

THE BEST CARS OF 1969



PHOTO BY GORDON CHITTENDEN

Parent Chrysler Corp. redesigned its discs for the 1969 model year, with the aim of simplifying the system and making it easier to manufacture the discs in quantity should the day come that discs in front are standard equipment. We panned several run-of-the-assembly line models this year because the drums are no longer enough. The Super Bee with discs was fine. A deceleration rate of 30 ft./sec./sec. on the first stop, and slight fade from the drums in back. More pedal pressure with each stop kept the rate from falling below 26.

The Bee's instrument panel has the mechanically inclined driver in mind. There's a big tachometer, albeit everything except the numbers and the tip of the pointer are hidden behind the clock, and a whole row of gauges for temperature and pressure. The water temperature gauge even had numbers on it. That showed faith in the buyer we decided; the operating temperature of the engine was raised for 1969, and Dodge is more willing

than most to let the driver know that 190° is the normal figure.

There are buyers who aren't really concerned with transportation. They want more go than even the basic Supercar has. Dodge came through for them, this year, with the Six Pack, the 440-cid V-8 and triple carburetors, still in Super Bee wrappings. The factory hotrod treatment put the Six Pack into SuperSupercar country, with quarter-mile runs of 13.8 sec. With its fiberglass hood, air scoop and flaming letters on the scoop to make sure everybody knows what's under the skin, the Six Pack isn't a family car.

But it's still a budget Supercar, and we've included the Six Pack in the Super Bee award. All the makers are getting into the act, with speed-shop stuff direct from the factory. The guy who wants to rule at grudge night will be hard pressed to find a better way to spend \$500. And the Six Pack has more than speed. It handles superbly. This was how testers described it: "A 3800-lb., 117-in. wheelbase slalom car."

Best Budget Supercar

DODGE SUPER BEE

THE DESCRIPTION of the Dodge Super Bee defines the budget Supercar class at the same time: an Intermediate coupe, with plain interior and trim, but with the performance engine. The budget Supercar is supposed to go, and the money that might have gone for the flossy insides or spangled taillights is diverted, for maybe a pair of slicks.

The Super Bee is a plain coupe, with stripes to clue the in-group. Base engine is the 383-cid V-8, rather small for a Supercar these days, but it gets the 440 heads and other neat things. It's rated at 335 bhp, and that's probably only a slight exaggeration. The first test car had a whopping sticker for its class, but most of that was for non-performance items like an AM/FM radio and seats shifted by electric

motors. The important bits, like front disc brakes at \$49, and a combined handling package, big radiator, 3.91:1 gears and a limited-slip differential for \$102, are within reason. The automatic transmission was a definite bargain. The stock box is a four-speed. It says standard on the sticker, but it does cost the factory something to put it in. So they adjust, by pricing the automatic at \$39.

The test 383 Bee made it into the Supercar class easily, with an E.T. of 14.73 sec. Remember, the first of the current Hemis CAR LIFE tested ran a 14.5. The standard engine has come a long way. The tires, gears and transmission suited the car well. It came off the line with a big leap and just a trace of tire smoke. The TorqueFlite shifted on cue, and the engine was

wound to its rated peak just as the car cleared the end of the traps. So it does what it's supposed to do.

The extras show up in two areas. The 383 isn't an engine swap. The factory has been putting it into mid-size cars for as long as they've had the engine and the model. The Bee is Dodge's already-good car made quicker. By not adding a heavier engine, and by using a relatively long wheelbase, the designers didn't have a weight imbalance to cope with. On the handling circuit, the Bee was a budget Charger. It has the same basic suspension, improved with the same skilled selection of spring and shock rates. The Bee developed slight understeer, quickly switched to neutral with judicious application of power. The fast, light steering made corrections with a snap

of the wrist. At high speed on the test track, the Bee was fun. Just cruising on the highway, particularly a road with hills and curves, it was more fun, because the speedy response and high cornering power could be used, without alarming the passengers (read wives and children).

That's the other advantage. The test car had bench seats, and room for six people. With the mild engine, automatic transmission and power-assisted brakes and steering, it became a family car. The testers used it that way, and nobody complained. Aside from a few children who read the right magazines, the families didn't know they were in a car built and priced for the young man whose thoughts have turned to the lights at the dragstrip. This may not be what the factory had in mind when it specified the Bee, but it would work: Rather than buy the economy engine and appearance groups No. 3, 4 and 5, the man with people to take with him can pick a budget Charger. Not quite as fast or distinctive, but the two cars are obviously from the same factory, and it's a factory that obviously builds cars for enthusiasts.

The brakes, options though they were, belong on a performance car.

SPECIFICATIONS

Wheelbase, in.....	117.0	Brakes: Disc front/drum rear	
Overall length, in.....	206.6	dia. x width, F/R.....	11.0 x 2.0/ 11.0 x 2.50
width.....	76.7	total swept area, sq. in.....	234.1
height.....	53.1	Engine: V-8	
No. of passengers.....	6	Bore x stroke, in.....	4.25 x 3.38
Price, basic.....	\$3121	Displacement, cu. in.....	383
as tested.....	\$4036	Compression ratio.....	10.0:1
Frame type: Unitized.		Rated bhp @ rpm.....	335 @ 5200
Front suspension: Independent by s.l.a., torsion bars, telescopic shock absorbers.		Transmission: Three-speed automatic with torque converter.	
Rear suspension: Hotchkiss live axle, multileaf rear springs, telescopic shock absorbers.		Gear ratio 3rd (1.00:1) overall.....	3.91:1
Steering: Integral assist recirculating ball gear, parallelogram linkage behind front wheels.		2nd (1.45:1).....	5.67:1
overall ratio.....	18.8:1	1st (2.45:1).....	9.58:1
turns, lock to lock.....	3.5	Lb./bhp (test weight).....	10.89
turning circle, ft. curb- curb.....	40.9	Mph/1000 rpm (high gear).....	19.0
Curb weight.....	3555	Engine revs/mile (60 mph).....	3156
Tires: Goodyear Polyglas F70-14.		Piston travel, ft./mile.....	1777.9
		CAR LIFE Wear Index.....	56.1

ROAD TEST RESULTS

Speedometer reading @ 30 mph.....	28.0	Passing, 30-70 mph, sec.....	5.5
Speedometer reading @ 60 mph.....	56.5	Braking: Maximum deceleration rate	
Top Speed (5800).....	110.2	ft./sec./sec.....	30
Acceleration 0-30 mph, sec.....	2.8	No. of stops from 80 mph (at 60-sec. intervals) before 20% loss in deceleration rate.....	8-15%
0-40 mph.....	4.0	Control loss: Slight.	
0-50 mph.....	5.3	performance.....	very good
0-60 mph.....	6.6	Fuel consumption under test conditions,	
0-70 mph.....	8.3	mpg.....	10.2
0-80 mph.....	10.2	Normal cond., mpg.....	10-13
Standing ¼ mile, sec.....	14.73		
Speed at end, mph.....	95.5		