

Lively

By Joe Sage

This color—Header Orange—may not be for everybody. Then again, once you’ve seen the Dodge Dart GT in Header Orange, everything else looks a little sedate by comparison. Of course, its sporty and powerful look leads any number of people to remind you that it’s not a Dodge Challenger. That we knew. Then again, a Challenger (also a bargain) costs some 60 percent more than a Dart (\$26,495 base versus \$16,495 base). The Challenger has twice the horsepower, while the Dart gets 52 percent better fuel mileage. (And the Challenger applies its power via the rear wheels.) Different strokes.

The fact that we’re even driven to compare the two speaks well for the Dart.

We drove the 2013 Dodge Dart at its new vehicle launch in Texas, two years ago. Our headline then was “Top flight entry level.” That is still an appropriate way of looking at it. We had also suggested that if you’ve always wanted a brand new Alfa Romeo, this was your opportunity, bearing full fruit from Chrysler’s new ownership by Fiat. “By definition an entirely new Dodge,” we mentioned, “the Dart is at its core the highly successful Alfa Romeo Giulietta”—though built at the Belvidere, Illinois plant. The company told us then that it represented “the reignition of ‘Dodge fever.’” With upscale interior, upscale

wheels and best-in-class interior room, they compared it with the Mercedes-Benz C-Class, but at half the cost or better. Mercedes has now introduced the just-under-\$30k CLA, and Dodge Dart still beats that by 45 percent.

Settling down inside the Dart is a very cool experience. It’s beautifully appointed, well beyond its price point.

The steering feels good, solid with no front torque steer. We might wish for more power in a tight squeeze, but not to the point of dropping below 30 MPG. This is a pretty good balance point, and in challenging situations, we were able to pull things off via its maneuverability if not its raw horses. At about 3300 pounds (the heaviest of the family, with 2.4L and automatic), its horsepower is not bad.

The power is enough that you can find yourself cruising at the posted limits even before you know it, as often as not. That’s a sign of a decent cruiser, not a weakling.

The Dart lineup is extensive, though they have simplified your choices after promoting over 30,000 possible combinations in 2013 (before options, or over 100,000 with). Five models—SE, SXT, Aero, Limited and GT—range from base to hypermiler to entry lux to sport. Different models offer the 184-hp 2.4L Tigershark of our test GT, the base model’s 160-hp 2-liter Tigershark, or a 41 MPG 160-hp 1.4-liter MultiAir Turbo in the fuel-frugal Aero. Both six-speed manual and six-speed automatic transmissions are available, depending upon model. ■

Header Orange Clear Coat paint is certainly a lively look, and beneath it lies a fairly lively car, especially at this price, with features galore and 30-plus MPG.



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE ...2.4L inline-4 Tigershark w MultiAir
POWER184 hp, 171 lb-ft torque
TRANSMISSION6-spd Powertech auto
DRIVETRAINfront-wheel drive
MPG22/31/26 (city/hwy/comb)
INCLUDED: 4-wheel discs w ABS, brake assist, traction control, roll mitigation, keyless entry and start, backup camera, tire service kit, Uconnect® 8.4 AM-FM-voice-Bluetooth, tachometer, auto-dim mirror w microphone, dual zone climate, heated leather-wrapped wheel, wheel-mounted audio controls, one year SiriusXM radio, iPod control, luxury door trim, soft touch instrument panel, ambient LED interior lighting, 6-way power and 4-way lumbar driver’s seat, Hyper Black crosshair grille, fog lamps, DRLs, LED taillamps, body-color power heated mirrors, dual rear exhaust with bright tips, and more.

BASE PRICE\$20,995
TECHNOLOGY GROUP: Alarm, rear park assist, blind spot and rear cross path detection, auto high beams, rain sensing wipers, HID headlamps995
SIX-SPEED AUTOMATIC: With leather-wrapped shift knob, remote start, AutoStick1250
UCONNECT® 8.4N: AM-FM-NAV, Garmin GPS nav, one year SiriusXM Traffic, one year SiriusXM Travel Link495
WHEEL UPGRADE: 18x7.5 Hyper Black aluminum wheels395
DESTINATION CHARGE995
TOTAL\$25,125

LOGBOOK NOTES

The ride is quite firm and the drivetrain has a prominent growl. The six-speed auto has AutoStick manumatic but no sport mode.

This GT is not a gran turismo in the mold of an Aston Martin—that of course should be clear from its \$20-something price.

Uconnect® is one of the better infotainment systems. We found most of its functions pretty intuitive, and when we didn’t, we were delighted to find a nice thin owner’s manual that contained everything in simple, well-organized fashion.

