

Dodge Charger Past Masters, 1966-2006

January 9, 2005, Detroit -

1966

ON THE STREET ...

The Dodge Charger was introduced on January 1, 1966. Built off of the Dodge Coronet chassis but using its own body, the Charger was Dodge's first fastback, high-speed street racer. It featured many styling cues from the Charger II concept car like a fastback roof design and full width taillamps. The interior featured four bucket seats and a full-length floor console.

The vehicle came with a standard 5.2-liter, 318 cubic-inch V-8 engine delivering 230 horsepower. Other available engines included a 361 cubic-inch V-8 engine that created 265 horsepower, or a 6.2-liter, 383 cubic-inch V-8 engine delivering 325 horsepower. However, it was the availability of a massive 426 cubic-inch Street HEMI® engine that provided 425 horsepower and 490 lb.-ft. of torque that forever defined the vehicle.

AT THE TRACK ...

Chrysler Corporation cars dominated NASCAR in the mid-1960s with the mighty HEMI engine. In 1965, NASCAR banned the HEMI and Chrysler boycotted the racing season. Ultimately, Chrysler followed the new NASCAR rules mandating that engines had to be available in general production, not just for race cars as the HEMI had been. For the 1966 season, Chrysler made a Street HEMI that was used for both the street and the racetrack.

1968

ON THE STREET ...

The Dodge Charger was completely restyled, and now featured a big, bold, aggressive look. A new roof design, called a tunnel roof or a flying buttress, was introduced. An exposed decorative gas filler cap also was a design feature.

The Charger R/T version was added to the lineup as a performance model featuring a 440 cid or 426 HEMI engine.

AT THE TRACK ...

The new 1968 Charger combined aerodynamic design, and handling and performance for national circuit racing objectives. No other automaker had applied aerodynamic principles to a race car before, and because of wind tunnel testing, rear spoilers were introduced on NASCAR machines of the mid '60s to control the tremendous amount of rear lift. In addition, the first front air dam was developed to counteract lifting in the front end.

1969

ON THE STREET ...

The 1969 Dodge Charger body style carried over from 1968 with minor exterior changes like a new grille and taillamps. The HEMI engine was installed in less than two percent of '69 Dodge Chargers, yet contributed immensely to the image and desirability of the Charger lineup. The 1969 Charger gained fame as the tire-squealing getaway car driven by Bo and Luke Duke for seven seasons on the TV series, Dukes of Hazzard.

AT THE TRACK ...

The 1969 Dodge Charger 500, featuring a flush rear window to improve aerodynamics, was introduced especially for NASCAR. The Charger Daytona was introduced in September and built specifically for NASCAR competition. The Daytona featured a large aerodynamic nose and a huge "wing" spoiler in the rear that stood 58 inches above the trunk. All Dodge Charger Daytona models were powered by either a 440 Magnum cid or 426 HEMI engine.

Dodge Charger Daytona won its first NASCAR Grand National race at Talladega (Ala.) in September followed by a win at Texas International Speedway. From September 14, 1969, through the next year, Charger Daytona and the Charger 500 won 45 out of the next 59 races. The car dominated racing so much that NASCAR eventually placed restrictions on the HEMI engine by forcing the use of carburetor restrictor plates on Chrysler models featuring the HEMI engine and limiting engine displacement to a maximum of 305 cubic inches on Charger Daytona and Plymouth Superbird models.

Driver Buddy Baker, behind the wheel of a HEMI-powered Charger, became the first to top the 200 mph mark on a closed-circuit course in 1970.

1971

ON THE STREET ...

The Dodge Charger was completely redesigned for the 1971 model year with a shorter wheelbase and wider body style. A modern, sleek and sporty design evolved with a swept back roofline and semi-fastback. A front spoiler and a "Ramcharger" vacuum-operated hood scoop were added.

The Charger Super Bee performance package was introduced to the lineup in addition to the R/T performance model. Charger now had four price classes and two performance models.

Due to increasing emissions and insurance regulations, the industry moved to low-lead gasoline, and the Street HEMI was phased out. 1971 was the last year customers could order a factory-built HEMI.

In 1975, the Dodge Charger was completely restyled and featured a more formal and elegant appearance. The largest engine available was the 360 cid. By 1978, the rear-wheel-drive Charger was phased out of the Dodge lineup.

AT THE TRACK ...

The Dodge Charger Daytona entered the Daytona 500 with 305-cubic-inch engine and driver Dick Brooks at the wheel. The vehicle qualified for the race and even led for a time, but in the end, managed to place only seventh. This was the last of the Dodge Daytona models to race at Daytona.

1981 – 1987

The Dodge Charger name reappeared on several small, front-wheel-drive Dodge vehicles, but none gained the popularity or carried the same mystique as the original.

2006

The Dodge Charger – one of the biggest names from the muscle car era – powered its way out of its storied past and onto the stage at the 2005 North American International Auto Show in Detroit. The much-anticipated 2006 Dodge Charger will muscle its way back to streets and racetracks across America in the summer of 2005.

MOTORSPORTS

The legendary Dodge Charger race car will roar again in 2005. Riding the waves of Dodge's success in NASCAR Nextel Cup Series racing since returning to the sport in 2001, the new Dodge Charger race car will make its NASCAR Nextel Cup Series debut in the Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway (Fla.) on Feb. 20, 2005. Four Dodge factory backed teams, including 10 drivers, will compete in the Daytona 500.

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