



PHOTO BY GORDON CHITTENDEN

Best Prestige Car

CHRYSLER 300

ONE MEMBER of the staff owned a Chrysler 300 back when they came with letters and special engines. The prospect of testing a 1969 Chrysler 300, now merely another nameplate in the line-up, did not cause him any joy. Just another car, he grumbled. They don't make 'em like they used to.

He was wrong. In the sense that the 300 no longer has special bodywork, nor can be advertised as the most powerful of any production car, the model is no longer the corporation's performance offering. The Hemi still strikes terror into the hearts of the opposition, but it goes into lighter bodies. Suspension development has squashed the dogma that big cars hold the road better than light cars. There are no longer any reasons to make the big car also serve as the enthusiast

car, and no maker chooses to anymore. But when the 300 became a prestige car, the high-performance inheritance remained. We found this out during a group comparison test, with the 300 and three other cars aimed at the buyer looking for big-car space and a nameplate that shows he's willing to pay for the extras.

All four cars were equipped for this market, with big engines, automatic transmissions, power everything. In the 300's case, this meant the 440-cid V-8 and Chrysler's basic option group of power brakes, power steering, TorqueFlite and AM/FM radio. The basic option means that the cars come that way unless the buyer says not to, which is why the radio is in there.

All four of the cars did what they were supposed to do. They all have sort of a massive elegance, and lots of

space in cockpit and trunk. (We didn't know it at the time, but a statistical survey of all makes later in the year showed that the Chrysler has the most space of any car sold in this country.) All four cars had enough power to propel the bulk that comes with size, and gearing and insulation to quiet the power. No problems here at all. Anybody shopping for a prestige car that served only as a prestige car can find one behind several nameplates.

The 300 wasn't the best in the braking department. It was a matter of options. Chrysler offers front discs, as all the manufacturers do, but the test car didn't happen to have them. The 300's brakes earned it only a rating of fair in that department. That didn't keep the car from being the best, because stopping a big car is hard for everybody. Even the Marquis

in the group, with discs and from a maker that is the best brake builder in the U.S., also had a fair rating. Of the four Prestige cars, the Buick Wildcat stopped quickest. It was the lightest in the group, which told us something.

The 300 won again on the handling circuit. Big as it was, it rounded the 40-mph family-car corner at target speed, as exciting to watch as a clothes dryer. Chrysler Corp. seems to know front suspension secrets. With close to the same weight distribution and ride rates as the other cars, it answered the steering wheel while the others mushed toward the outside of the curve. The strain on the heavy Marquis was such that the outside front hubcap was flipped into the weeds every time the car went 'round.

The interiors of the four cars were similar. As a staff, we resent warning lights telling us what we already know, and designs that didn't take people into account. We had a few rude gibes at the Marquis' lights and the Oldsmobile's habit of pinching the driver in the ashtray, and we like the Buick's rear window defogger. Not much to choose from here. Buyers of the higher priced cars have a weakness for gadgets, and the makers indulge it. Possibly Chrysler's speed-control mechanism wasn't derided because none of our test cars had it.

Chrysler issued a new body for the big cars in 1969. It hasn't had the success that was hoped for, but the fresh design gave the engineers a chance to place controls, seats, etc., where they should be. The switches could be deciphered at a glance, and moving the seat didn't put the driver out of the range of the rearview mirror. Once again, a sad comment on design. Chrysler gets points for doing the obvious because the Marquis designers forgot to do the obvious.

All the numbers and statistics don't make the case for the 300. We were reduced, at the end of the test, to emotion. We plain liked the car. If one car was needed, and four were available, the Chrysler was picked. The solid ride, the responsive wheel, the logical controls, the combination of minor items and good basic design made the car into a driver's car, without taking away any creature comfort. The Chrysler 300 boomed down the beach a long time ago, but it still has Daytona sand in its shoes.

SPECIFICATIONS

Wheelbase, in.....	124	Brakes: Power drums front and rear.	
Overall length, in.....	225	dia. x width, F/R.....	11 x 3/11 x 2.5
width.....	79	total swept area, sq. in.....	380
height.....	55	Engine: V-8	
No. of passengers.....	6	Bore x stroke, in.....	4.32 x 3.75
Price, basic.....	\$4054	Displacement, cu. in.....	440
as tested.....	\$5429	Compression ratio.....	10.1:1
Frame type: Unitized		Rated bhp @ rpm.....	350 @ 4400
Front suspension: Independent by unequal A-arms, torsion bars, anti-roll bar.		Transmission: Three-speed automatic with torque converter.	
Rear suspension: Live axle with leaf springs.		Gear ratio 3rd (1.00:1).....	overall 3.23:1
Steering: Recirculating ball with integral power assist.		2nd (1.45:1).....	4.68:1
overall ratio.....	19:1	1st (2.45:1).....	7.91:1
turns, lock to lock.....	3.5	Lb./bhp (test weight).....	13.6
turning circle, ft. curb-curb.....	27.4	Mph/1000 rpm (high gear).....	25.4
Curb weight.....	4450	Engine revs/mile (60 mph).....	2365
Tires: Goodyear Polyglas.....	J78-15	Piston travel, ft./mile.....	1480
		CAR LIFE Wear Index.....	35

ROAD TEST RESULTS

Speedometer reading @ 30 mph.....	27.8	Passing, 30-70 mph, sec.....	7.4
Speedometer reading @ 60 mph.....	56.4	Braking: Maximum deceleration rate	
Top Speed (4700).....	119	ft./sec./sec.....	24
Acceleration 0-30 mph, sec.....	3.4	No. of stops from 80 mph (at 60-sec. intervals) before 20% loss in deceleration rate.....	n.a.
0-40 mph.....	4.7	Control loss: None.	
0-50 mph.....	6.5	performance.....	fair
0-60 mph.....	8.5	Fuel consumption under test conditions,	
0-70 mph.....	10.8	mpg.....	10.9
0-80 mph.....	13.8	Normal cond., mpg.....	11-15
Standing ¼ mile, sec.....	16.1		
Speed at erd, mph.....	86.3		