



BY ALLAN GIRDLER, EDITOR
PHOTOS BY GORDON CHITTENDEN

AS A SPEED MACHINE...

SHOULD AN AWARD ever be made for fearless journalism performed at absolutely no risk whatsoever, we will win it.

Like this: The Dodge Charger Daytona, with extended, reshaped nose, and airfoil standing on stabilizer fins on the trunk, offers no benefit, practical or emotional, to anybody driving on the highway. Not any. None.

The last time we said something like that about spoilers and such, the people about whom we spoke didn't like it. They said things. We didn't understand the words, but we got the gist. People who make claims don't like to have their claims doubted.

The people at Dodge aren't going to act like that. No matter what we say, we are not going to disprove their claims about the Daytona Charger, and we're not going to make them mad. They don't make any claims. What we say doesn't matter.

What counts is winning races, which is how the Charger Daytona came about. Ford's canted-valve 429 NASCAR engines have more muscle than Dodge's Hemi-chamber 426 NASCAR. Sheet-metal is cheaper than engines. The Dodge engineers built a pointy nose, 14 in. longer than stock, onto a Charger 500. An extractor goes atop each fender, to reduce turbulence there. Two



THE CHARGER DAYTONA...

stabilizers bolt to the rear fenders and an airfoil goes between them, some five feet in the air. Then they ran it through a wind tunnel and announced the Charger Daytona as a production car.

That's all they announced. The motoring press was told that the shape is slicker, and that the changes produce downforce at speed.

This is something we're interested in and know something about. In the June *CAR LIFE* we tested some spoilers. We were not impressed.

So we asked the engineers announcing the Daytona if they would care to take part in a sequel.

"Hey, I read that story. We really enjoyed it. Very interesting."

"Good. We're thinking about doing

the same thing for the Daytona. I notice that the chart you have on display shows downforce front and rear, but there aren't any figures. Would you care to tell us how much downforce, in pounds, the Daytona develops at speed?"

"You're kidding."

Other Dodge officials were no more helpful. One guessed there's 20 lb. downforce in back, another said it was 400, and a third said the negative lift developed by the rear blade cancelled out the positive lift created by the roof and trunk deck, so that there was no force, up or down.

So we asked about speed. That pointy nose is bound to make the Daytona Charger faster than the regular

Charger. "How much faster is the Daytona?"

"We don't know. We haven't run one at top speed yet."

"Well, how fast is a regular Charger in racing trim?"

"We don't know that, either."

"You're kidding."

We're not, they said. They know how fast a racing Charger can lap Daytona, and what speed it hits on the straights, but they don't know how fast it would go in a long straight line. They might get around to seeing how fast a street Daytona will go, but they didn't seem to be in any hurry.

We borrowed one anyway. Not for a full road test. We've already tested Dodges with 440 (which this one

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continued

had) and Hemi. We, and you, know all about the engine, chassis, interior, etc.

What would be different? Not top speed. The Daytona is surely slicker, the 440 and Hemi both have enough power to push the Charger past redline in high gear, so there's no benefit there. Downforce? Our aerodynamics adviser tells us the nose and blade won't dig into the air until the front of the car is dropped the 8 in. or so that NASCAR noses get dropped. Mileage? That's as close as we could get to an advertising claim. An engineer said the shape might, repeat might, gain one mph at 60 mph. Wow. That means the money spent on the body will be earned back in something like 12 years.

There are racing-oriented cars that boost the owner's ego, win on Sunday, sell on Monday. Nothing wrong with that. We've been known to bask in the admiration of passersby ourselves.

But everybody laughed at the Daytona. Yes, laughed. Set out to take one gag shot and crowds gather, each person brimming over with ideas for silly pictures. Stoplight comments ranged "Not much *car* left, is there?" to "Does it float?"

Inside, the Daytona was all Charger. Everybody who drove it liked it. Nice interior, great chassis, magnificent engine. The Charger 500 was the best Supercar of 1969. The Charger Daytona is a rule-bending racer and don't blame us if the only thing it does for you is not get lost in parking lots.



We could save our breath. Dodge will laugh all the way to the track. The 1969 NASCAR rules required that 500 examples be sold. Done. For 1970, the rules change. More sales are required, the exact number depending on

the number of dealers each make has. Dodge has to sell something like 1700 Daytonas or run last year's car. By new-model announcement time, more than 1800 were ordered. No matter what we say, Dodge will laugh. ■

