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**CAR of the YEAR
NOMINEES**

TEN

BEST CARS FOR '71



**SCORING DODGE'S
'71 SCAT PACK**

Models: SE • Super Bee • 500
Engines: 383 • 440 • 440/6 • 426 Hemi
Transmissions: 3- & 4-Speed vs. Automatic



Comparison test:
383 Charger 500
440-6 Super Bee
Hemi Super Bee
440 Charger SE

THE CHARGERS OF THE DODGE BRIGADE

By A.B. Shuman

Around Hamtramk and Highland Park they're calling 1970 "the year of the compact," and luckily (meaning through no insight on the part of Chrysler's traditionally myopic product planners) Dodge had Dart, the right car for which the right time had finally come, in its corner. But, while sales were booming with the small cars, the intermediates were taking a beating. Luckily again, Dodge had already planned to consolidate, trim, and revitalize Coronet and Charger for '71. The decision had nothing to do with the 1970 sales figures, though they did indicate its validity, as it was made some time ago. There were several aspects involved. First, the multiplicity of Coronet and Charger models, with all the various options, complicated production line scheduling. In effect, with all the permutations of paint, engines, and accessories, it's conceivable that the "same" car could never be built twice. Then, too, this proliferation produced situations where two different models were in sales competition with each other, as in the case of a Coronet Super Bee versus a Charger Super Bee. If one or the other had to go then, the only thing to decide was which one. Coronet's strongest years had been 1965 and '66, immediately following its re-introduction by Dodge when it accounted for about half of the division's total sales. Charger, on the other hand, while still not approaching the volume of Coronet sales, had been debuffed as a semi-limited production speciality car but really caught on. And, as it progressed from its initial angular, tear-drop-flatback configuration to the more

pleasing Coke bottle-tunneled backlight shape, its popularity skyrocketed, reaching a high in 1969, with production of just over 70,000 units (100,000 less than Coronet). So, while Charger's star was still rising, Coronet's at the very least was remaining fixed in the sales heavens. Yet, it still had a substantial lead on Charger. Obviously, it wasn't ready to be done away with.

Examining the situation from another aspect, a check into what percentage of Coronets were hardtops and what percentage sedans, along with a new wave of realization that the reasons people chose one body style over another were quite definite, eventually led to the concept of designing two totally different cars to fulfill the two divergent needs. This became Dodge's one-two punch in the intermediate line: Charger and Coronet would both continue, but as two distinctive entities. The Coronets, built on a 118-inch wheelbase, would serve the needs of the four-door contingent, while Charger, on a 115-inch wheelbase, had blossomed from a single special two-door hardtop to a whole line of cars, six different models fitting into three series. The plan was not completely unique, as GM introduced the two-wheelbase-length plan for their intermediates (112 inches and 116) in 1968. The elimination of the sedan-hardtop split personality through the use of two different wheelbases and two different floor pans (the common denominator when everything is built on the same chassis) freed the stylists and engineers to develop packages which more closely approached what the two market factions wanted. Now Charger, like the Ford Torino before it, covers a whole spectrum of models (and

prices): Charger, Charger 500, and Charger SE. Unlike Torino, though, these are all two-doors, which, with their individual floor pan, freed the designers to "wing it," to come up with they did, coming up with the next step in Charger's evolution, the fastback. Call it sneaky, tough, or slippery, it gets a lot of attention. More than appealing style, though, each of the three new Charger series has its own distinct personality, all done, not with mirrors, but through changes in detail.

But as attractive as the new Chargers are, there is a problem. Charger is larger. To most people that would seem to be a plus, or at least the ad writers would have us think so, but not in today's hyper-crowded world. There are just too many big cars on our roads, big cars that make inefficient use of the space they take up. If you go by the specs, the figures for wheelbase and overall length, you'd have to say that opposite were true, that Charger is smaller, for as the chart shows, both of those dimensions, as well as rear overhang, are indeed less than last year. This is good. The trouble is that front overhang has been increased and overall width has been increased.

CHARGER SIZE COMPARISON

	1970	1971	CHANGE
Wheelbase	117.0	115.0	-2.0
Overall length	208.5	205.4	-3.1
Rear overhang	52.6	48.6	-4.0
Front overhang	38.9	41.8	+2.9
Width at =2 pillar	75.6	79.1	+2.5
	73.4	75.9	+2.5

This matter of inches may not seem like much, but the overall effect is that

the car is much larger than it has to (or should) be. Believe it or not, that's the main gripe. True, there's about an inch or more rear seat shoulder room (thanks to a 2.8-inch increase in rear tread width, which also probably accounts for some of the legerdemain by which the packaging engineers were able to chop 4 inches off the rear and still increase trunk space by 2.8 cubic feet). These things are good, but when you're driving the car those positive aspects somehow don't seem to offset the feeling that you're wheeling around one of those full-sized behemoths rather than a spritely intermediate. While we're on the subject of maneuvering, all of the cars were equipped with power steering, and anybody planning on buying one for use other than inspecting railroad tracks is advised to order that option. Chrysler power steering is not notable for its feel of the road or response, but it most certainly cuts down turning effort, especially on heavy-engined cars shod with G60 tires. The steering units in all four cars were presumably identical, but, for some reason, the unit in the SE felt markedly better than the others. As previously mentioned, each has a distinctive personality, but there were several points in

common. First, on the important subject of quality control and Dodge's avowed efforts to improve it: These cars were very early production run models, rushed to our door to meet our deadline, and so they aren't truly representative, but they did serve as general indicators, especially in the realm of paint and bodywork. Things are getting better. Pieces of interior trim were better fitted than in the past. There were no dash-

board rattles or squeaks. (On the dash and other areas where woodgrain applique is usually seen, Dodge is using a heavy, textured plastic. It's still plastic, but it's better plastic.) On the negative side, there were the few loose screws, particularly in the doors, balky power windows, small lumps in the vinyl tops, and improperly adjusted heater controls. Most of these gripes would normally be caught in a good pre-delivery prep by the dealer, but these cars were sent directly to us for cover shooting without benefit of such TLC.

Three of the Chargers had inside hood releases (a \$10.55 option that makes it that much harder for those who would rob you of your spark plugs). The hood release handle, which is big and shiny, is located under the dash, just above the emergency brake release handle, which is small and made of black plastic. And, the natural thing, when starting out in the morning, after you're all strapped in and mentally prepared to go, is to pop the hood, when all you really meant to do was release the parking brake. It only takes three or four turns at unstrapping, getting out, opening the hood all the way, slamming it closed, getting back in, and buckling up again, before you learn which handle is which. Actually, the problem is that you can't see the brake release because of the steering wheel rim. The same thing holds true on the right side, where the rim blocks a lot of the good instrumentation that Dodge bothered to put in: oil pressure, fuel level, water temperature, and alternator, arranged in two neat dials. But even if you can't easily see them, they are attractive and legible, and they are there, as they ought to be.

All of the cars exhibited a great deal of road and tire noise, which became quite pronounced on rough surfaces, at which time vibrations would be transmitted to the steering wheel. There were no adverse handling or control characteristics, only the increased noise level in the car.

Rear seat legroom and headroom haven't grown, but they are better than average, as is knee room, and two adults can travel quite comfortably back there. Front seat accommodations are likewise good, and the optional high back buckets are comfortable, though the seat portion could use more padding to make long stretches behind the wheel more bearable. The sweeping design of the roof creates a blindspot in the right rear quarter, making it good practice to check the right hand outside mirror before changing lanes. Visibility to the front and sides, with the new ventless side windows is generally very good, through the placement of the oversize rear view mirror can also produce a blindspot on right turns, particularly on tight ones.

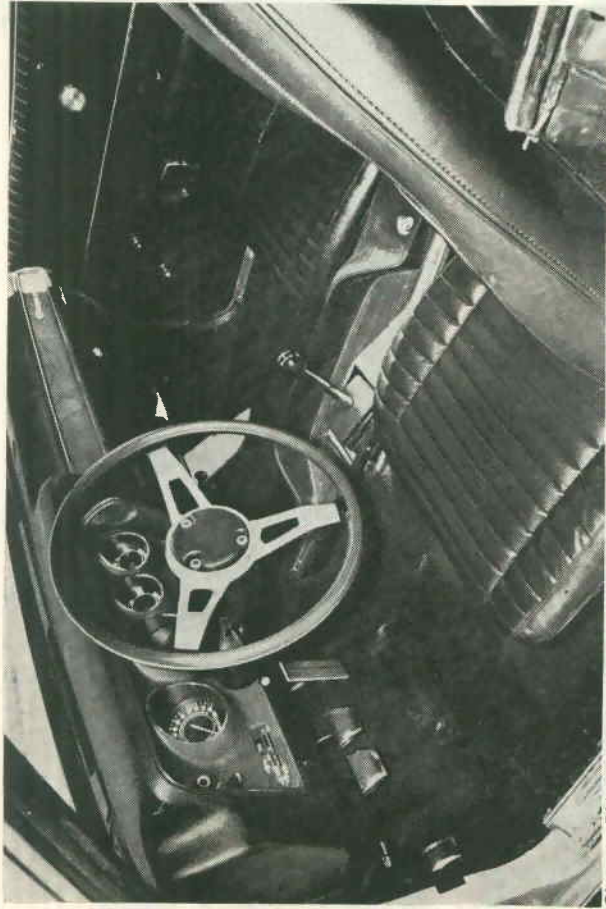
On to specifics.

CHARGER 500

This is the middle series Charger, corresponding to last year's Coronet 500. Its two variants, the Super Bee and the R/T, constitute Charger's members of the Scat Pack. Base engine in the 500 is the 230 hp 318-2V, with 383-2V (275 hp) and 383-4V (300 hp) as options. All of these are designed to operate on regular fuel. Being interested in performance, we selected the four-barrel Torqueflite opted for the standard, all-synchro 3-speed manual trans, with floor



The Chargers of the Dodge Brigade



Charger 500 was equipped with 3-speed trans and good floor-shift linkage, performed very well with 383 engine. All Chargers feature clean dash layouts, but steering wheel blocks key gauges.

shift linkage. Though the economic advantage of this choice, from the standpoint of new car prices, was considered, the choice was more heavily based on a series of tests we ran last spring. Thanks to the cooperation of Jack McFarland, Dodge's gravelly-voiced West Coast p.r. rep, we were able to obtain two identically-equipped 340 Dart Swingers, one with a 4-speed, the other with a 3-speed. Basically, we found that the 4-speed car, not surprisingly, was about .2-second quicker in the quarter-mile and got the same maximum gas mileage on the highway as the 3-speed. The 3-speed, on the other hand, was much more pleasant to drive, especially in city traffic, where it delivered a little more than 1 mpg better fuel economy. Since we were anxious to give the 3-speed some of the exposure it deserves (as devices like the "crime-fighting steering column," which may be getting its own TV show next season, replacing Adam-12, have captured most of the limelight), we specified the "3-at-the-knee" setup for our 383, the biggest engine it is available with. The results didn't disappoint us in the least.

The shift lever is straight and direct, with a plain, functional knob that fits your palm. There's no Mickey Mouse pistol grip handle, only a shiny black ball that falls right where your hand is. There is one drawback though. You must forget that you're in the Now Seventies, break the ingrained 4-speed habit, and drop back to the less complicated Then Fifties, to resurrect (or learn) the pattern from a '39 Ford box. And remember — you must always reverse — where first is, and where reverse is. Even so, you might as well resign yourself to the fact that you'll

botch it at least twice the first day you drive it; after that you'll be O.K.

The transmission features a 2.55:1 first gear, 1.49:1 second, and 1.00:1 high, which is roughly identical to a Torqueflite (2.45, 1.45, and 1.00). Shifting action is clean and the throws short. There was a slight gate between first and second, which bothered us during the acceleration testing, but this eventually smoothed out as the linkage loosened up. As it was, the car ran a 15.15 elapsed time, with a trap speed of 94.8 mph, which isn't bad for a regular fuel sub-400-cubic-inch engine. Some improvement in performance can be expected from use of the optional 3.55:1 rear axle ratio with Sure-Grip differential, as our car was carrying the standard 3.23:1 gear set, without limited slip. For maximum acceleration, it was necessary to use a starting line rpm of 2,500-3,000, requiring judicious use of the throttle to prevent excessive wheel spin. Full-throttle starts below this rpm level produced a bog just off the line. Shifts were made at 5,200 rpm in each gear, with good clutch action. In normal driving, good clutch feel and pedal leverage contribute greatly to making smooth starts and shifts. Part throttle response in top gear is also very good.

In hard cornering, the 500 exhibited considerable body roll, more than any of the other three test Chargers, something that was almost as uncomfortable to watch as to experience. This reflected its lower torsion bar and rear spring rates, although it did have the .88-inch front stabilizer bar. The rear springs on the 500 had 4½ leaves on each side, while the others, as a function of their 426/440 engine options carried stiffer

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CHARGER 500

Base price	\$3,196.00
Bucket seats	105.95
Disc brakes	24.45
Power brakes	45.15
Console	57.65
3-speed	14.05
383 4-bbl.	144.55
Left mirror	16.25
Right mirror	11.75
AM/FM multiplex	213.70
Power steering	111.40
Rim blow horn	28.95
Vinyl roof	95.75
Invoice	\$4,065.60

SUPER BEE (440)

Base price	\$3,245.00
Bucket seats	100.55
Concealed headlamps	65.60
Super Track Pak	219.30
Console	57.65
Torqueflite	237.50
440-Six Pack	262.15
Headlamp washer	29.30
Hood tie down pins	16.55
Tachometer	52.70
AM/FM multiplex	213.70
Power steering	111.40
Vinyl roof	90.90
Invoice	\$4,702.30

SUPER BEE (HEMI)

Base price	\$3,245.00
Super Track Pak	219.30
Torqueflite	237.50
Hemi	883.55
Left mirror	16.25
Right mirror	11.75
Hood tie down pins	16.55
Inside hood release	10.55
Spoiler	35.40
Tachometer	52.70
Power steering	111.40
Tuff wheel	30.50
Vinyl roof	95.75
Invoice	\$4,966.20

CHARGER SE

Base price	\$3,396.00
Bucket seats	105.95
Disc brakes	24.45
Power brakes	45.15
Console	57.65
Torqueflite	237.50
440-4 bbl.	281.55
Right mirror	16.25
Left mirror	11.75
Air conditioning	383.25
Headlight warning	5.60
Power windows	110.10
AM/FM multiplex	213.70
Power steering	111.40
Vinyl roof	28.70
Invoice	\$5,029.00

SPECIFICATIONS

	CHARGER 500	SUPER BEE	CHARGER SE	SUPER BEE HEMI
Engine	90° OHV V8	90° OHV V8	90° OHV V8	90° OHV V8
Bore & Stroke — ins.	4.25 x 3.38	4.32 x 3.75	4.32 x 3.75	4.25 x 3.75
Displacement — cu. in.	383	440	440	426 (Hemi)
Advertised gross HP @ RPM	300 @ 4800	385 @ 4700	370 @ 4600	425 @ 4600
Advertised gross Torque: lbs.-ft. @ rpm	410 @ 3400	490 @ 3200	480 @ 3200	490 @ 4000
Compression Ratio/Fuel	8.5:1/Regular	10.3:1/Premium	9.1:1/Premium	10.2:1/Premium
Carburetion	1 4-bbl	3 2-bbl	1 4-bbl	2 4-bbl
Transmission	3-speed	Automatic	Automatic	Automatic
Final Drive Ratio	3.23:1	4.10:1	3.23:1	4.10:1
Steering Type	Recirculating ball power-assisted	Recirculating ball power-assisted	Recirculating ball power-assisted	Recirculating ball power-assisted
Steering Ratio	15.7:1	15.7:1	15.7:1	15.7:1
Turning Diameter (Curb-to-curb-ft.)	40.8 ft.	40.8 ft.	40.8 ft.	40.8 ft.
Wheel Turns (lock-to-lock)	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5
Tire Size	F70-14	G60-15	G60-15	G60-15
Brakes	Power, front disc/drum rear	Power, front disc/drum rear	Power, front disc/drum rear	Power, front disc/drum rear
Curb weight — lbs.	3879	3945	3764	4083
Front suspension	Independent; lateral nonparallel control arms with torsion bars	Independent; lateral nonparallel control arms with torsion bars	Independent; lateral nonparallel control arms with torsion bars	Independent; lateral nonparallel control arms with torsion bars
Rear Suspension	Parallel longitudinal semi-elliptic leaf springs	Parallel longitudinal semi-elliptic leaf springs	Parallel longitudinal semi-elliptic leaf springs	Parallel longitudinal semi-elliptic leaf springs
Body/Frame Construction	Unit	Unit	Unit	Unit

PERFORMANCE

	CHARGER 500	SUPER BEE	CHARGER SE	SUPER BEE HEMI
Acceleration (2 abd.)	3.2 secs	2.9 secs	3.2 secs	2.5 secs
0-30 mph	5.2 secs	4.7 secs	4.9 secs	4.2 secs
0-45 mph	8.1 secs	6.9 secs	7.0 secs	5.7 secs
0-60 mph	11.5 secs	9.9 secs	9.9 secs	7.6 secs
0-75	15.15 secs	14.74 secs	14.93 secs	13.73 secs
Standing Start ¼-mile MPH	94.8 mph	97.3 mph	96.4 mph	104.0 mph
Elapsed time	15.15 secs	14.74 secs	14.93 secs	13.73 secs
Passing speeds (2nd gear)	3.8 secs	2.9 secs	3.3 secs	2.9 secs
40-60 mph	3.8 secs	3.6 secs	3.4 secs	3.0 secs
50-70 mph	3.8 secs	3.6 secs	3.4 secs	3.0 secs
Speeds in gears*				
1st mph @ rpm	47 @ 5200	42 @ 5500	46 @ 5200	42 @ 5500
2nd mph @ rpm	83 @ 5200	73 @ 5500	80 @ 5200	70 @ 5500
3rd mph @ rpm	109 @ 4500	106 @ 5500	114 @ 5000	104 @ 5500
Mph per 1000 rpm (in top gear)	24.2 mph	19.3 mph	22.8 mph	18.9 mph
Stopping distances (panic)	32.6 ft.	27.0 ft.	32.2 ft.	28.8 ft.
From 30 mph	123.0 ft.	119.1 ft.	122.3 ft.	115.1 ft.
From 60 mph	Fair, moderate rear wheel hop	Good, no wheel hop	Fair, moderate rear wheel hop	Good, no wheel hop
Stability	Fair, moderate rear wheel hop	Good, no wheel hop	Fair, moderate rear wheel hop	Good, no wheel hop
Gas mileage range	12.1-13.5 mpg	9.1-11.2 mpg	10.4-13.0 mpg	11.0-12.0 mpg
Speedometer error	30 45 50 60 70 80	30 45 50 60 70 80	30 45 50 60 70 80	30 45 50 60 70 80
Electric speedometer	33.5 48.5 53 63 73 82	31 46 51 61 72 82	32 46 51 61 70 80	31 45 50 60 70 80
Car speedometer				

*Speeds in gears are at shift points (limited by the length of track) and do not represent maximum speeds.



