

# Big news in the biggest segment

BY JOE SAGE

The 2015 Chrysler 200 is an entirely new vehicle, delivering a significant offering in the midsize sedan segment as well as some adjustments to the overall Chrysler lineup and some fine tuning of its target markets.

Chrysler is the first to admit that their prior 200, derived from the venerable Sebring, was not their finest achievement. They have now set that straight, delivering a contender where an also-ran used to live. "We poured everything into this," said Chrysler's Andy Love. "Engine, technology, powertrain"—on a solid Alfa Romeo-based chassis, along with all new sheetmetal and a compelling interior.

Chrysler Group is on a roll, with huge successes in the Jeep®, Dodge and Ram brands, as well as Chrysler's long-popular 300 and minivan lineups. It was time to transform the midsize segment for the Chrysler nameplate.

It's not hard to see some family ties with the new-in-2013 Dodge Dart. The Dart is a compact, based heavily on Europe's highly successful Alfa Romeo Giulietta—courtesy of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles' parent brand. The Chrysler 200 is based on the same "compact wide" platform, also used in the 2014 Jeep Cherokee, but the 200 is adapted to fit into the midsize Dodge Avenger category.

The 200 will never be mistaken for a Jeep, though immediately recognizable from the new Cherokee are its 9-speed automatic—a smooth and efficient unit that impressed us in the Cherokee, as it does again in the Chrysler 200—and its fully disconnecting rear axle (on all-wheel-drive models), increasing fuel efficiency when cruising on front wheel power.

That's about all you will find in common with the Dart, Cherokee, Avenger or prior



Chrysler 200. The new car is truly all new, and it receives a premium treatment inside and out. (And in its least premium form, it starts in the low \$20s—and gets up to 36 MPG.)

**THE WHEELBASE** of the Chrysler 200 is about an inch and a half longer than the Dart, while overall the 200 is about 8.5 inches longer. The 200 is about an inch and a half wider and an inch taller. The Chrysler's coefficient of drag is a hair more slippery than the Dart—well done for the bigger of the two.

Inside, the Chrysler 200 is over three cubic feet larger than the Dart. Interior measurements are very similar in the front, but in the rear, the 200 has some 2.5 inches more leg and shoulder room. We spend our time in the

The 2015 Chrysler 200 comes in LX, Limited, 200S and 200C trim levels. Each is available with the 184-hp four-cylinder Tigershark MultiAir engine shown at upper right, while the 200S and 200C are optionally available with the 295-hp Pentastar V6 (second photo). Both the 200S or 200C have AWD available, with the V6 only.

front, but a look at the interior (see photos on third page) bears this out.

Interior volume in the front of the 200 is about one and a half cubic feet larger than the Dart, while in the back it's almost four cubic feet larger. Cargo volume is 16 cubic feet for the 200, compared to 13.1 for the Dart. For four adults, or a family with the kids growing up, the advantage is clear.

Chrysler 200 has about the same interior volume as Camry, Altima and Fusion, though a couple of cubic feet less than Hyundai Sonata and a couple more than Malibu.

**NUMBERS** tell the story of the Chrysler 200—9, 21, 36, 60 and one billion. **9:** the 9-speed transmission is available across the lineup. **21:** prices start at \$21,700 for the LX model. **36:** fuel economy with the Tigershark MultiAir inline-4 engine is EPA rated at 36 MPG highway. **60:** there are 60 safety and security features—the most in this segment. **One billion:** Chrysler has invested over \$1 billion in

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## SPECIFICATIONS: BASE AND TEST

### 2015 CHRYSLER 200 LX

ENGINE .....2.4L Tigershark MultiAir I-4  
POWER/TORQUE .....184 hp / 173 lb-ft  
DRIVETRAIN .....front-wheel drive  
FUEL ECONOMY .....23/36/28 (city/hwy/comb)  
WHEELS .....17x7.0 steel wheels w cover  
BASE PRICE .....\$21,700

### 2015 CHRYSLER 200S FWD

ENGINE .....3.6L Pentastar V6  
POWER/TORQUE .....295 hp / 262 lb-ft  
DRIVETRAIN .....front-wheel drive  
FUEL ECONOMY .....19/32/23 (city/hwy/comb)  
WHEELS .....18x8.0 painted satin carbon  
BASE PRICE .....\$24,495  
• AS TESTED .....\$31,220

### 2015 CHRYSLER 200C AWD

ENGINE .....3.6L Pentastar V6  
POWER/TORQUE .....295 hp / 262 lb-ft  
DRIVETRAIN .....all-wheel drive  
FUEL ECONOMY .....18/29/22 (city/hwy/comb)  
WHEELS .....19x8.0 aluminum polish/paint  
BASE PRICE .....\$30,195  
• AS TESTED .....\$35,670

TRANSMISSION .....9-speed 948TE automatic  
BRAKES .....anti-lock 4-wheel disc  
SUSPENSION .....FRONT: MacPherson strut, dual-reacting twin tube shocks.  
REAR: multi-link independent, dual-reacting twin tube shocks  
DESTINATION CHARGE .....\$995



At left and above, the all-new 2015 Chrysler 200, based on the Fiat/Alfa compact wide platform adapted to everything from the Alfa Romeo Giulietta to Dodge Dart and Jeep Cherokee. At right, the 2010-2014 Chrysler 200, which always had a lukewarm reception.



its Sterling Heights, Michigan plant (once slated for shutdown) for a new-tech paint facility, fully robotic body shop and upgraded assembly area. The chassis is derived from Alfa Romeo but redone for American roads and tastes and built here.

There is no one top model, per se. The 200S has darker elements and an edgier feel, with black window surrounds and wheels sporting bright metal set against dark pockets—aimed toward a sportier, youthful customer.

The 200C follows a more traditional premium path, familiar from the 300C and generations of its forebears, with a slightly higher base price—\$25,995 vs \$24,495 for the 200S (a win-win for the 200S target market).

Paddle shifters are included on the 200S and available on the 200C, with a sport mode on AWD models. On the 200S, a rotary shifter drives a sportier throttle map and a neat trick: pull down the paddles once to get the lowest available gear.

**STYLING** for the new Chrysler 200 defines what they call “a 360 car,” with no corners. The Chrysler wing in its grille flows through the headlights and down the sides, while a gentle power bulge in the hood flows into the A-pillars and over the top of its streamlined coupelike sedan roof to the taillights.

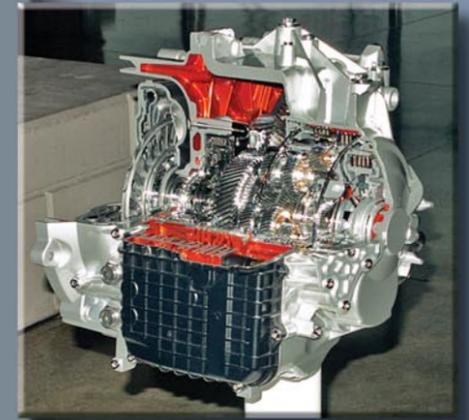
Projector beam headlights are joined by LED DRLs and fog lamps. Chrome or black window trim emphasizes the car’s proportions: one-third glass and two-thirds body. Wheels range from 17 to 19 inches.

**INSIDE**, the instrument panel includes real wood formed into complex shapes that wrap onto the doors. Two-tone piped leather is stylish and supportive. The steering wheel’s 360-degree chrome trim ring is a nice touch, but no doubt hot in an Arizona summer. Rear seat legroom benefits from sculpted front

seatbacks, and passengers enjoy their own air supply and console. The body is stiff but light—curb weight is 3473 pounds—with a six percent increase in torsional rigidity for smooth handling, enhanced by an isolated rear cradle suspension and stiff components for immediate response from driver inputs.

**THE 200S** goes up against entry luxe Germans, and we found an American sedan with European style and bearing that has every chance to be competitive. As Andy Love says, the 200S is “the best shot we have to get a younger customer into the showroom.”

All-wheel drive availability—rare in this segment—and great fuel mileage increase the 200’s odds. And with a range from \$21,700 base, to \$35,000 or more for a top-range 200C with 295-hp V6 and all-wheel-drive, the Chrysler 200 should find a wide audience. ■



The 9-speed automatic transmission used in the Chrysler 200 displays the precision of a Swiss watch. Our test car’s all-wheel drive was smooth and secure on patches of snow during our springtime drive in the Kentucky hills. The Chrysler 200’s beautiful interior boasts significant rear seat room.

