, it represents a good selection.



Car's service card, similar to credit card, is placed in engine compartment pocket for safe-keeping.

GENERAL SPECIFICATIONS

Wheel base 117
 O. A. Length 203.5
 Width 75.3
 Height 53
 Ground clearance 5.2
 Curb weight 3380
 Weight dist. 55/45

Brake type drum
 Swept area, sq. in. 314
 Tire size 735 x 14
 Steering, turns
 Manual 5.4
 Power 3.5
 Turning circle 44'

Clutch dia. 10.5
 Std. ratios
 4th
 3rd 1.00:1
 2nd 1.83:1
 1st 3.02:1
 Diff. ratio 2.94:1

ENGINE

Type (426) V-8 Hemi
 Bore 4.25
 Stroke 3.75
 Disp. cu. in. 426
 Comp. ratio 10.25
 BHP @ rpm 425/5000
 Torque @ rpm 490/4000

OPTIONAL TRANS.

4th 1.00:1
 3rd 1.39:1
 2nd 1.91:1
 1st 2.66:1

AUTOMATIC

3rd range 1.00:1
 2nd range 1.45:1
 1st range 2.45:1

ENGINE

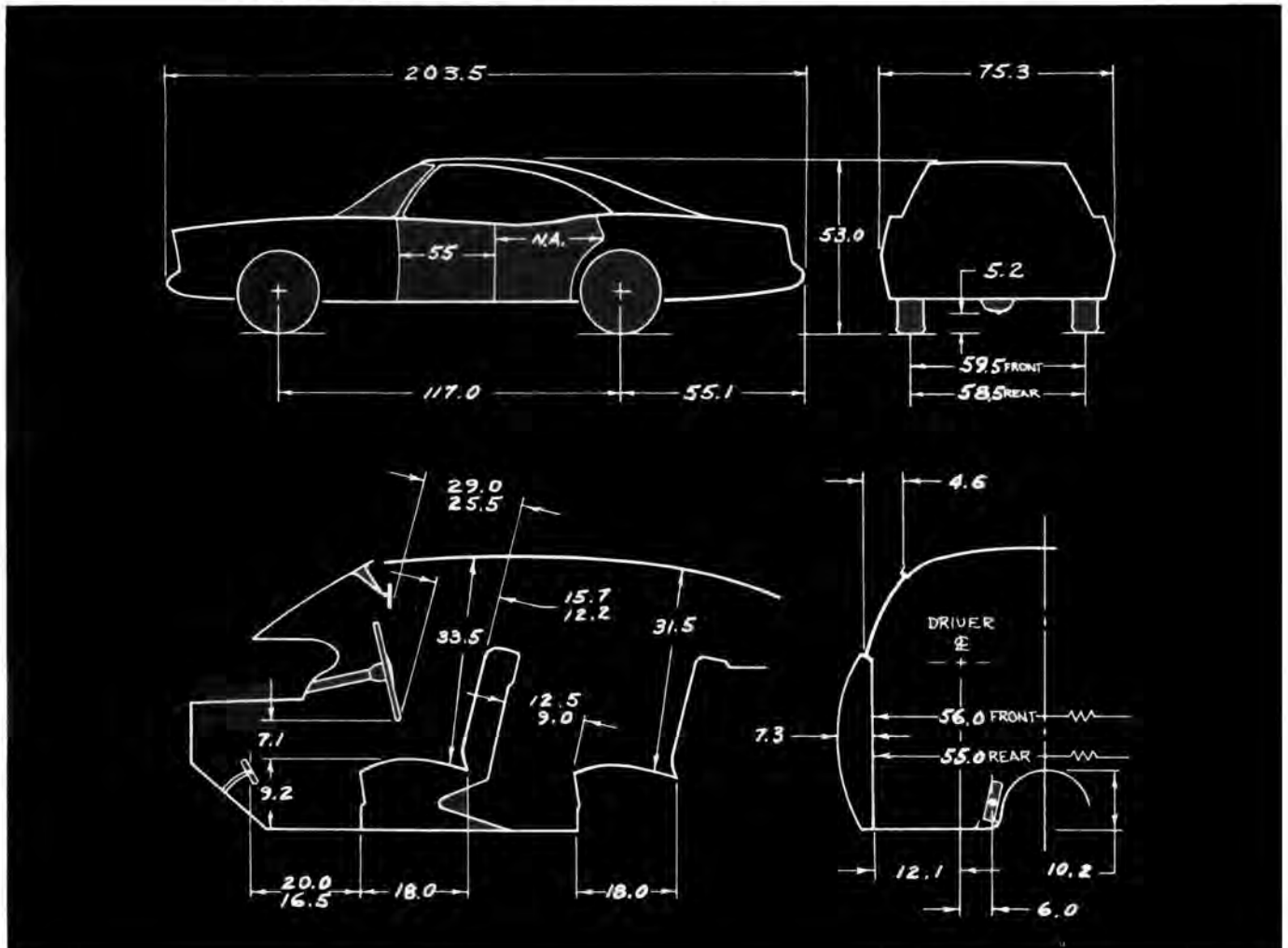
Type (383) V-8 ohv
 Bore 4.25
 Stroke 3.38
 Disp. cu. in. 383
 Comp. ratio 10.0
 BHP @ rpm 325/4800
 Torque @ rpm 425/2800

ENGINE

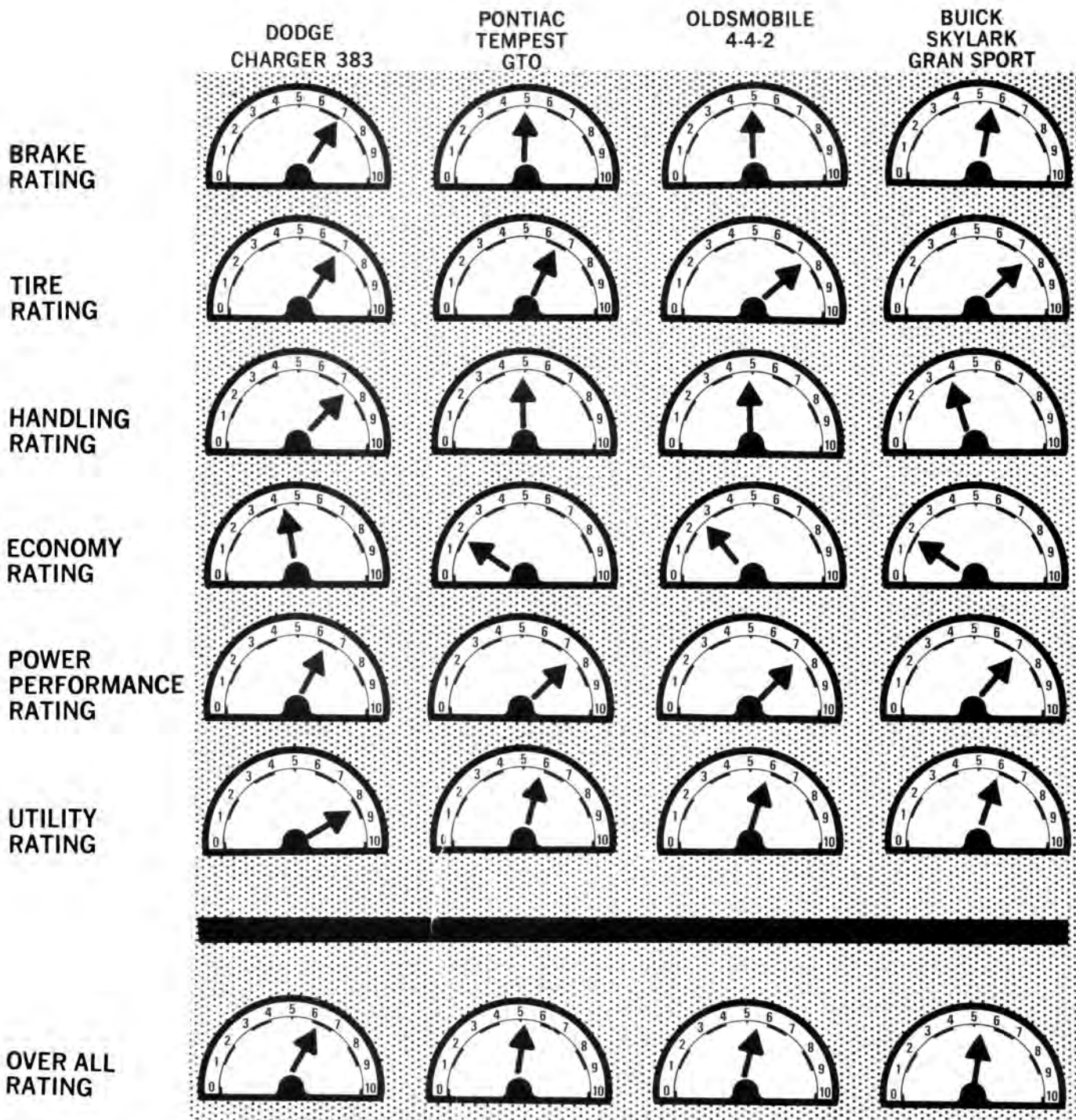
Type (318) V-8 ohv
 Bore 3.91
 Stroke 3.31
 Disp. cu. in. 318
 Comp. ratio 9.0
 BHP @ rpm 230/4400
 Torque @ rpm 340/2400

ENGINE

Type (361) V-8 ohv
 Bore 4.12
 Stroke 3.38
 Disp. cu. in. 361
 Comp. ratio 9.0
 BHP @ rpm 265/4400
 Torque @ rpm 380/2400



HOW THEY COMPARE



* SEE PAGE 3 FOR EXPLANATION OF ROAD TEST RATINGS.