

Dodge Durango: Daimler Dividend

The fundamentals of a Mercedes-Benz GL at a fraction of the price? By Joe Sage

It has been a surprisingly long time since Daimler and Chrysler split up. Their sometimes stormy marriage lasted from 1998 through 2007. But its impacts live on. Many platforms and technologies were shared or swapped during their time together. Friends and family alike only whisper about some of this, and much is never fully confirmed. Take for instance the Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG, which reportedly is based on the Dodge Viper—or perhaps on what the next Dodge Viper was destined to be, had it lived on.

And take for instance the Dodge Durango—a large and powerful SUV from Chrysler Group LLC, which they themselves gently mention contains some valu-

able elements of its departed half-sibling, the Mercedes-Benz GL-Class. Despite a dearth of specifically corroborating evidence, that factoid got our attention. After all, the Mercedes GL is one of our favorites, and we are not alone—it has vaulted to the head of the line in sales for its segment and class. But what of the Dodge Durango, which arguably delivers much of the same product, but clearly at a much lower price. How much lower? It depends upon your final trim and options, but the difference in base prices is startling: \$63,000 for a bottom-tier GL, but \$29,795 for a rear-drive SXT trim Dodge Durango.

Now we are definitely interested. And what, for that matter, of another one of our favorite vehicles, the Jeep Grand Cherokee—an even closer half-sib-



ling of the Durango (both hailing directly from Chrysler Group)? These questions led us to build the chart shown on the facing page.

One thing Dodge made clear to us at this vehicle's press launch is that the brand does not try, or even want, to be all things to all people. There are some niches they don't touch (small hybrids, electrics or convertibles, for example). What they do do, they do right, and they are proud of that. They feel it makes them unique within their segments. Dart, Challenger and many other models substantiate this. Dodge CEO Tim Kuniskis tells us a Charger "is like an Avalon on paper, but is cross-shopped against... nothing." Dodge thinks the mid-to-large SUV category has gotten soft, but they are proud that the Durango is still the real deal. It delivers towing, performance, technology and safety—but also per-

sonality and attitude.

Compared with the Jeep Grand Cherokee, it delivers seven seats. It has two of the same three engines (no diesel) and the same transmission. Towing capacity is the same. Cargo room is considerably larger, unless of course you utilize all the seats—the classic seven-seater tradeoff.

The Durango's extra size adds anywhere from 200 to almost 600 pounds, which drops fuel mileage (Jeep's 30 MPG high end comes with its apples-and-oranges available diesel). Prices match at the low end, but you can save about eight grand with a Durango in top trim, still with that extra interior volume. You may not want the extra length—it's about a foot longer, with a 5-inch-longer wheelbase—but the turning circle is the same. A tie on around-town maneuverability, but more to squeeze into a garage, basically.

But that mention of what we've called the Daimler dividend in the Dodge Durango's bloodlines is what led us to what we think is a most enlightening perspective and study in relativity.

Compared to Mercedes-Benz GL, your Durango—whether base or top end—comes in at less than half the cost of the Benz. Horsepower is about the same (on the mainstream models), and the Dodge is better on MPG (again, not counting the Mercedes diesel). The GL can tow a bit more—100 to 1300 pounds more—but its turning circle is three feet larger, a disadvantage as you maneuver your boat to the ramp, or at Safeway.

As of August, Dodge sales had topped 400,000 units and were on track to pass 600,00 for the year. This is America's fastest-growing brand, with double-digit growth on all models.

As for cross-shopping Ford, GM, other Europeans, the Japanese and Koreans—well, now that this Benz and Grand Cherokee comparison has gotten our attention, there is no question the Dodge Durango should be high on any comparative shopping list in the segment. ■

	DODGE DURANGO	MERCEDES-BENZ GL-CLASS	JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE
ENGINES (hp/lbft)	3.0L V6 (290/260)	3.0L V6 T-diesel (240/455)	3.0L V6 diesel (240/420)
	3.6L V6 (290/260)		3.6L V6 (290/260)
	5.7L V8 HEMI (360/390)	4.6L biturbo V8 (362/406)	5.7L V8 HEMI (360/390)
		4.6L biturbo V8 (429/516)	
TRANSMISSION	8-spd auto	7-spd auto	8-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	RWD / AWD	RWD / AWD	RWD / AWD
FUEL MPG (CITY/HWY)	14/23 to 17/22	13/18 to 19/26	17/24 to 22/30
LENGTH (IN.)	201.2	201.6-202.6	189.8
WHEELBASE (IN.)	119.8	121.1	114.8
TURNING CIRCLE (FT.)	37.1	40.7	37.1
PASSENGER CAPACITY	seven	seven	five
CARGO (sq.ft. bhd 1st row / 2nd row)	84.5 / 47.7	93.8 / 49.4	67.5 / 36.3
GROUND CLEARANCE (IN.)	8.1	8.5	8.6
WEIGHT (LB.)	4756-5331	5401-5578	4545-4725
TOW CAPACITY (LB.)	6200-7400	7500	6200-7400

BASE MODELS, BASE PRICES:

Durango:	SXT RWD	\$29,795
MB GL:	GL 350 BlueTEC 4MATIC	\$63,000
Jeep GC:	LAREDO 4X2	\$28,995

TOP MODELS, BASE PRICES:

Durango:	CITADEL AWD	\$43,395
MB GL:	GL 550 4MATIC	\$89,000
	• GL63 AMG w/ 5.5L biturbo V8 (550hp) AWD	\$118,560
Jeep GC:	SUMMIT 4X4	\$51,195
	• SRT 4X4 w/ 6.4L HEMI V8 (470hp) AWD	\$63,660

TESTED: 2014 Dodge Durango Limited AWD

BASE PRICE\$38,395

Options: Dual screen Blu-ray rear DVD entertainment center, second-row fold/tumble captain's chairs with full console, power sunroof and power liftgate, 20-inch polished aluminum wheels.

AS TESTED\$43,875

Note: all specifications subject to change and further verification.

