

SUPER CHARGER- GEM!

by RAY HOY

Don't confuse the '68 Charger R/T with the conventional Pony Cars. It's like comparing a wise-to-the-ways-of-the-world jet-setting Countess to an insolent teeny bopper. She's a big gal with a broad fanny, but she moves with class!

Madigan just stopped talking, if you can imagine such a thing! Yes sir, ol' "Tom Terrific," veteran of hundreds of fuel dragster runs, and one of the talkingest managing editors in the automotive business, just quit talking! It probably seemed to him like the thing to do at the time. I know it gets a little scary over there in the front passenger seat, when the corners come rushing up at you and there's not a thing you can do about it. The Dodge was leaning over quite a bit, now that I reflect back on it, and we were pressing through that corner at a pretty good rate of knots. But when ol' Tom stopped jabbering, I knew I'd just about reached the practical limit.

"Terrific" started right up again as soon as we came down off the top of the tach. His Detroit friends, victims of a 140 mph ride in the rain at the Dodge 1969 car press preview, with Tom at the wheel, won't believe he stopped talking, even for a minute, but he did. Because the 1968 Dodge Charger will do that to you. It's a big, shapely wedge of high-performance trickery that keeps whispering "You're the best race driver that ever was" in your ear, and begging you to keep your foot in it.

The Charger is strictly an American invention. Nowhere in the world can you find a big six-passenger sedan with up to 425 hp and 490 pounds of neck-wrenching torque that is utterly reliable

and as easy to drive as a golf cart. It could only happen here.

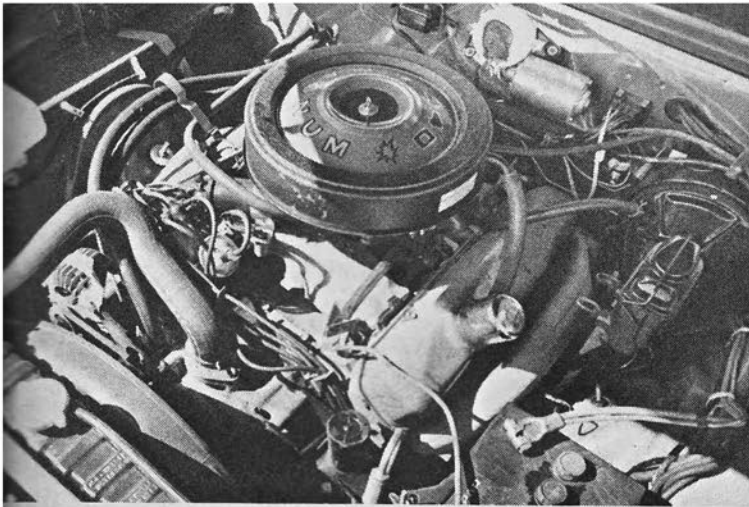
From a looks standpoint, the '68 Dodge Charger is one of the most impressive looking cars on the road. It has that confident look that you only see on an extraordinarily beautiful woman, or a poker player who is holding a Royal Straight Flush. The body seems to start somewhere over the rear wheels, or at least the over-all design fools you into thinking it does. The Charger has kind of a hefty fanny—but an attractive one—but from there on forward, the body tapers rapidly, resulting in a car that looks like a wedge. The result is a big car that hides its bulk well, and ends up looking positively elegant. The roof line is a semi-fastback style with a recessed rear window. The roof line flows into the lower rear quarter of the car, which adds to the over-all streamlined look. A competition "quick fill" gas cap on the rear deck adds to the car's competition-oriented character, and it makes short work of topping off the 17 gallon gas tank.

The headlights hide behind a plastic grille. Plastic? What's the world coming to? But after looking it over, we came to the conclusion that it's a good idea. Intricate detailing can be done in plastic, and it won't rust, so why not?

Most of the Chargers that charge out the door at the Dodge factory are adorned with an "R/T" emblem that stands for "Road & Track." You get



The Dodge Charger will "Garlits" out of the hole with the best of them. The big "440 Magnum" V-8 twists out a face-distorting 480 pounds of torque at 3,200 rpm. There is 375 bhp is on tap at 4,600 rpm.



Long, fast corners were exhilarating in the '68 Charger, the "stickability" being rather good (on a smooth surface). Like most domestic cars of this size, the cornering power on a rough road surface is limited.



heavy-duty suspension and brakes, dual exhausts and wide tread tires, and the 440-cubic-inch "Magnum 440" V-8. The 426 Hemi is optional.

The 440 has a new improved combustion chamber this year, plus larger diameter exhaust valves and a windage tray in the oil pan that keeps the oil on the job, just when it should be. The 426 Hemi shares this new windage tray idea, and a redesigned fuel system and new cam profile for higher speed is now standard, too.

Our R/T Charger was bright red with white stripes encircling the rear fenders. It couldn't have attracted more attention if it had been equipped with a clanging school bell and sirens. The cast mag wheels and wide oval tires added to its brutal look, and all in all, it's the kind of car that turns the young crowd all the way "on."

The first thing you notice about the big Charger, once you're firmly strapped in and on your way, is the muscle-building clutch! Look closely at your Charger-driving friends. Yup, left leg is at least three inches bigger around than the right. During some around-town road testing, I had the misfortune to land right in the middle of the Ventura Freeway's infamous rush hour traffic. After a half hour of stop and go, bumper to bumper traffic, I was reduced to holding the clutch in by using both hands to hold my trembling left leg down. It's not a car for teeney boppers.

The four-speed gearbox is definitely not one of the "stick in butter" types. A bit of force is necessary to move it from place to place, but you soon get used to it, and the heaviness somehow adds to the "this is a man's car" flavor of the machine.

All dash instruments are honest gauges, and they're angled toward the driver. The tach reads to 8,000 rpm, but the redline is a modest 5,000 rpm, which means you're shifting before the needle sweeps halfway across the face of the tach. All the torque comes on NOW, right out of the hole, and you'd better have both hands on the wheel when you open the tap. The brute comes off the line with the tires giving out with 2 low moans that rapidly climb up the scale to a scream, laying a smoke screen that would do credit to a fuel dragster. The engine never drops an rpm in the process.

The seating position is comfortable, although a bit more rake to the seat backs would be nice. The steering wheel is non-adjustable, which is too bad as this is an important feature to a driver who wants to find that exact position where he's utterly comfortable at any speed. Both front doors have convenient map pockets. The shoulder harness belts lock into a special retainer when not in use,

high up on the headliner, out of the way. Unfortunately, like all other American shoulder belt systems we've seen, the thing is just too complicated and time-consuming to see much use. Buckling a lap belt is too much trouble for some people. Buckling two of them is out of the question! We're not defending this point of view, just pointing out what happens. It is possible to design a combination seat and shoulder belt that is sewn together and uses only one buckle. Several foreign sedans have it, and it's something Detroit should look into.

A lot of safety features have been added to the new Dodge. The fuel tank has new retaining straps and anchor points for better retention in case you get overexuberant and get the car out of shape. Extensive use of crash padding in the dash area offers protection to the knees and legs. The folding front seats have latches to keep them in position during sudden stops. There are a host of other items, too, including breakaway ash trays, impact-absorbing front seat back tops, power window safety lockouts (ignition switch must be turned on), availability of head restraints, rear window defoggers, one piece impact-absorbing steering column jackets, and the use of flush door levers.

Obviously, nearly every optional piece of luxury equipment known to mankind can be ordered with the Dodge Charger—it's a Detroit tradition. It's a car that you can darn near "build" yourself, with just a checkbook.

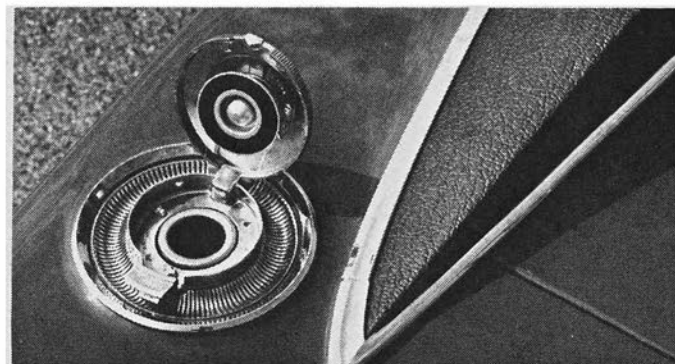
The car handles well for a big (117" wheelbase, 208.0" over-all) car. In smooth corners you have to be a dolt or a magazine editor to get into trouble. In rough corners, well, watch yourself. That heavy non-independent rear axle is painfully evident. We tried braking on a rippled surface, and managed to put an alarming amount of space between the rear tires and the road, all of which does strange things to the car's handling characteristics! Frightening.

The Charger understeers until you really start bending through corners hard. Then it gradually makes the transition to neutral steering. A bit faster and the tail starts to hang out and you can use the throttle for control. By the time you've reached this stage you're really motoring, although at no time will you confuse this heavy machine with a sports car. It is a good handling big sedan.

This "Super" Charger is a good example of American automotive art. It has enough acceleration to make your nose bleed, a top speed that can only be realized on a place like Bonneville, and good handling. And all of these good things are wrapped up in some of the sexiest sheet metal to come out of Detroit in a long time. It's a car to reckon with.



The standard 1968 Dodge Charger is, without a doubt, one of the most handsome big cars on the road today. The special R/T (Road & Track) version, which features heavy-duty suspension and brakes, a 440-cubic-inch V-8, dual exhausts and wide tread tires, gives the performance-minded Dodge fan that "extra edge."



The interior is spacious by anyone's standards. The center armrest folds down, or, a center console may be installed at no extra cost. Map pockets ("veddy British") have been added on both the driver and passenger doors.

A quick release gas cap is standard equipment, shown here on the vinyl-topped version of the '68 Charger.

All dash instruments are angled toward the driver, which also has a calming effect on a nervous passenger. The deep well tach reads to eight grand, the speedometer to a sobering 150 mph. You won't find any idiot lights here. The Charger is a high-performance car, and it deserved, and got, honest gauges that do not keep secrets from the driver.

