

NEW CARS
'79

PLYMOUTH HORIZON TC3 & DODGE OMNI 024

*Chrysler leaps back into the sports-coupe scrimmage
with two variations on a successful theme.*

BY DON SHERMAN



• In the beginning, God created the Hemi—or so goes the Mopar version of the muscle-car legend. A vast fleet of ground-pounding, pavement-ripping performance cars prospered around this centerpiece of power, and all the world was pleased. Like most great things, it was too good to last, and when the inevitable cataclysm came—insurance, emissions standards, low-octane fuel, etc., etc.—all of Chrysler's wildlife were swept away. Barracudas, Super Bees,

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD GEORGE

OCTOBER 1978

Demons, Dusters, and Chargers vanished from the face of the earth. Conservative sedans and station wagons took their place, and performance was all but forgotten at Chrysler Corporation.

But not forever. Fresh technology has made it possible for Chrysler once again to build some zip into a couple of cars. The two new sport coupes on these pages are harbingers of things to come from Chrysler. And even though you won't be able to

buy them until December, we've been granted a special preview test to let you know exactly what to expect.

For starters, you can anticipate styling that will launch Chrysler out of the "formal-look" rut. Next to an Aspen or a Volaré, these new coupes look as sleek as an SST. As adventuresome as this may seem, Chrysler hasn't risked the future of its new sportsters on unproven nameplates. Instead, they'll be sheltered under the al-

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The 024/TC3 takes the strait-laced Omni/ Horizon about as far as Chrysler has dared tread in the sports-car direction.



ready well-established Omni and Horizon family umbrella. Distinction will come from code letters emblazoned across their sides: 024 for the three-door Dodge Omni, and TC3 for the Plymouth Horizon. (Sorry. The designations don't mean anything. No Twin-Cam engines or Turbo Chargers or 2.4-liter engines. At least for now.)

This christening should pretty well tell

you where these identical twins come from. Both are derived from an Omni/ Horizon floorpan shortened 2.5 inches, but with all suspension and driveline components intact. Above this base, everything's new. The three-door body, the rakish roofline, and the long nose cone very effectively shrug off any utilitarian stigma.

There is wisdom in this cloning method

of car creation. Ford proved it can work quite effectively by building the new Mustang out of modified Fairmont components. At Chrysler, the Omni/ Horizon is the best car the company builds, so this basic design will be stretched, creased, and folded into a multitude of future Dodge and Plymouth variants, both larger and smaller than the Omni/ Horizon, all of which will benefit from the inherent advantages of a transverse front-wheel-drive powertrain. This is a great way to cut down on engineering complexity while spreading the goodness of one design throughout a broad spectrum of cars. The parent Omni/ Horizon is now a runaway success, so the next step is the second-generation 024 and TC3. These offspring will soon be launched into the sports-coupe world to do battle against strong competition: the Toyota Celica, the Datsun 200-SX, four Monza variants from GM, and the dynamic Mustang/ Capri duo from Ford. If the 024 and TC3 hybrids thrive, ground will be broken for all the Omni/ Horizon varieties of the future.

After testing a very early prototype Dodge Omni 024, we have only one reservation about this scheme: building sales momentum will be tough because there's precious little acceleration to work with. The 024 and the TC3 have but 75 Volkswagen-made horsepower to pull around their base weights of 2176 pounds. In our air-conditioned test car this translated into a zero-to-sixty time of 12.7 seconds and a quarter mile ET of 19.4 seconds. For the time being, a 1710cc four-cylinder engine is the only choice, so Chrysler's new generation of performance cars won't have much luck winning back old fans with acceleration. Almost every Omni/ Horizon competitor has a base or optional engine that will leave the 024/ TC3 in the lurch every time the passing lane is clear.

Ten years ago, any car that looked this racy but didn't have beta-particle acceleration to match could expect a marketplace half-life shorter than that of U-239. Fortunately, today's definition of performance means prowess in every phase of driving—acceleration, braking, and cornering—and the 024/ TC3 is very definitely in the modern idiom. Even though it won't inflict whiplash, it can leave you breathless with its handling and braking. Base 024 and TC3 equipment is very close to the standard Omni/ Horizon suspension, but for a few extra bucks you can have a sport package that contains a fatter front anti-sway bar, a new rear anti-sway bar, and 70-series radial tires. Springs and shock absorbers are also retuned to give the sport-option



car much sharper reflexes than the standard Omni/Horizon's. The overall steering ratio is the same for all cars, but the fact that 2.5 inches has been trimmed from the wheelbase makes the response to the wheel slightly quicker in the three-door. It's not quite ballerina-agile—probably because of the hefty curb weight and the lengthy overhang at both ends of the car—but neither does it balk when you ask for a quick move now and then.

This car's specialty happens to be entrance-ramp sweepers. You can dive into a constant-radius turn hell-bent-for-election, and all four Goodyear GT radials will grab the road with the surety of a politician's handshake. There is some understeer at the limit, but a quick liftoff from the gas pedal is enough to twitch the back end around for quick midcourse corrections. At Chrysler's 218-foot skidpad, we timed the Omni 024 at a maximum 0.77-g lateral acceleration, which ranks this phase of its performance profile halfway between a Camaro Z28 and a Firebird Trans Am.

Normally, this is where we'd tell you to underline the sport package twice on your 024/TC3 order blank and to avoid power steering at all costs. We did in fact request no power steering on our test car, but Chrysler engineers insisted on demonstrating their latest success in this area. What they've accomplished is one power-steering 024 prototype with REAL ROAD FEEL. It's a revelation, clearly the most significant Chrysler engineering breakthrough since the alternator, and all it took was a high-effort control valve in the steering gear. Now you get the quicker steering that power assist usually brings, and with no significant loss of sensitivity at the

Know them by their code letters: 024 for Dodge, and TC3 for Plymouth.

steering wheel. It's enough to make us take back about half the bad things we've said about Omni/Horizon power steering. *Consumer Reports* might even like it.

While we're on the subject of the fearless Brand X magazine, you might like to know our experiences in the patented toss-the-wheel-and-see-where-she-stops test. Yes, folks, Omnis and Horizons will wobble disconcertingly if you attempt the *CR* trick, which we consider an eleven on the Evel Knievel one-through-ten scale of foolish feats. By the very nature of steered front wheels, rubber tires, and multi-degree-of-freedom suspension systems, all cars respond in a cyclic fashion to a step input such as this. In the Omni and Horizon, for a variety of reasons, this oscillation damps out somewhat more slowly than in other cars, but you have to disregard the real world of driving to consider it a safety defect. We don't.

The 024 and the TC3 damp out much more quickly in this type of maneuver than their Omni/Horizon parents, because their center of gravity is lower and they ride on tauter suspensions. Also, Chrysler has reduced the rotational inertia, or flywheel effect, of the steering wheels on all its front-wheel-drive cars. Lots of mass in the steering wheel can contribute overshoot to yaw oscillations when normal damping *isn't* present. The ultimate solution, however, is

to keep normal damping—your hands on the wheel—all the time.

With or without criticism from *CR*, Chrysler has made the optioned-up 024/TC3 a great-handling car. No small part of this comes from the Goodyear GT Aramid cord radials, which most Detroit suspension engineers consider the best-handling tires made in America. We're inclined to agree, given the stickiness we measured on this particular car. It happens to be one of the few cars we've ever tested with more tire than brake. Locking a wheel was all but impossible because every last ounce of pedal force translated into pure stoppability. The prototype we drove had non-power brakes, terrific tire traction, and nearly perfect front-to-rear balance. Seventy-to-zero amounted to 189 feet, making this one of the shortest-stopping cars on sale in America.

This great braking performance is a specific result of intensive development, and the 024/TC3 has soaked up its share of new technology in other areas as well. Wind-tunnel refinement of its body shape has resulted in an aerodynamic-drag coefficient of 0.46 (with the sport option's rear spoiler), which happens to equal that of the new Mustang notchback. These two new bolides now stand as the slipperiest missiles made in America.

The 024 and the TC3 are also Chrysler's first experience with a urethane bumper system. The design has been around for years, but Chrysler has added a new twist. The flexible body-color bumper skins are the usual fare, but underneath, the 024 and the TC3 are packing ultra-high-strength aluminum beams. These hidden bumpers are made of a heat-treated alloy with a

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The wind tunnel says the 024/TC3's drag coefficient is 0.46, or lower than a Stingray's. And wind tunnels never lie.



GENO HOSCHER

yield strength of 50,000 pounds per square inch, compared with 30,000 psi for mild steel. This gives the aluminum alloy a five-to-one advantage over mild steel on a strength-per-weight basis.

Even with featherweight bumpers and a shorter wheelbase, the Omni 024 test car weighed 2345 pounds, or 135 pounds more than the heaviest Horizon we've tested. Air conditioning accounts for 72 pounds of this increase, but Chrysler says the 024 and the TC3 bear an additional 52-pound cross in the form of a larger hatchback, an increased glass area, and a longer length.

Inside, the 024/TC3 must also live with a few compromises that weren't perfectly resolved in the transition from the five-door to the three-door. The seat bottoms are closer to the floor in the coupe to compensate for a two-inch-lower roofline. This would pose little problem if the steering wheel had also been lowered, but it unfortunately has stayed high, in the original

Omni/Horizon location. Adjustable seat-backs (optional) partially alleviate the long reach this requires. But don't expect any more than the usual amount of lateral restraint from this seat, which is to say none. Also, the gas and brake pedals are so arranged that you could break an ankle trying to heel-and-toe.

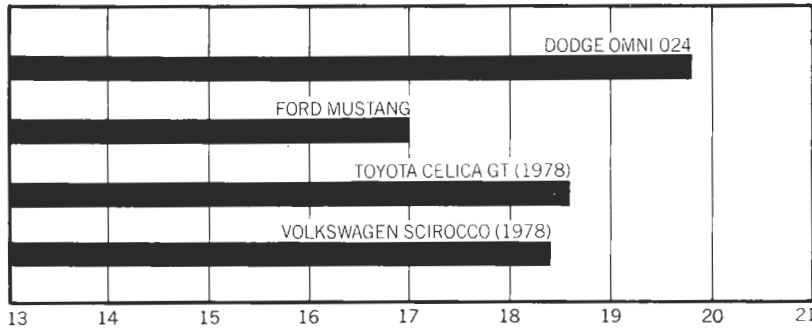
On the plus side, visibility is excellent in every direction, since Chrysler designers have paneled this superstructure with no fewer than eight windows. You can go one step further and add a ninth pane by specifying the optional sunroof, which Chrysler calls a "Tri-Lite" portal because it works three ways: as a weather-tight tinted window, as an open hole in the roof, or as a window that can be cracked at its trailing edge with an infinitely adjustable knob.

While the 024/TC3 is clearly a 2+2 rather than a full four-seater, its back-seat environment is a good deal more survivable than that of the Camaro/Firebird or

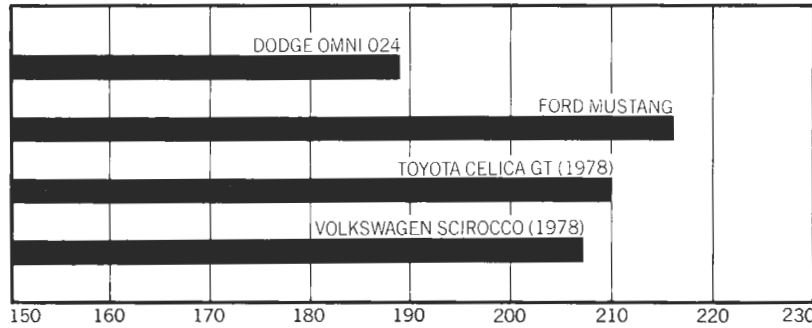
any of the Monza variants. Interior designers have also done good things to the instrument panel. It hasn't been changed much from the Omni/Horizon's, but the central cluster has been filled with three equal-sized gauges that are easily visible through the steering wheel: an 85-mph speedometer, a 7000-rpm tachometer, and a third housing for fuel level, water temperature, and battery voltage.

No car company can make up for four years' absence from the sport-coupe skirmish overnight, however. That's why this new three-door 024/TC3's not a bull's-eye. But Chrysler's shot is unquestionably on the target, and the corrections that will bring it closer to dead-center are well under way. Turbocharger experiments began before there were running 024/TC3 prototypes, and a larger-displacement, American-made engine is due by the 1981 model year. Watch this spot and you'll see Mopar muscle flexing back into shape. ●

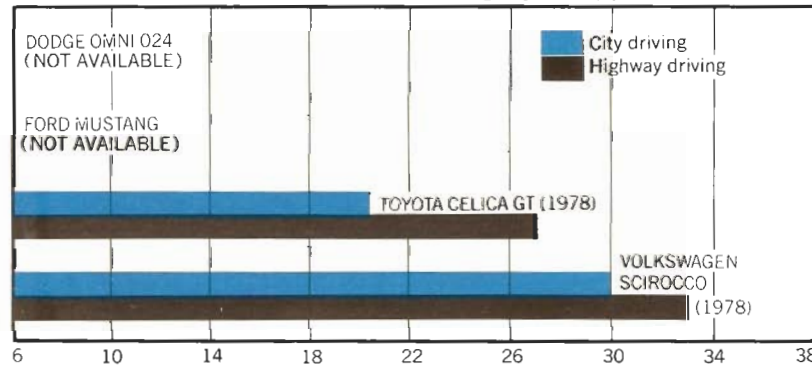
ACCELERATION standing 1/4 mile, seconds



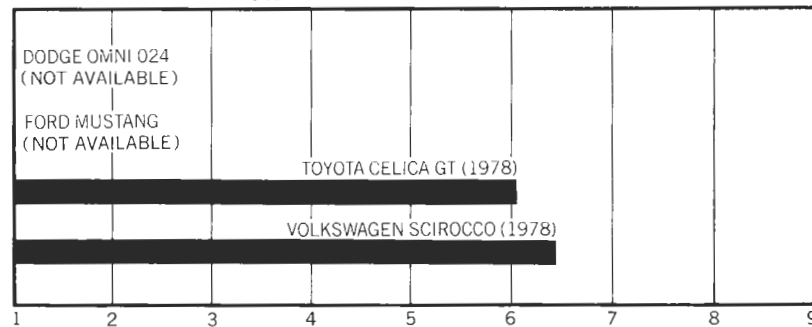
BRAKING 70-0 mph, feet



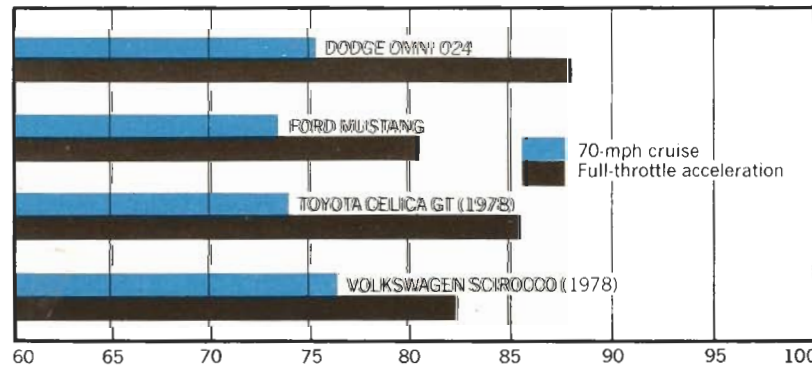
FUEL ECONOMY C/D mileage cycle, mpg



PRICE AS TESTED dollars x 1000



INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL dBA



LINDA BERNSTEIN



DODGE OMNI 024

Manufacturer: Dodge Division
Chrysler Corporation
Detroit, Michigan 48280

Vehicle type: front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 4-passenger hatchback

Price as tested: NA

Options on test car: base Omni 024, sport option package, air conditioning, power steering, AM/FM radio, Tri-Lite roof.

ENGINE

Type: 4-in-line, water-cooled, cast-iron block and aluminum head, 5 main bearings
 Bore x stroke 3.13 x 3.40 in, 79.5 x 86.4mm
 Displacement 104.7 cu in, 1710cc
 Compression ratio 8.2 to one
 Carburetion 1x2-bbl Holley
 Valve gear belt-driven overhead cam
 Power (SAE net, 1978 rating) 75 bhp @ 5600 rpm
 Torque (SAE net, 1978 rating) 90 lbs-ft @ 3200 rpm
 Specific power output 0.72 bhp/cu in, 43.8 bhp/liter
 Max. recommended engine speed 6000 rpm

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission 4-speed, all-syncho
 Final drive ratio 3.48 to one

Gear	Ratio	Mph/1000 rpm	Max. test speed
I	3.45	5.4	33 mph (6000 rpm)
II	1.94	9.7	58 mph (6000 rpm)
III	1.29	14.6	87 mph (6000 rpm)
IV	0.97	19.4	96 mph (4950 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase 96.7 in
 Track, F/R 56.0/55.6 in
 Length 173.3 in
 Width 66.0 in
 Height 51.4 in
 Ground clearance 5.1 in
 Curb weight 2345 lbs
 Weight distribution, F/R 60.8/39.2%
 Alternator capacity 840 watts
 Fuel capacity 13.0 gal
 Oil capacity 5.0 qts
 Water capacity 6.0 qts

SUSPENSION

F: ind, MacPherson strut, coil springs, anti-sway bar
 R: ind, trailing arms integral with transverse member, coil springs, anti-sway bar

STEERING

Type rack-and-pinion, power-assisted
 Turns lock-to-lock 3.2
 Turning circle curb-to-curb 33.4 ft

BRAKES

F: 9.1-in dia solid disc
 R: 7.9 x 1.2-in cast-iron drum

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size 5.0 x 13-in
 Wheel type cast aluminum alloy, 4-bolt
 Tire make and size Goodyear GT Radial, P185/70R-13
 Tire type fabric cord, radial ply, tubeless
 Test inflation pressures, F/R 29/29 psi
 Tire load rating 1080 lbs per tire @ 35 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	4.0
40 mph	6.3
50 mph	9.2
60 mph	12.7
70 mph	17.9
80 mph	25.4
90 mph	43.8

Standing 1/4-mile 19.4 sec @ 72.7 mph
 Top speed (observed) 96 mph
 70-0 mph 189 ft (0.87 g)
 Fuel economy, C/D mileage cycle 29.0 mpg, urban driving
 29.5 mpg, highway driving



Plymouth TC3 Turismo

Sporty is not necessarily in the eye of the beholder.

• Keep a close watch when you unleash your eyeballs on the TC3's sheetmetal. They'll jump up and down and holler, "Sporty car, sporty car!" Eyeballs don't know the first thing about where to draw the line on what's sporty and what's not. They're perfect suckers for clever styling, and Chrysler knows that.

The TC3 Turismo has all the visual goodies that make up the collective password that gets it into the sporty-car compound. A mini air dam, a laid-back windshield with curved-to-the-side glass, a tallish tail spoiler strung across the back, angles and slots and panes of glass galore, soft bumper appendages, matte black trim, styled sport wheels, flared-out rear-view mirrors, the whole works—all designed to cue up your youthful juices.

The air dam is said by the minions of Lee Iacocca to reduce aerodynamic

drag by 5.7 percent, while the smooth windshield-to-pillar integration is claimed to drop buffeting resistance by its own 6.2 percent and the rear lip is supposed to cut drag by a full 9.0 percent. These improvements are significant enough to show up in our coast-down testing in the form of the mere 6.5 horsepower that's needed to overcome the TC3 Turismo's aerodynamic

drag at 50 miles per hour.

So the car looks the part that Chrysler had in mind. What happens under the skin is another story. The new-for-1981 2.2-liter engine is a nice little unit. It's smooth, willing, quite energetic, and relatively economical, a logical step up from the less intense 1.7-liter Volkswagen derivative that comes standard in every Horizon and TC3 except the Turis-



PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON KILEY

mo. The 2.2-liter motor is the base engine in Chrysler's K-cars, where its penchant for free revving is mildly smothered by the K-cars' greater weight. In the TC3, this benefit in revviness goes partly by the boards because of the transmission. A Chrysler-designed-and-built gearbox, it delivers wide ratios, impressive fuel economy (25 mpg, EPA city), and long-legged cruising, but the same wide ratios take some of the fun out of acceleration. You *feel* that the engine is good and you *feel* that the car is accelerating decently, but you *know* it would be still better with a five-speed with tighter, more aggressively staged ratios in the first four gears and a cruising fifth-gear ratio as tall as fourth is now. For most folks the



gearing would be just fine, given as most folks are to moving around town in molasses fashion, especially these

days; but we're more inclined to take an active approach to getting where we want to go, and we suspect you're inclined the same way. We know the basic urge lives within this engine, too, because it pulls up to a 105-mph top end in both third and fourth. First is good to 40 mph and second carries on until 70, but the prices for the long-leggedness of Juliet Prowse, automotive division, are a zero-to-sixty time of 12.4 seconds (realistically, not all that bad) and a quarter-mile combo of 18.8 seconds and 73 mph (realistically, mediocre).

The 2.2-liter is very much VW-inspired, offering a similar valve layout, being blessed with a belt-driven overhead camshaft, and producing its combustion in chambers formed by an alu-

Hot Flash!

1982 Plymouth Scamp and Dodge Rampage



• It ain't got a barrel of money. Some think it's ragged and funny. But as you can see from these super sneak shots, Chrysler is still coming out with the goodies. Feast your eyes on the new Omni/ Horizon sport truck.

The word around Chrysler is that an Italian chop shop on the West Coast came out with the original truck variation on the 024/TC3 theme. It's said that when Iacocca saw it, he was absolutely pumped. Chrysler snatched up the prototype. Four years later, by early next year, the finished models will be born as the Plymouth Scamp and Dodge Rampage.

The little truck comes off a lot slicker than one would imagine from the silly names (still time to change them . . . hint, hint). The Scamp/Rampage is literally the merger of a leaf-sprung pickup box and the front half of the front-wheel-drive TC3/024, MacPherson struts and all. The result is a Chevy LUV-sized truck about ten inches longer than the TC3. The wheelbase has been stretched seven and a half inches to 104.2 inches. Construction is unitized like civilian TC3s and VW's

truck. To complete the look of sleekness there's a full-width, flushed-in backlight.

A couple of changes were made to the TC3 half of the Scamp to control body roll and handling. First, the sway bar was lengthened and the link attachments were scrapped. The front anti-sway bar is now connected directly to the crossmember and the lower control arm (instead of through links), with thick rubber isolating the points of attachment. This linkless design will be used on all of Chrysler's 1982 front-drive cars as well. Second, to compensate for the effect of heavy cargo loads on steering response, steering components were retuned. As with the TC3, rack-and-pinion steering is standard on the Scamp and power assist can be added as an option.

Other than these changes, the Scamp remains, basically, a TC3. So much so that the truck will be built on the car's assembly line. Chrysler's 2.2-liter, four-cylinder engine and four-speed manual transaxle form the standard powertrain. A three-speed automatic is optional and a five-speed manual is being talked up for

the 1983 model year. There'll also be a Miser version this fall—Chrysler's latest ad fad—with a 1.7-liter four and the four-speed manual.

The truck's 1000-pound payload (about one-third less than that of the Plymouth Arrow and Dodge Ram 50) makes it obvious that the marketing emphasis won't be on "Ram toughness." Sure, it'll be good for hauling dirt bikes, a load of Cub Scouts, shrubs, and stuff. But with such standard features as tinted glass, high-backed bucket seats, and a soft sport steering wheel, the Scamp will be majoring in flash and comfort, with a minor in utility. There will also be a Sport version available for 1982, done up in two-tone paint with a jazzy tape treatment, blacked-out lower sills, an upgraded interior, and a tachometer as standard features.

All we really have to go on at this time is appearances. Keeping that in mind, it *looks* as if Chrysler's frugal design engineers are making the most of their minimal financial resources.

—Jean Lindamood

minum head and pistons pumping for all they're worth in a cast-iron block. The Chrysler engine is only a tenth of a liter smaller than Ford's unhappily coarse 2.3-liter four, yet the Chrysler motor is a much smoother, better balanced, and happier example of four-cylinder technology than either Ford's 2.3 or its much newer 1.6-liter engine for the Escort/Lynx—which, though 27 percent smaller in piston displacement, produces only about 10 percent better fuel economy.

Chrysler deviates from Volkswagen attributes by substituting a feedback carburetor with an electronic fuel-control system for the VW electronic fuel injection. VW's method is more expensive and Chrysler feels in no way compelled to use it—the 2.2, after all, being its own engine through and through. Chrysler also squeezes a good deal more sound- and vibration-deadening tricks between the engine and passenger compartments, so the engine keeps any distresses pretty much to itself, although general ambient noise (from wind and tire disturbances) is not particularly low, the TC3 creating as much minor dither coasting at 75 mph as it does cruising at the same speed in fourth gear.

Chrysler may have gone for the tall

gearing because of the brakes. They're not so swell, guys. They need a whole 224 feet to meander waspishly to a stop from 70 mph, the longish distance brought on by poor front-rear balance characteristics and only fair modulation properties—not auspicious for any car this small and even less desirable in one with pretenses of sportiness. The good part is that there's little fade to be found in our braking tests.

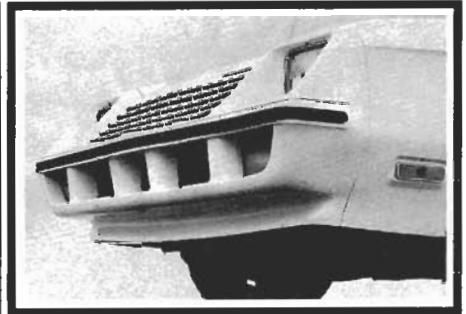
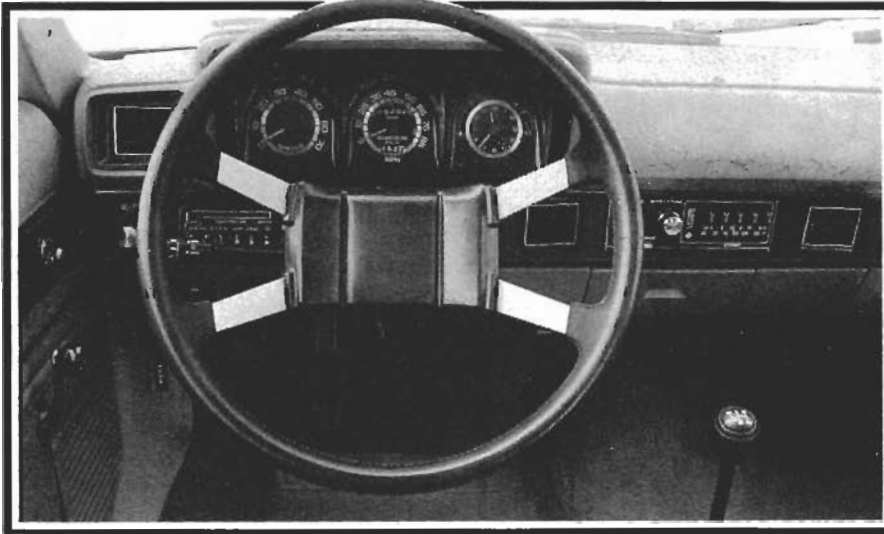
The TC3's handling is better than we think. At the moment it's hidden behind the power steering and brakes that are part of the so-called popular equipment group. This option adds the steering and braking assists, deluxe intermittent wipers, dual horns, dual aerodynamic outside mirrors, a clock and a trip meter, a light package, and \$452 to the TC3. Best you should order the other safety and convenience items separately and leave Chrysler standing with a few power steering and brake units in hand. *C/D* tech wizard Csaba Csere drove an unoptioned Horizon Miser (lighter, no PS, no PB) a few days before we got the Turismo, which of course springs from the Horizon platform, and he reports that the unassuming little Plymouth hatchbox felt much better on the roll than the TC3. The TC3 tries to work well, and its P195/60R-14 Firestone

HPRs are sticky enough to deliver a substantial 0.75 g on the skidpad, but the power steering and brakes whittle away at confidence until you're using the car hard (partly out of frustration) instead of working with it to achieve a quick and efficient end to your travels. The TC3 does not make you wish for endless trips.

Pushing the right buttons on the salesman's cash register will save you lots of time slaving over a hot order blank. Plymouth has gathered together a staggering list of specifics in the official Turismo package (code A69): handsome LaCorde and Monteverdi cloth and vinyl upholstery; high-backed bucket seats; carpeting for the luggage compartment; black trim for the instrument panel; special instrumentation (speedo, tach, clock, trip odo, gauges for alternator and fuel level, and a warning light for oil pressure and water temperature); stamped-steel "Rallye" wheels; big tires; a rear spoiler; a plethora of assorted black trim pieces; and Turismo decals here and there on the body.

Our car also had a tonneau cover for the hiding of the considerable amount of luggage that can be housed in the cache beneath the hatch. Flop the back seat down for even greater capacity. We found a killer battery, air conditioning,





a rear defroster, sealed-beam tungsten-halogen headlamps, an AM/FM-stereo, undercoating, and a sport suspension hiding in this TC3. We also found next to no lateral support in the seats; a dismal legs-up, arms-out driving position; a rather pleasing, wrapped, old-fashioned, dragsterish steering wheel; and something called the Y93 Show Car Finish, which apparently did little to improve the Turismo's mediocre quality control and a little less for our dispositions. There is something inherently disappointing about getting into a car whose shortcomings are visibly appar-

ent. We didn't even have to look closely to find them, let alone have to drive the car to find hidden faults. By way of vindication, this TC3 had seen a ton of hard miles in hard hands before it fell into ours, but nonetheless we all know inexpensive trim and slapdash assembly when we see it.

If Chrysler is serious about wanting to duke it out with preeminent sports coupes like the Scirocco, the Prelude, et cetera, it's going to have to take a good, hard look at what it's up against. So far it hasn't focused too well, and that's frustrating for us because we know

there's a basically good car under this sporty skin. But for the lack of mechanical development, creature comforts, and attention to detail, we'd be telling you this is quite a package. So far that would be a fib. Chrysler isn't far off, it's just spending too much time nibbling around the edges of a better thing. When it moves in for a big bite, we'll let you know. We'll back up what your eyeballs are trying to tell you already.

—Larry Griffin

COUNTERPOINT

• What we have here is undoubtedly the most underrated sports sedan in America. Fitted with the primo suspension hardware and HPR tires, the Turismo showed me the kind of moves I'd expect from a Scirocco. The power steering is the best I've encountered on an American sedan—communicative, accurate, and confidence-inspiring. The Turismo feels all of a piece, taut and responsive—one of those happy cars that just go where they're pointed. It's nice to see that America can build a vest-pocket sedan with world-class road manners—and from the New Chrysler Corporation, no less.

This is not to say that all is wine and roses with the Turismo. There is ample room for improvement. How Chrysler could fit fixed-back front seats to a car like this is beyond my ken. The awkwardly placed pedals thwart heel-and-toeing. And the steering wheel is really tacky. These are things that can be fixed relatively easily—and cheaply—and Chrysler ought to attend to them. The resulting car would make a Scirocco seem as overpriced as Sherman's Guccis.

—Rich Ceppos

I drove L-cars day in and day out for almost two years at the Chrysler Proving Grounds, and I still think they're really fun to drive. They ride and handle well. The brakes are quick and reliable. There's plenty of room for legs and knees under the wheel and even in the rear seat. And they get great mileage.

The TC3 is my pick from the Chrysler lineup, and the pointy nose, the slicked-down roofline, and the rear spoiler look especially sporty in Turismo attire. Sure, it's basically a cosmetic job. But it's the most tasteful-looking tape and blackout treatment Chrysler offers. Also, the upgraded Turismo interior includes, along with the extra "Rallye" gauges, some of the only almost-comfortable seats in Chrysler's warehouse.

The only other option you need is the sport suspension. Sprint-car drivers who worked days at the test track took TC3s out on the gravel test loop to practice for the Saturday-night roundy-rounds, and they swear by the sport suspension.

It's not a new car, but it's sure aging nicely.

—Jean Lindamood

While filling in the Turismo's specification page, I almost thought I was back on the J-car again. Transverse four-cylinder engine, front-wheel drive, rack-and-pinion steering, MacPherson-strut front suspension, trailing-arms-integral-with-an-anti-sway-bar rear suspension, a lightweight, aerodynamic body—exactly the trendy econo-sportware used on GM's latest and greatest. Yet the Plymouth Turismo is a clone of the four-year-old Omni/Horizon series. Surely, with this much development time on these most contemporary pieces, the Turismo must be a finely honed automobile.

Unfortunately, it's not. The driving position still suffers from a mismatch of low, swoopy bodywork with the upright sedan dashboard and steering column. The power steering dutifully carries on the Imperial tradition. The shift linkage makes an early Porsche 914's look good. The new engine's extra half-liter seems to be on indefinite layoff. In its defense, the Turismo is inexpensive, and it accelerates, handles, and stops competitively. But a desirable car is more than numbers and a parts list.

—Csaba Csere

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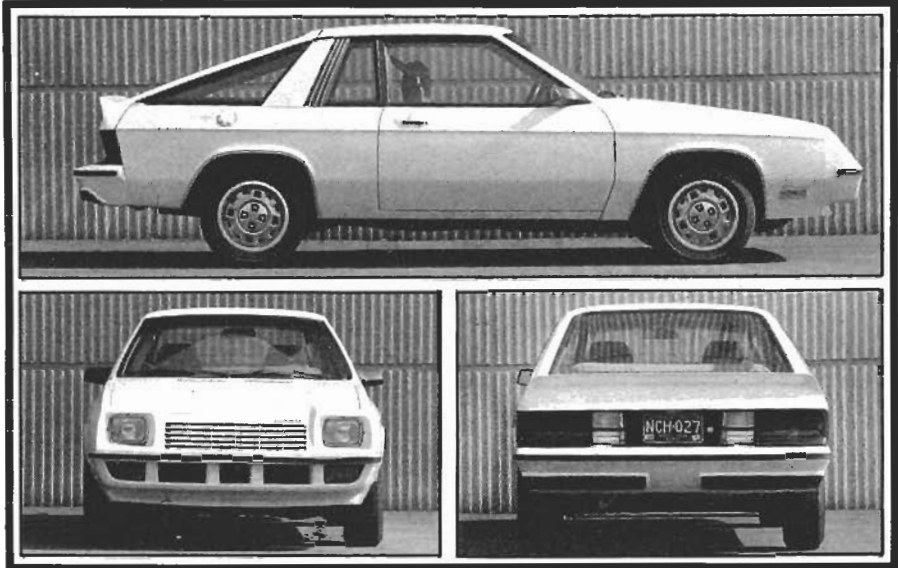
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Vehicle type: front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 3-door sedan

Price as tested: \$7920

Options on test car: base Plymouth Turismo TC3, \$6390; air conditioning \$554; popular equipment group (includes power steering, power brakes, clock, miscellaneous options), \$452; AM/FM-stereo radio, \$186; rear defroster, \$102; cloth-vinyl bucket seats, \$73; tonneau cover, \$50; sports suspension, \$46; halogen headlamps, \$40; power trunk release, \$27.

Sound system: AM/FM-stereo radio, 2 speakers

ENGINE

Type: 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head
 Bore x stroke 3.44 x 3.62 in, 88 x 92mm
 Displacement 135 cu in, 2210cc
 Compression ratio 8.5:1
 Carburetion 1x2-bbl Holley
 Emissions controls 3-way catalytic converter, feedback fuel-air-ratio control, EGR, auxiliary air pump
 Valve gear belt-driven single overhead cam
 Power (SAE net) 84 bhp @ 4800 rpm
 Torque (SAE net) 111 lbs-ft @ 2800 rpm
 Redline 6000 rpm

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	4-speed		
Final-drive ratio	3.05:1		
Gear	Ratio	Mph/1000 rpm	Max. test speed
I	3.29	6.7	40 mph (6000 rpm)
II	1.89	11.6	70 mph (6000 rpm)
III	1.21	18.1	105 mph (5800 rpm)
IV	0.88	24.9	105 mph (4200 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase	96.6 in
Track, F/R	56.1/55.6 in
Length	173.5 in
Width	66.7 in

Height	51.2 in
Ground clearance	5.0 in
Curb weight	2470 lbs
Weight distribution, F/R	66.0/34.0%
Fuel capacity	13.0 gal
Oil capacity	4.5 qt
Water capacity	8.7 qt

CHASSIS/BODY

Type unit construction
 Body material welded steel stampings

INTERIOR

SAE volume, front seat 48 cu ft
 rear seat 29 cu ft
 trunk space 19 cu ft
 Front seats bucket
 Recliner type none
 General comfort fair
 Fore-and-aft support good
 Lateral support poor

SUSPENSION

F: ind, MacPherson strut, coil springs, anti-sway bar
 R: ind, trailing arms integral with an anti-sway bar, coil springs

STEERING

Type rack-and-pinion, power-assisted
 Turns lock-to-lock 3.2
 Turning circle curb-to-curb 34.9 ft

BRAKES

F: 9.0 x 0.5-in disc
 R: 7.9 x 1.2-in cast-iron drum
 Power assist vacuum

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size 5.5 x 13 in
 Wheel type stamped steel
 Tire make and size Firestone HPR Radial, P195/60R-14
 Test inflation pressures, F/R 35/35 psi

Car and Driver Test Results

ACCELERATION

	Seconds
Zero to 30 mph	3.7
40 mph	6.2
50 mph	8.9
60 mph	12.4
70 mph	17.5
80 mph	24.9
Top-gear passing time, 30-50 mph	13.7
50-70 mph	13.5
Standing 1/4-mile	18.8 sec @ 73 mph
Top speed	105 mph

HANDLING

Roadholding, 282-ft-dia skidpad 0.75 g
 Understeer moderate

BRAKING

70-0 mph @ impending lockup 224 ft
 Modulation fair

Fade none
 Front-rear balance poor

COAST-DOWN MEASUREMENTS

Road horsepower @ 50 mph 13.0 hp
 Friction and tire losses @ 50 mph 6.5 hp
 Aerodynamic drag @ 50 mph 6.5 hp

FUEL ECONOMY

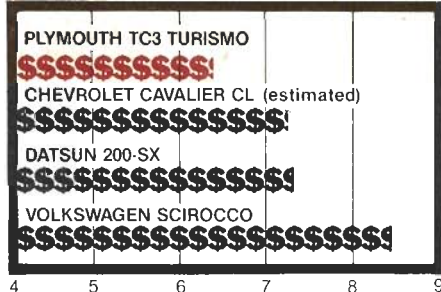
EPA city driving 25 mpg
 EPA highway driving 41 mpg
 EPA combined driving 30 mpg
 C/D observed fuel economy 24 mpg

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL

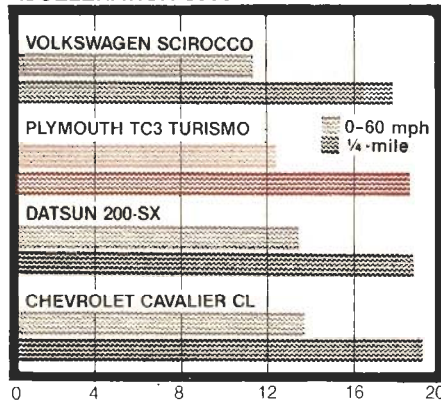
Idle 52 dBA
 Full-throttle acceleration 86 dBA
 70-mph cruising 75 dBA
 70-mph coasting 75 dBA

Charlie Daniels
Recording Artist

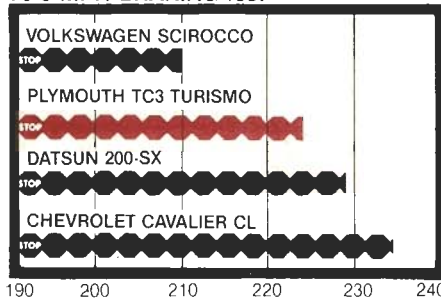
CURRENT BASE PRICE dollars x 1000



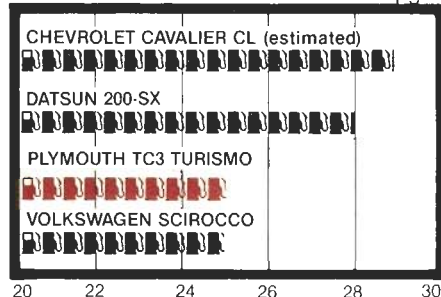
ACCELERATION seconds



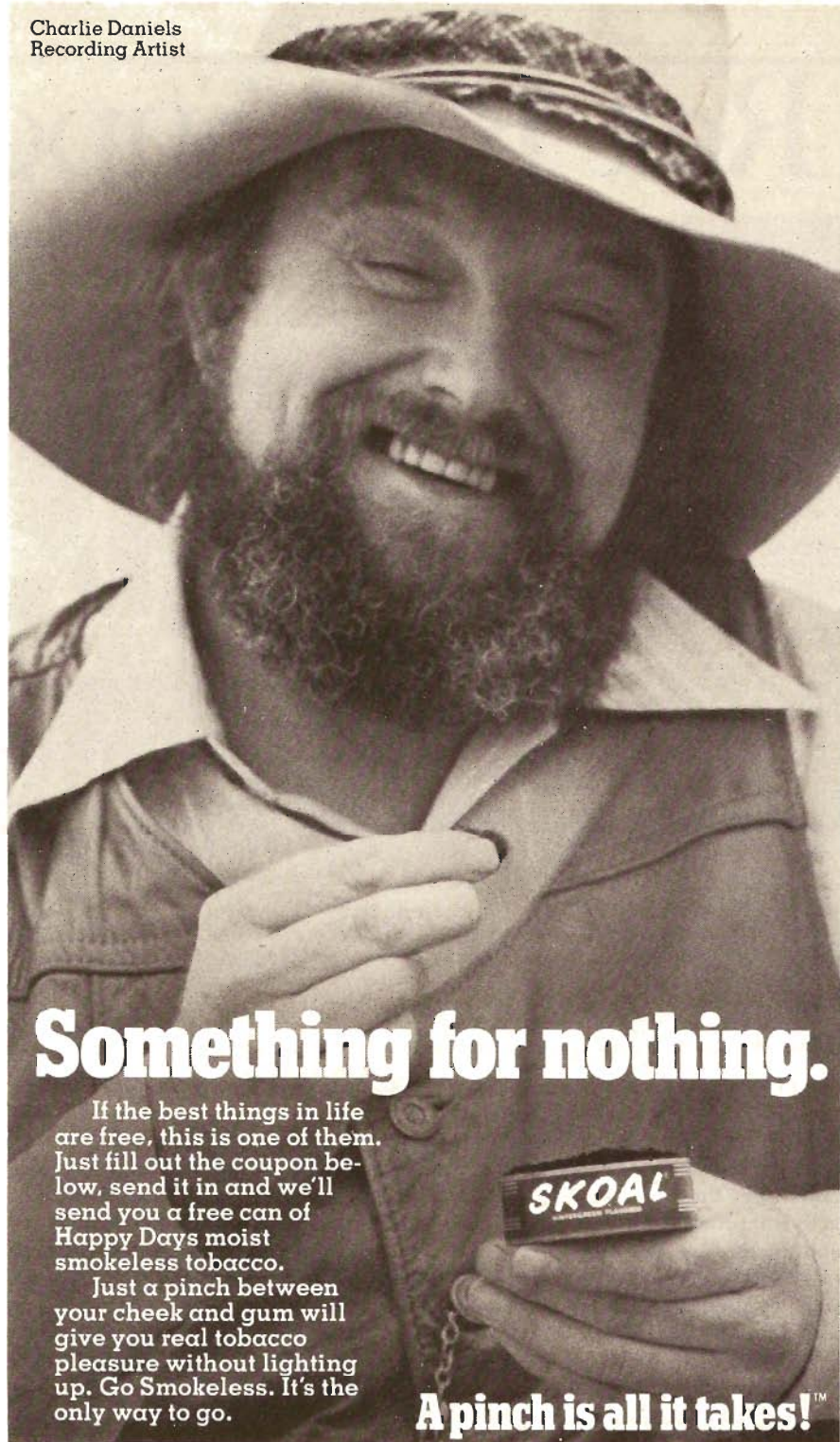
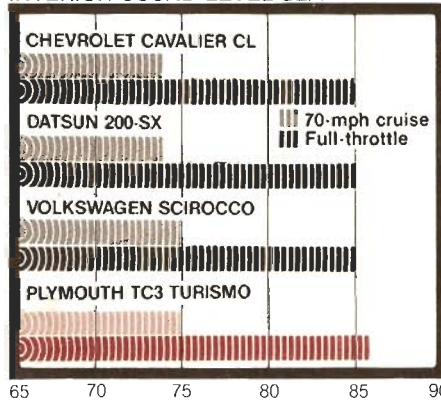
70-0 MPH BRAKING feet



EPA ESTIMATED FUEL ECONOMY mpg



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DODGE CHARGER 2.2 VS FORD EXP

Is the sizzle all on the surface?

by Tony Swan

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB D'OLIVO



We suppose the glib answer to this line of questioning is yes. When you compare the straight-ahead performance of this twosome to some of their road-wrinking ancestors from the era of the original Dodge Charger—the era of the big inch and the low E.T.—you're comparing Shetland ponies to Appaloosa stallions. Particularly the Ford EXP's slice of the equation.

But the glib answer conveniently ignores a whole flock of changes in the

world since the heyday of the musclecar. When we were singing along with the Beach Boys about 409s, we were also paying about 30 cents for a gallon of premium. When the little GTOs were really lookin' fine, the guys with the burnouses hadn't quite gotten hip to the basic laws of supply and demand. Not to mention control. And massive international political leverage.

The Clean Air Act had yet to clamp its jaws on horsepower,



CHARGER vs EXP

there were plenty of places where you could legally go faster than 55 mph, and the benighted notion that a speedometer capable of registering more than 85 mph was somehow un-American still lay in the future.

Halcyon days, indeed. But they're also history. The cars we're being offered today are rooted in a much different set of realities than those of the muscle era. As a result, the performance cars of 1981 score their marks in categories other than 0-60. Categories like going around corners without excessive drama. Categories like mpg. Categories like quality.

Of course, there's one category—style—that transcends all automotive ages. Part of what makes a car fun to drive is its packaging. While there are certainly plenty of us who are willing to accept cars strictly as appliances, there are also plenty of us who want more. For this latter group, a car not only takes its driver from point A to point B, it says a great deal about him (or her) before, during and after the drive.

What we want to examine here is what these two cars are saying about themselves (and thus their potential owners) and how well they deliver on their statements.

Charger 2.2: It's more than paint and stick-ons

One phenomenon that has long afflicted the world of image cars—big inch and otherwise—is the Mylar GT. Operating from the economically sound premise that a little tape can take a car's appearance from humdrum to hot with virtually no capital outlay, almost any manufacturer you can name has, at one time or another, cobbled up a so-called GT from an ordinary production car. Some of them even less than ordinary.

We're pleased to observe that the Charger 2.2 package isn't trading quite so superficially. Although tape and other nonfunctional stick-on items abound, there's more to this one than meets the eye—specifically, better acceleration than the standard Plymouth Horizon TC3/Dodge Omni 024. The last of these that we tested—a TC3 2.2 Turismo (January MT)—took almost 19 seconds (18.7) to run the quarter-mile, hitting the tape at 73.8 mph. As the data panel indicates, the 2.2 Charger is almost a second and a half quicker and almost 5 mph faster down-stream.

The Dodge Division wrought this mir-

acle through a simple expedient: altering the final drive for a lower (numerically higher) ratio. It paid off with a car that can play red light/green light with a surprisingly broad range of machinery. Audi Turbo 5000, Datsun 280ZX and Mazda RX-7 are a few of the names that make that range surprising.

A reworked exhaust system, designed (successfully) to produce a more primal note, is about the only other non-visible distinction between this and the standard 024. The rest of the package, which costs a modest \$399 premium, is right out there for you to see. This includes the nonfunctional hood scoop, the quarter-window treatment, the seats, the wheels, the Goodyear low-profile Eagle GT radials, and, of course, the cosmetic scheme. Judging by our experiences with the car, it has a surprisingly high flash quotient, particularly for a non-exotic.

The interior of the 2.2 is executed tastefully, in quality materials: corduroy upholstery and padded black vinyl. Like the ordinary TC3s and 024s, it's a 2+2, offering the utility of an emergency rear seat, although the latter, like most of its breed, is pretty severely restricted.

However, the general level of interior equipment doesn't measure up to the ad-



Ford EXP



Dodge Charger 2.2



vertisements made by the exterior. You somehow expect a fairly comprehensive instrument display, but what you get is the absolute bare minimum: speedo, tach, fuel and temp gauges. (The optional rally instrument package is a quick cure for this shortfall.)

When you see the words "Sport high back bucket seats" on the inventory sticker, you expect lateral support and seat-back adjustability, both of which are grievously absent. You might expect air conditioning, but what you get is a remarkably inadequate ventilation system. A cruise control would also be a welcome addition, although this isn't exactly mainline stuff on the GT scene.

Assessed as a device for hurrying around corners without going on one's ear, the reincarnation of the Charger certainly compares favorably with its predecessor. Suspension is independent up front, and the addition of the optional TC3/024 S14 Sport Suspension package, including hettier swaybars and stiffer shocks, helps reduce body roll. It also undoubtedly contributes to substantial understeer; the 2.2-liter Charger engine has enough power to make the car plow in hard cornering, but this is standard front-wheel-drive behavior and never

alarming. The endearing obverse side of the car's classic power-induced understeer is that there's no terrible trailing throttle oversteer. The nose will tuck in if you back off in mid-turn, but the rear end won't try to beat you to the apex.

All things considered, it rates as a predictable, even forgiving, setup, with two drawbacks. One is the power steering, which is over-assisted and consequently, doesn't give you much information about what the front wheels are doing until well after they're already doing it. The other is the 4-speed's shift linkage, which, like all the Omnirizon family, is exceedingly vague and notchy. Transaxle gearing is standard 024, including a 0.88:1 4th gear, but the combination of the engine's plentiful power and the lower final drive helps the Charger overcome the wide ratios with vigor.

Best of all, the acceleration gains don't seem to be at the expense of impressive fuel economy, which tells you a lot about the importance of operating in an engine's optimum performance range. The Charger's impressive 2.2-liter OHC four is obviously an eager worker, but it nevertheless came in at 34.8 mpg on the MT 73-mile fuel loop and scored 35.0 mpg in steady-state 55-mph cruising.

It would be hard to overrate fuel performance in relation to the image the Charger projects. The car is telling the buyer that yes, there's still some wheel-spin and go-fast left in the world, but you don't have to pay for it at the pump anymore. For that matter, you don't have to pay too severely at the dealer's, either, at least not in relation to some of the cars the Charger will be positioned against. The target list includes BMW 320i, Toyota Celica Supra, Porsche 924, Datsun 280ZX, and Mazda RX-7, to name a few, and with a manufacturer's suggested retail of \$6,488 added to the Charger's ability to blow more than a few high-priced doors off in a drag race—you come up with a car that looks like a bargain.

The Dodge 024 has lost a certain amount of ground in its market segment of late, and Chrysler is doubly aware of the need for a tonic in the face of fresh competition from the Ford EXP, Mercury LN7 and the sporty J-car entries from Chevrolet and Pontiac. The Charger, admittedly, is a long way from being the kind of all-new piece the other manufacturers are able to field. But the fact that it delivers what it does at a competitive price gives the buyer in this segment a viable alternative.



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CHARGER vs EXP

Ford EXP: Good-looking underkill

So you say the absence of horsepower is embarrassing in a car that looks as good as the EXP? Don't worry about it. The key to happiness in this car is avoiding eye contact with the other braves out there. Otherwise, the guy in the next lane will think that you care. In which event, you'll be blitzed by BMWs, pummeled by Preludes, mugged by Mazdas, ditched by Datsuns, trounced by Triumphs and all sorts of other indignities.

While there are many commendable qualities to the EXP and its Mercury counterpart, the LN7, we simply can't rate excitement as a significant part of the mix. Not in the way we comprehend automotive excitement, at any rate. The MT concept of excitement includes brisk acceleration, and even though Ford's new OHC 1.6-liter CVH engine is solid goods, brisk acceleration is simply not part of its act. Although the EXP/LN7 version of the engine generates one more horsepower than the regular Escort/Lynx edition, it is bolted to a car that weighs 100 pounds more than the little sedans.

The 4-cylinder engine is mated to Ford's new 4-speed transaxle (with a 3-speed automatic available in case you want to hold the car back even more). The 4-speed, manufactured for Ford by Toyo Kogyo (Mazda), is a very good one—easy to shift, and much more precise than the Charger 4-speed. However, with only 70 horsepower on tap (at 5,200 rpm), the tall gear ratios represent a big drop in rpm from gear to gear. This car cries for a 5-speed, which it won't get until 1983.

Having nattered on about the EXP's tepid engine performance, let us hasten to add that this is otherwise a package that largely lives up to its appearance. Handling is good, a couple of cuts above the Charger 2.2 and substantially better than the standard Escort/Lynx. The interior treatment is attractive and well-equipped, there is substantial luggage space and, of course, the car combines its sleek looks with big-number mpg. EPA ratings are 29/46 city/highway, and the EXP came in at 27.6 mpg on the MT loop. In 55-mph steady-state cruising, the EXP's 3.59:1 final drive ratio and slippery shape helped it deliver 44.5 mpg.

As we mentioned earlier, the EXP's limited horsepower makes you acquire some new driving techniques, most of them involving careful advance planning for your various moves. But this doesn't mean it can't be fun. The combination of all-independent suspension and the optional Michelin TRX radial tire package produces very predictable cornering with impressive adhesion. Although the little EXP gives away a lot of horsepower to the Charger, the disparity isn't nearly as obvious on a stretch of twisty road. The EXP corners flat and tracks beautifully, and while the rack-and-pinion steering is

a bit numb at center, it delivers solid road feel when the action becomes spirited.

The TRX suspension—with accompanying Porsche 928-style wheels—does have a down side, in the area of ride quality. This tends to be a bit stiff even in the basic EXP, thanks to limited suspension travel, but with the TRX package's stiffer springs and low-profile tires, the ride can be quite harsh on anything other than smooth surfaces. Small bumps find their way to the driver's hindquarters without much difficulty, and big bumps can make the car change lanes in the middle of a turn.

Inside, the EXP is nicely, though not lavishly, appointed. Instrumentation is adequate and well-placed, air conditioning (which takes a serious bite out of the already anemic performance) is first-rate, and our test car was equipped with an excellent AM/FM stereo cassette player. The interior of this particular car was executed in high-grade soft vinyl, tinted white for the sake of contrast to the metallic gray exterior. White would not be our first choice, given our druthers. Or our second. Or our third.

The seats are surprisingly good, considering some other Ford buckets we've encountered in the past. Lateral support is much better than the Dodge Charger buckets, and the seatbacks are adjustable for rake. One irritating deficiency of the seats is that there is no latch to keep the seatback from pitching forward during braking.

EXP and LN7 are being marketed as 2-seat personal cars, although if you check around your parts books, you'll find that there are optional rear jump seats available. Ford showed the seats at its long-range product previews a few months back, but has since decided that that the extra seat doesn't really tally with what the product planners are aiming at: the personal sports/image car. So, the official posture now is to carry the seats as a kind of open secret.

With or without the seats, though, the EXP swallows a respectable volume of luggage or what-have-you, while simultaneously affording adequate leg, head and shoulder room. There's a detachable window shade-type security screen to cover the cargo area, and a little retainer bar just behind the seats to keep cargo from

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Charger 2.2	Mpg	Ford EXP	
EPA City	25	EPA City	29
EPA Highway	41	EPA Highway	46
MT Test Loop	34.8	MT Test Loop	27.6
Steady-state		Steady-state	
55 mph	35.0	55 mph	44.5
Driving range (steady-state)		Driving range (steady-state)	
55 mph x fuel capacity)	455 miles	55 mph x fuel capacity)	503 miles

bumping against the seatbacks.

A nicely detailed package, with distinctive looks and good handling. The Ford dealer network is excited about the arrival of the EXP—it figures to be a very good showroom traffic-maker—and Ford is suggestively presenting the car as its first 2-seater since the Thunderbird. The corporate publicity mill is referring to the little fastbacks as “life style cars,” whatever

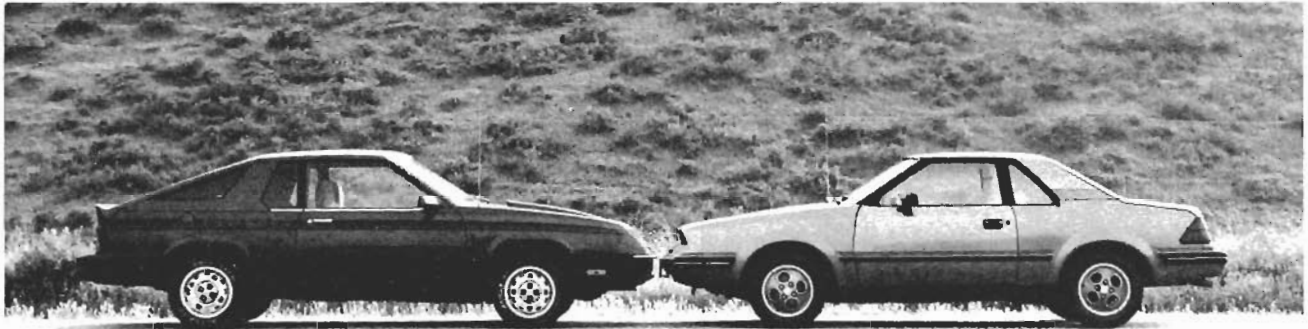
that means, and the ad agency people are calling them “sportcoupes,” to avoid the mendacity of calling them sports cars.

For our part, the unreconstructed among us call them Secretary's GTs, and see the EXP/LN7 phenomenon as the 1981 update on the Karmann Ghia effect. The EXP is, in many ways, a more up-to-the-minute automobile than the Charger 2.2. It is free of the tarty, painted-on flash

that distinguishes the Charger. It turns heads with its slippery (0.37 Cd), understated good looks.

But, horsepower is still the primary raw ingredient for enthusiasm, and we are frankly curious about how many people will be willing to pay more money (the EXP bases at \$7,250) for less go. The answer to that one will tell us a lot about where we're going in this decade.

ROAD TEST DATA

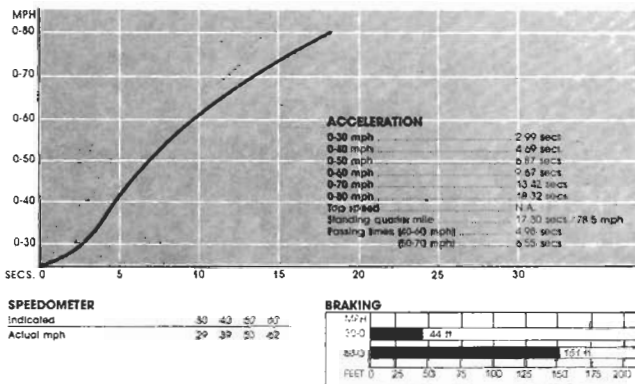


Dodge Charger 2.2

SPECIFICATIONS

GENERAL	Vehicle type	Front-engine, front-drive, 2 plus 2 hatchback	35,935	Charger 2.2 package (hood scoop, quarter window appliques, 2.2 graphics, high-back bucket, tires, wheels, lower final drive ratio), AM-FM radio	\$7,523
PRICE AS LISTED					
ENGINE	Type	In-line four, water-cooled, cast iron block, aluminum head, 5 main bearings	3.44 x 3.62 in. (87.5 x 92 mm)	135 cu in. (2,213 cc)	8.5:1
Bore & stroke		2-bar carburetor	Unleaded	Catalytic converter	Overhead camshaft
DISPLACEMENT	Ratio	34	at 4,800 rpm	111	at 2,800 rpm
FUEL SYSTEM	Recommended fuel	Unleaded			
EMISSION CONTROL	Valve gear	2-bar carburetor			
HORSEPOWER (SAE net)	Torque (lb-ft, SAE net)	111	at 2,800 rpm	26.8	lb-ft hp
POWER-TO-WEIGHT RATIO					
DRIVETRAIN	Transmission	4-speed manual (0.88:1 overdrive 4th)	3:1:1		
FINAL DRIVE RATIO					
DIMENSIONS	Wheelbase	99.7 in.			
TRACK, F/R	Length	56.1/55.6 in.	154.8 in.		
WIDTH	Height	65.8 in.	53.5 in.	5.0 in.	
GROUND CLEARANCE	Max. load length w/rear seats (folded down)	62 in.	2,247 lb	62:38%	
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION, F/R					
CAPACITIES	Fuel	13 gals			
CRANKCASE	Cooling system	3.8 qts	8.7 qts		
SUSPENSION	Front	Independent, tie-struts with coil springs	stabilizer bar	Independent, trailing arms, coil springs, stabilizer bar	
REAR					
STEERING	Type	Rock and pinion, power assist	3:1	34.1 ft	
TURNS LOCK-TO-LOCK	Turning circle, curb-to-curb				
FRONT	9.0-in. discs				
REAR	7.9-in. drums				
WHEELS AND TIRES	Wheel size	14J x 5.5	Steel disc	Goodyear Eagle GT, P195-65R14	Steel-belted radial
TIRE MAKE AND SIZE	Recommended pressure (psi), F/R	35/35			

TEST RESULTS

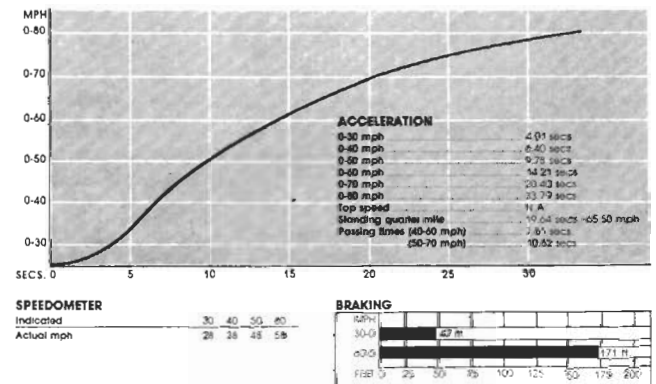


Ford EXP

SPECIFICATIONS

GENERAL	Vehicle type	Front-engine, front-drive, 2-pass, 3-door coupe	\$7,254	AM-FM stereo cassette, air conditioning, TRX suspension package, power steering, aluminum sport wheels, digital clock, right-hand remote mirror	\$8,700
PRICE AS LISTED					
ENGINE	Type	Transverse in-line four, water-cooled, cast iron block, aluminum head, 5 main bearings	3.15 x 3.13 in. (79.92 x 79.52 mm)	97.6 cu in. (1,597 cc)	8.8:1
Bore & stroke		2-bar carburetor	Unleaded	Catalytic converter, EGR	Overhead camshaft
DISPLACEMENT	Compression ratio	34	at 4,800 rpm	111	at 2,800 rpm
FUEL SYSTEM	Recommended fuel	Unleaded			
EMISSION CONTROL	Valve gear	2-bar carburetor			
HORSEPOWER (SAE net)	Torque (lb-ft, SAE net)	88	at 3,000 rpm	30.6	lb-ft hp
POWER-TO-WEIGHT RATIO					
DRIVETRAIN	Transmission	4-speed manual	Overdrive transaxle	3.55:1	
FINAL DRIVE RATIO					
DIMENSIONS	Wheelbase	94.2 in.			
TRACK, F/R	Length	54.7/54.0 in.	150.3 in.		
WIDTH	Height	60.3 in.	50.5 in.	6.5 in.	
GROUND CLEARANCE	Max. load length w/rear seats (folded down)	62 in.	2,100 lb	61:38 1/8%	
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION, F/R					
CAPACITIES	Fuel	11.3 gals			
CRANKCASE	Cooling system	4 qts	52 qts		
SUSPENSION	Front	Independent MacPherson struts, coil springs, stabilizer bar	Independent, trailing arms, coil springs		
REAR					
STEERING	Type	Rock and pinion, power assist	3:05	35.1 ft	
TURNS LOCK-TO-LOCK	Turning circle, curb-to-curb				
FRONT	9.29-in. discs				
REAR	7.1-in. drums				
WHEELS AND TIRES	Wheel size	5 x 13	Aluminum disc	Michelin TRX P165-70 R365	Steel-belted radial
TIRE MAKE AND SIZE	Recommended pressure (psi), F/R	35/32			

TEST RESULTS



Pace Cars and Bears

What appears to be an in-depth styling exercise is just that. The working minds at PPG (Automotive Finishes, Coating and Resin Division) created an open-field competition wherein each auto maker had a chance to "what-if" one of its most popular models. The cars were designed by each manufacturer's "sporting blood" division, while the actual work was farmed out to several outstanding private companies in the Detroit area.

These cars—the Dodge 024 Turbo and the Mercury Turbo LN7—are two of the PPG Pace Cars that will be used season-long in the PPG Indy Car World Series. (Missing are the American Motors AMX Turbo and the Chevrolet Turbo J Cavalier, both of which offer levels of sophistication and imagination equal to the Dodge and Mercury.)

The LN7 Mercury is the child of the Ford Design Center and Ford Special Vehicles Operations, and its handiwork is the product of American Sunroof Corporation (Southgate, Michigan). They were responsible for the exterior and interior modifications, including the rear spoiler, front air dam, wheel flares and power dome hood.

The unseen systems were the responsibility of Jack Roush Performance Engineering (Livonia). Under Roush's hand, the 1.6-liter engine was revamped

and then turbocharged through its carbureted induction system. Boost begins slowly at about 2,500 rpm and then it rapidly spins the little engine to a 6,500-rpm redline.

The 024 Turbo Charger, looking not at all like the production car and more like a Turbo Carrera than the real thing, is a whole-hog affair right down to its flush-mounted windows. Synthetex, Inc. (Romulus), left not one panel unturned. The completely tweaked 024 features a continuous air dam, prototype modular wheels and a turbocharged, fuel-injected 2.2-liter engine. All modifications, including the development of the electronic fuel injection, were produced by a savvy crew of ex-Chrysler racers who form the nucleus of Specialized Vehicles, Inc. (Troy).

The PPG Pace Cars represent a new kind of vehicle performance in this country, a trend away from Visigothic pavement-peeling and toward knife-edged windsplitting, where smaller displacement engines will emphasize a driveability and panache consistent with modern times. It will be their job to lead the field on race day, so they must be ready to roll right up to 120 mph to set the pace.

We have no doubt that this goal has been reached; both turbo cars easily cracked the century mark before the end

of our very short test track. The heavier Charger, with its fuel injection, was smoother in all rpm ranges and clearly superior to the LN7 during throttle tip-in. Conspicuous by their absence were suspension and braking needed to cope with the extra power. We were apprised of that the first time the brakes went on hard, and succeeding runs only lessened their effectiveness. The suspension was similarly unfinished, with preferred geometry and maximum load rates as yet undecided.

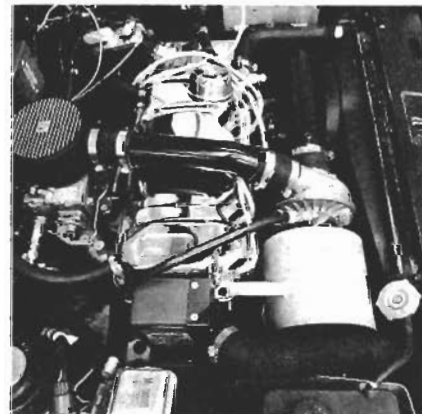
Both pacers work with fully upholstered interiors (minus the rear seat), at least a half-dozen gauges, modified shifters, aircraft lap belts, rollbars and enough sensible power to convince the driver that all cars could use some of this. But the message comes clearly through the mind's eye and the modified exhaust; there are feasible workings here, ones that will make the vehicle outstanding in appearance as well as function. And this is only the surface, friends, for as we have seen, in every styling exercise there is tangible evidence of the future.

Will the street cars of the new decade approach what we have here? Could we, as trend setters, customizers, performance enthusiasts and car wackos use some of these same ideas? Do bears sleep in the woods? —Ro McGonegal

JIM CHAPMAN



Dodge 024



Mercury LN7



CHARGER vs EX

THE VOICE OF THE MARKETPLACE

When several Ford Motor Company executives told us the primary target market for the new Ford EXP and Mercury LN7 was women—in particular young, professional women—we sat up and took notice. What this strategy says to us is that the EXP doesn't have the performance to appeal to the young male buyer, but that muscle is of no particular interest to women.

We decided to test this theory by putting the EXP and the more powerful Charger 2.2 into the hands of three women who are almost dead center in Ford's bell-shaped marketing curve. Jackie Andersen is our former copy editor, who has moved on to become managing editor of Hot Rod Specialty Books. Marianne Gregory, whose work has merited space in this magazine on previous occasions, is a high school English teacher who also has the dubious distinction of being the wife of *MT* Senior Editor Fred M.H. Gregory. Tracey Hurst, a recent—and welcome—arrival, is *Motor Trend's* executive secretary.

We weren't at all sure how this trio would react to Ford's marketing posture, and our uncertainty was rewarded by the general unpredictability of the responses. We think you'll find them instructive.

—John Dianna

"For a total package of image and performance, the Dodge 2.2 is my real winner."

Will women go for a vehicle that looks sporty, even though it may be a non-performer?

Most women, ourselves included, are grateful if the beast merely takes them from place to place faithfully, without mechanical mishap. Others don't care what the car looks like as long as it performs. This can cover any area from good gas mileage to coming through in show-off situations.

In our comparison of the Ford EXP and the Dodge Charger 2.2, image and performance were key issues.

Braking was adequate; shifting was easy and precise. And though the EXP wants to play, its questionable accelerative thrust precludes most street combat.

The over-designed dash provided a nonstop serenade of loose parts (nuts and bolts, perhaps?). The steering col-



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umn and wheel jolted alarmingly at each rut and bump in the road, evoking slapstick images of liberated steering wheels held aloft in startled hands.

The front passenger seatback had a bizarre habit of lurching forward under braking, so that I conditioned a maternal response of blocking the seatback with my right arm at every abrupt braking and/or cornering move. The only solution I found for this problem was to bring a passenger everywhere I went.

The good parts: Lots of interior luxuries. Like the goodie-holding side pockets in each door; the handy courtesy flashlight attached to the headliner; generous hatch space—enough for two small people and a month's worth of (you fill it in). There's a sound system that, with the windows closed, envelops one in her own world of music, and the air conditioner, though obtrusive on high setting, cooled the cabin in a hurry.

The Dodge 2.2 seemed like a mid-size trying to be a musclecar. With its slightly raked stance, the 2.2 looked nasty and sounded even better; it made me want to drive fast.

There is no question of thrust in this car; I was treated to willing and powerful takeoffs. At speed, the 2.2 offered total control, straight steering, good tracking and acceptable suspension.

The gearshift had a rather close gate, which gave me 4th for 2nd until I got the hang of it; at that point it became a favorite feature for its contribution to easy handling. The turn-signal indicator stalk was quite a reach for this driver; I had to remove my hand from the steering wheel to signal for a turn.

There was not much headroom in the 2.2. I had to squish my 5-foot-4 frame down into the seat to avoid contact with the ceiling. The interior was a bit spartan compared to the EXP. There was a back seat, though, and this was adequate for two people with short legs. However, the appointments were a bit abbreviated: no air conditioner (what?), and a simple AM/FM radio with no cassette player.

The Charger's image? Sexier than the EXP. It was red with black trim and looked real nice with its 2.2 logo and that mysterious bulge in its hood. It was better sounding, too, with a throaty rumble in its voice that kept saying, "C'mon, try me."

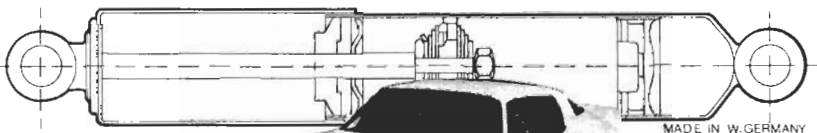
On both cars the right sideview mirror could be a nice touch if one could but touch it. To reach the mirror adjustment required the armspan of a gorilla. And I felt the interior colors were out of keeping on both cars: The EXP was black on white, and the 2.2 was decked in a teeny zebra stripe. Whatever happened to solid colors?

For those who seek only a sporty image, the EXP is tolerable. But for a total package of image and performance, the Dodge 2.2 is my real winner.

—Jackie Andersen

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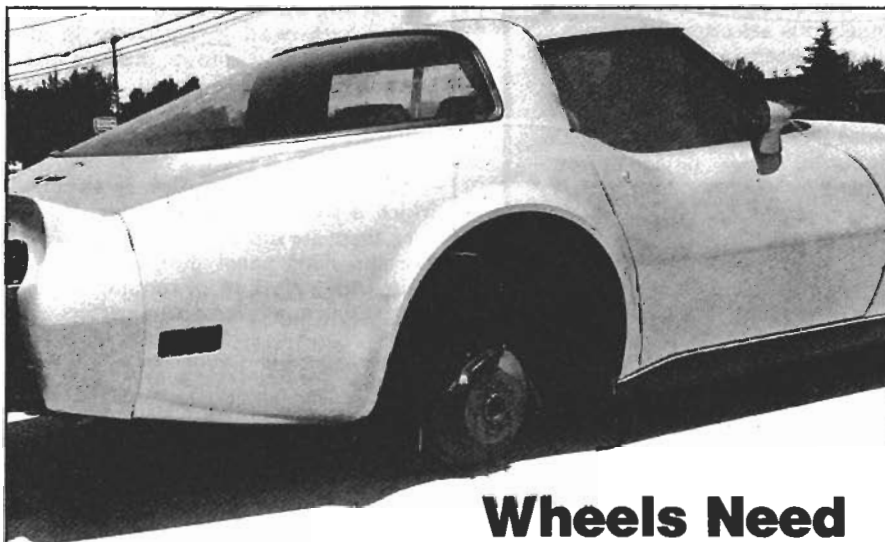
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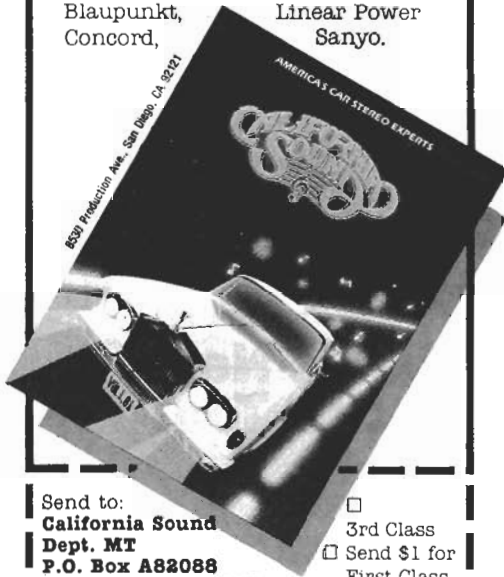
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CHARGER vs EXP

If it is possible to stereotype a car, to predict its performance by its looks, then I think both the Ford EXP and the Dodge Charger live up to their images. The battleship-gray EXP looks to me like a librarian's Corvette. And the Dodge Charger 2.2, with its rocket-shaped front and its flashy color scheme, looks like a bit of an upstart—maybe a sorority girl's present from Daddy. But it definitely earns its name.

I like to compare the cars I drive to the Honda Civic, which seems to be the car no one complains about much. It's the VW Bug of the Eighties: easy to maneuver, comfortable to drive, and powerful enough. So if another car, especially an American car, can come close, I am amazed. This new Ford EXP feels

"The EXP looks like a librarian's Corvette; the Charger definitely earns its name."

almost as comfortable to drive. It feels right and it fits me—or should I say I fit it. The seats feel just right in their glove-soft, washable, padded vinyl. My feet reach the pedals, and my knees don't hit the steering wheel. Without neck-straining or back-twisting, I can see in all directions. The windows, mirrors and controls are all well-placed. The seat belt is comfortable and easy to use. Seat adjustment is easy, and even the seat-back reclines.

The design of the dash is simple, which is something I appreciate. However, there are slip-ups elsewhere inside, like the door panel design, which is white with a black stripe running diagonally through, a reverse skunk effect.

The EXP starts smoothly and shifts easily. However, the reverse gear is so close to 1st that it's easy to make the mistake of trying to take off in reverse. The drive is comfortable, but as I mentioned earlier, it fits the conservative image of the car.

The black and white pinstriped corduroy interior of the Dodge Charger is well-designed and comfortable, especially in extreme temperatures. Even the door panels are attractive and sturdy-looking. The seat belts retract without any hesitation, and the controls are all within easy reach. The seat adjustment is easy to reach and operates smoothly. However, the seatback does not adjust, a big minus.

The instrument panel is not junked up with useless controls, although a third air vent in the middle would be welcome.

Although no one expects much room in the back seat of a sports car, I am pleasantly surprised that the Charger's back seat comfortably seats my three children, and all in seatbelts at that. Another plus is that the back seat folds forward for a good-sized storage area.

The Charger is powerful, fun and easy to drive. It can turn a mild-mannered young lady into a road-racing squirrel. The hardest part about driving this car is trying not to go over the speed limit. It just makes you want to roll.

But, like the EXP, the Charger has its minor annoyances. The turn signal is too far from the steering wheel for me to operate without taking my hand off the wheel. Also, the ignition switch is extremely difficult to place in the "off" position because you must press an inconveniently placed button. Of all the anti-theft devices, why have these annoying buttons anyhow? There must be a simpler way.

—Marianne Gregory
continued on page 108



The Motor Trend all-girl review: Jackie Andersen, Tracey Hurst and Marianne Gregory. They don't care about target markets; they just know what they like.

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CHARGER vs EXP

When I took possession of the EXP and the Charger 2.2, I decided I would test drive each as a passenger car and as a sports car. I then proceeded into the streets, highways and canyons of Los Angeles.

The canyon driving provided me with my first set of conclusions. While both cars may be "sporty," I cannot place either in the sports car category. The 2.2 did seem to corner somewhat better, but neither had the stability I expect in a sports car. Several times I felt the rear end of each car slip, pulling around the curve first; not very reassuring.

Performance is another essential ingredient to me, for any kind of car. When I accelerate quickly, I want and expect a car to respond appropriately. The 2.2 delivers this power (plus some). It is a performance car, and I found it hard not to take advantage of that.

The EXP didn't do as well in the performance department. I found it particularly sluggish in 1st and 2nd gears. At higher speeds, the acceleration wasn't as

much of a problem.

Although I failed to find a sports car in the EXP, I did discover a fun car that was functional for city and highway driving. It was a comfortable car that was equipped with many luxury-type features in very convenient locations. This is no small feat and should not go unnoticed. The dash area was particularly well-thought-out.

"While both cars may be sporty, I can't place either in the sports car category."

I had two major complaints about the interior of the EXP. The first was that it was very plain (excluding the dash area). The interiors of the doors were the major contributors to this feeling. They looked cheap, from the plastic handles to the black "racing stripe" emblazoned on the doors.

My second complaint had to do with

the idea of the car being a "2-seater." I presently own a 2-seat car and through my frustration have concluded that even a small back seat is better than no back seat at all.

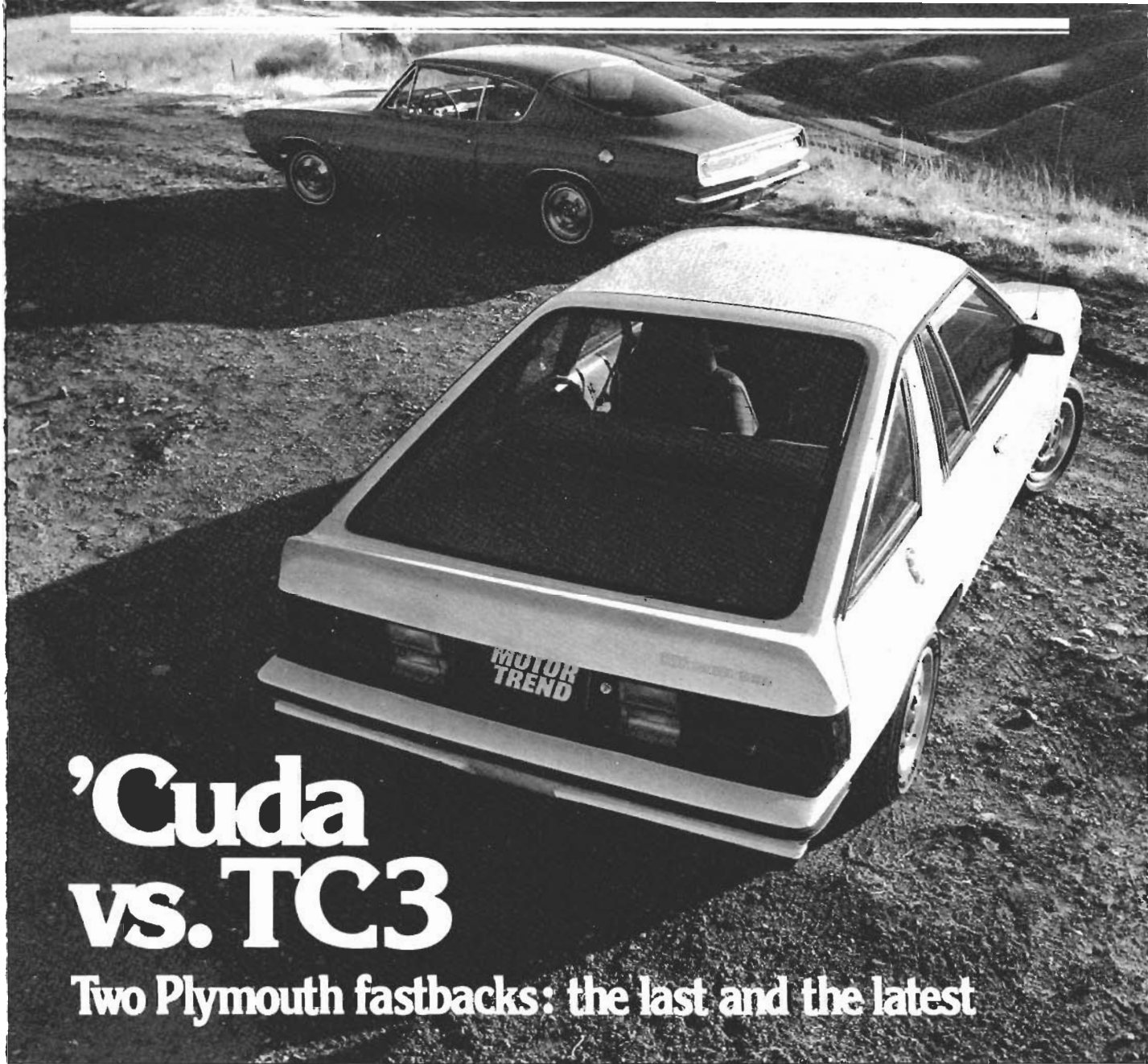
The 2.2 was the sportier looking of the two. Chrysler has used detailing that is really eye-catching. It was reminiscent of my wilder high school days. I must admit, though, that while it was a fun car, I felt a bit too conspicuous.

The interior was upholstered with fabric, which added a great deal to the car's hospitality. There were some serious flaws, though. The seats were not very comfortable, and the adjustment levers were nearly useless.

Interior noise level was about the same in both cars: fairly loud. The stereo in the 2.2 could drown only part of this noise.

It's hard to compare such different-feeling cars, even two that have a similar image. One is so obviously designed for performance; the other for comfort and general city driving. But overall, I found the EXP better suited my tastes. If only it had the power of the 2.2 . . .

—Tracey Hurst



'Cuda vs. TC3

Two Plymouth fastbacks: the last and the latest

**"They
don't
build 'em
like they
used to"**
ROAD
TEST

by Clifford Ghatti

PHOTOS BY JIM BROWN



The large glass bubble that Plymouth grafted on to the back of the 1964 Valiant to create the Barracuda may have resulted in a fastback profile straight out of the early Fifties. But it also served as a "crystal ball," foretelling the future of the family car. The fastback glass was not the whole Barracuda "window of the future." There was also a fold-down rear seat. Corvair sported this fold-down feature years earlier, but when you folded down the 'Cuda's rear seat and combined it with the room to the rear (including a concealed trunk), you had over 7 feet of "anything" space, as the ads touted it. Almost like a wagon. It marked the first time you could have the appearance of a sports car, the 5-passenger seating space of a family car, and much of the versatility and practicality of a station wagon—all in one.

Today, everyone makes cars descended from those first Barracudas. To see just how they compare, we decided to match the "last of the *real* Barracudas" with one of its new-wave counterparts.

First, a little background. When the original Barracuda was introduced, everyone's attention was immediately focused on the 14.4-square-foot rear window, claimed at that time to be the largest piece of glass "ever installed in a production automobile." Base price was \$2,365, just \$3 under that of the new Mustang. Standard equipment varied on the two cars, but the Barracuda had the folding rear seat and all that load space. However, the Mustang's long-hood, short-deck styling (which resulted in a small trunk and minimum rear seat room) was more desirable to the public than practicality, and respective sales reflected this. Both cars were based on the mechanical componentry of their com-

'Cuda vs. TC3



TC3

Barracuda

pact-sedan siblings, but the Plymouth also inherited most of its exterior sheet metal. Unique front styling and the monstrous rear window were, all things considered, well integrated into the Valiant body panels and reasonably successful in disguising the car's heredity.

When the 1967 Barracuda came on the scene, it had all its own sheet metal for the first time but still shared its underpinnings and drivetrain with the boxier Valiant. So in spite of the clean, gently rounded contours that the fastback now wore with its handsome new roofline, it was still not a Pony car. With its high cowl and sedan-derived proportions, the fastback and the new notchback coupe and convertible led a pretender's existence in this market. Its *looks* just couldn't pull it off. The 273 V-8 in the '67s and the 340 V-8 in the '68 and '69 models (not to mention the 383 V-8s) made the car more than competitive from a performance standpoint, but most buyers were looking for styling and pizzazz, not performance and practicality. The 1969 fastback was the last "real" Barracuda, and even at that, Plymouth had made the folding rear seatback a \$67.25 option in an attempt to cut costs.

The 1970 Barracuda was little more than a warmed-over clone of the other Pony cars and, while the folding rear seat resurfaced briefly in a later Duster model, Plymouth basically abandoned a packaging concept that was to be picked up by the Vega in 1971 and, eventually, by every manufacturer. It wasn't until the 1979 model year, 10 years after the "last" Barracuda, that a domestically built Mopar capitalized on the attributes of that original package and sweetened the deal with sportier styling and front-wheel drive. Chrysler, apparently having learned a lesson with the Barracuda, did not make the TC3 a compromise car. Surprisingly, the cowl height is the same as on the Horizon 4-door, but the windshield is laid back an additional 6 degrees, tumblehome is increased, wheelbase is shortened, and the front of the car is extended and more aerodynamic. From the outside, the TC3 would have to be considered an improvement over the Barracuda.

Inside, it's not such a clear-cut victory, but, on balance, it seems that the newer car has benefitted from evolution.



TC3



Barracuda

While the Barracuda had a relatively cavernous load space that was 7 feet long overall, it was not the most accessible. The opening through to the trunk was only 43 inches wide and 14 inches high. Great for vaulting poles, skis and jumbo pizza pans, but not so great for bicycles, platform rockers and other bulky objects. Some of the latter items could be wrestled through the side door and window, but not everything the volume could contain could be gotten into it. The cargo area was very much like the "ship-in-the-bottle" challenge. The car's main flaw was the lack of an adequate rear opening. Not so the TC3. If anything, its hatch may be too big. For a relatively small car, the vicinity of the hatch, but our test example was a very solid and quiet car.

Being 29 inches shorter on the outside, the TC3 is almost the same amount shorter on the inside, in the cargo area. In addition, the rear suspension towers neck



TC3



Barracuda

down the width of the load space. In spite of this, the smaller car can swallow almost three-quarters of what the Barracuda could. Alas, there are a few places the newer car falls short. The lift-over lip is nearly 3 feet off the ground and a full foot above the floor. Floor, or lack of it, is the other problem. The firm, flat, carpet-covered plywood platform of the old car has been succeeded by lightweight carpet spread over the tire well and attached to the seat back. When folded, the seat back makes a 4-inch step-up from the rest of the load floor.

Room for passengers is also scaled down from the Barracuda, except for leg room in the front seat, which is 1½ inches greater. The TC3 is a much more hospitable car to the front seat occupants than its ancestor. The seats hold you up high, in good relation to controls and instrumentation, and, combined with virtually 360 degrees of glass, this means better visibility in all directions. The interior trim quality is considerably better and the availability of cords and velours, in addition to the usual vinyls, is a great improvement. Instrument clusters on both cars consist of three round dials visible through the upper half of the steering wheel. The TC3 short-changes on temperature and oil pressure gauges, and the markings on the others, as well as the location of the clock, tend to make the cluster face less easily readable than that of the older car. The controls in both cars are within comfortable reach, although it is a stretch to the multi-function directional/wiper/high-beam stalk on the TC3. The temperature controls are more

ROAD TEST DATA

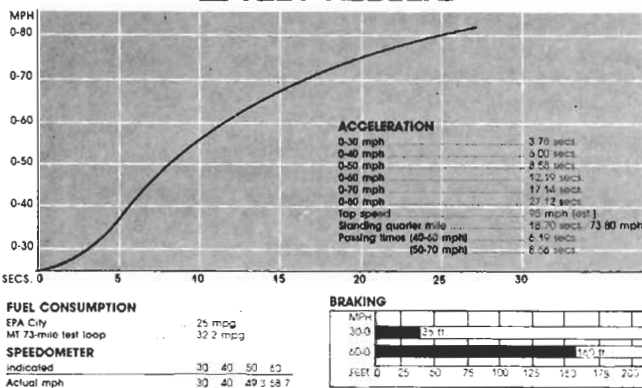


1981 Horizon TC3

SPECIFICATIONS

GENERAL			
Vehicle type	Front-engine, front-drive, 2 + 2 hatchback	Width	65.8 in.
Base price	\$6070	Height	53.5 in.
Options on test car	Turismo package, tonneau cover, foot mats, maintenance-free battery, elec. rear defogger, elec. rear window, A/C, undercoat, power lift gate, AM/FM stereo, Sport suspension \$8410	Ground clearance	5 in.
		Max. load length w/rear seats (folded down)	62 in.
		Curb weight	2247 lb.
		Weight distribution, F/R	1394/853 lb.
		CAPACITIES	
		Fuel	13 gal.
		Crankcase	3.8 qt.
		Cooling system	8.7 qt.
		Trunk	N/A
		SUSPENSION	
Price as tested		Front	Independent leaf-spring w/coil springs, stabilizer bar (1.0-in. diameter)
ENGINE		Rear	Independent trailing-arm, coil springs, stabilizer bar (0.63-in. diameter)
Type	In-line four, water-cooled, cast-iron block, aluminum head, 5 main bearings	STEERING	
Bore & stroke	87.5 x 92 mm (3.44 x 3.62 in.)	Type	Rock and pinion, power assist
Displacement	2.2 liter (135 cu. in.)	Turns lock-to-lock	3.1
Compression ratio	8.5:1	Tuning circle, curb-to-curb	34.1 ft.
Fuel system	2-bbl. carburetor	BRAKES	
Recommended fuel	Unleaded	Front	Solid discs, 8.98-in. diameter
Emission control	Electronic leak control, catalytic converter, overhead camshaft, ball-driven	Rear	Cast iron drums, 7.87-in. diameter
Valve gear	Overhead	WHEELS AND TIRES	
Horsepower (SAE net)	84 at 4800 rpm	Wheel size	5.5 x 14J
Torque (lb.-ft., SAE net)	111 at 2800 rpm	Wheel type	Steel disc
Power-to-weight ratio	26.2 lb./hp	Tire make and size	Firestone HPR P169, 60R14
DRIVETRAIN		Tire type	Steel-belted radial
Transmission	4-speed manual (0.88:1 overdrive 4th)	Recommended pressure (psi), F/R	35/35
Final drive ratio	3.05:1		
DIMENSIONS			
Wheelbase	98.7 in.		
Track, F/R	56.1/55.5 in.		
Length	164.8 in.		

TEST RESULTS



DODGE CH



In 6.9 seconds she can be doing 50 mph.
Did you ever see a 41 **25** mpg* car do that before?

HWY EST EPA EST MPG

The Charger legend comes alive again in the all new Charger 2.2.

A torque machine.

The brute force of the 60's at the expense of fuel economy is gone. But if performance is still your thing, Charger 2.2's space age technology and sophisticated design make getting there from here every bit as exhilarating. Now as it was then.

We took Chrysler's gutsy new

2.2 liter overhead cam engine, that cranks out 111 foot-pounds of torque at 2800 RPM, hooked on a 3.13:1 final drive ratio, and "stuffed" it into one of the slipperiest missiles ever built in America.

Slices through the air at 41 hwy **25 EPA est mpg*:**

That aerodynamically sleek body you're looking at has a drag coefficient lower than Corvette's

—and weighs in at less than 2400 pounds. That's power-to-weight like the Chargers of past for very respectable get-up-and-go.

Pulls like a rocket:

0 to 50 in 6.9.

0 to 50 in 6.89 seconds in tests by National Hot Rod Association. The thrill is back.

But you give up nothing in mileage—it's impressive by any standard.

*Use EPA est mpg for comparison. Your mileage may differ depending on speed, trip length and weather. Actual highway mileage probably lower. California estimates lower.

ARGER 2.2



What the competition doesn't want you to know.

MODEL***	EPA EST*	HWY EST	ENGINE	DSPLY/WLT*	0-50**	1981 M.S.R.P.**
Charger 2.2	25	41	2.2-Liter 135 CID	.060	6.89	\$6,598
Datsun 280ZX 2+2	21	32	2.8-Liter 168 CID	.056	7.30	\$14,949
Mustang Cobra	23	34	2.3-Liter 140 CID	.053	9.04	\$7,728
Porsche 924	20	35	2.0-Liter 121 CID	.046	7.77	\$16,770
Pontiac Trans Am	16	22	4.9-Liter 301 CID	.087	7.32	\$8,670

*Calculated by dividing cubic inch displacement by curb weight.

**Based on National Hot Rod Association acceleration tests.

***Base models. Charger 2.2 shown with two-tone paint option.

**Sicker price, excluding title, taxes and destination charges.

But the best thing about Charger 2.2 is how all the power gets to the road. While most of its competition is still in the starting gate with rear-wheel-drive, Charger 2.2 is technologically years ahead.

It gives you the handling you can expect only from front-wheel-drive and rack and pinion steering.

A predictable corner-stormer.

Thrust it ahead and you get the tactile feel of the road that lets you know who's in charge. Just aim Charger 2.2 where you want to go. That's where you go. Thanks also

to standard 14" x 5.5" rallye road wheels and P195/60R14 raised white letter steel belted radials.

Hang on the S14 Sport Suspension option and you'll really show a winding road who's boss.

How much? How about \$6598** for starters.

Dodge Charger 2.2 is the new standard by which all thoroughbred driving machines will be judged.

You'll have a hard time beating her on the road.

At \$6598**, you'll have an even harder time beating her price.



Buy or lease at your Dodge Dealer.