

The Penultimate Performance Mania

Nothing in memory brings back the insane performance mania of Detroit's Muscle Cars than the unforgettable 1969 Dodge Chargers. Two specials were released that year, to put the Charger in direct competition for NASCAR, models that were completely street legal but could hit 150+ on the track: the Charger 500 and the Daytona, probably the most outrageous car of the era.

The Charger 500 was a souped up 1968 Charger with some aerodynamic changes -- a Coronet grille, flush mounted, and a flush mounted window over a recessed back light, very smooth in the air tunnel. This model had something going for it, but Dodge engineers pushed forward, analysed the data from the wind tunnel experiments and came out with the Daytona. The Daytona had a nose extended out a full 18 inches to reduce drag and enable down force. In the rear a horizontal tail stabilizer on wings gave the car an almost supernatural feel on the road. With the 440 or the 426 Hemi engine, these were formidable machines. A few were even sold with a 503 engine, almost guaranteed un-drivable on the street, though still considered legal.

It should be noted that the basic 1969 Charger did start with Chrysler's 225 slant-six, a really superb engine by anyone's standards, but also had the five V-8s to choose from, including the 425 hp 426-cid Street Hemi. Transmissions came in three and four speed manuals and a three-speed Torque Flight Automatic. The body itself was built on the 1968 117 inch standard wheelbase, and just had some styling touches. Having owned a 1969 Dodge Hemi was an experience of a lifetime. Even better was the experience of restoring a car very similar -- although the body was found at a land-based auction, the parts were almost all obtained by painstakingly researching national magazines and countless calls to brokers and other Hemi aficionados. Had this been today, all our work would have been done online. The ability now to find used and [cheap car parts](#) for just about anything is one of the wonders of the internet. Problems in the rebuild came in identifying which parts were meant to be on the car that was bought by our team, it took some research and a lot of part cleaning to find numbers on the inside to identify what we had.

When it finally came to taking the car out for a test run, the twenty some years difference between the 1968 version and the 1988 version of our team driver was blatantly apparent, getting out of the car, the guy was white as a sheet. One forgets the sheer power of those muscle cars! As a restoration project, the Hemi was due for sale, and we were all sorry to see it go, but the team turned a decent profit and had a great deal of fun doing the work.

About the Author

The author of this piece would like to recommend those with a keen interest in restoring and or maintaining cars,(be them American cars, classic cars, sports cars, prestige cars or motorbikes) to the online [car parts supplier breakeryard.com](#) to satisfy the demand for your required car part.

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