

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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**AUCTION RESULTS
CONCOURS HIGHLIGHTS
DRIVES INCLUDING SUVs, EVs,
RETURN OF GASOLINE DODGE CHARGER
PLUS PHOENIX RACEWAY,
ADOT FREEWAY EXPANSIONS
AND MUCH MORE!**

Dodge Charger Scat Pack Plus
Twin Turbo SIXPACK HO

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS

This piece is longer than some, for multiple reasons. The new Dodge Charger looks great coming or going, so we show both angles. Our sample's "Peel Out" paint lights up the pages. The car showcases significant trends, reflecting and redirecting the state of migration (or not) to (and/or back from) EVs. Maybe it's just the objectively sexiest thing in here. And/or we just had a lot to say.

We welcome the triumphant return of internal combustion to the Dodge muscle car family. It's a simple lineup for now, and its recent life story is also not that complicated. Or then again, it is.

The long-running two-door Challenger and four-door Charger lineups have undergone much change

over the past couple of years, melding into one EV, the Dodge Charger Daytona—with one (electric-sounding) name, one style evoking the spirit of both, and your choice of two or four doors.

Then as EV fever abruptly cooled, Stellantis has been among the first and most comprehensive in recalibrating to bring back internal combustion as quickly as they could. Thus now we have variety—not one but two gasoline-powered Chargers, in the same style as Charger Daytona, which is still an EV and still available, now making three options.

Ours is the 2026 Dodge Charger Scat Pack Plus 2-Door AWD, with a 550-hp SIXPACK high output 3.0L twin-turbo inline-6. With a 420-hp R/T arriv-

ing this spring, ours marks the top ICE, or the middle of a three-versions ICE-plus-EV lineup, by horses (see chart at right). Four doors are yours on any for \$2,000 more.

Without the EV detour, who knows when there may have been a restyling of the two veterans. But that chapter did bring us an updated look, both old school and new school—traditionally cool, while modernized in so many ways.

DRIVING—The engine and exhaust sounded exciting from the moment our Charger pulled up. True, many are clamoring for a V8 (and we would certainly be fans). For now, when it comes to the reasons why—power, sound and feel—this ful-

fills a lot of them, in its own way. With a generally higher and tighter note than a V8, and with a tap of the pedal generating a more immediate jump to action than expected based on lingering V8 feels, the new powertrain is magical for this era, if not in quite the same way.

Be that as it may, we quickly felt like we were driving the coolest thing on the road. It sounds especially great when starting up, accelerating or idling with a solid rumble. We appreciated the car's own soundtrack to the point that we uncharacteristically drove with our own audio off, to better experience the powertrain's own acoustic feed.

Performance features beyond the powertrain include everything from suspension to Performance Pages, where all of the above come together. Not having a track opportunity, we largely using regular drive modes with default steering, suspension and drivetrain. Suspension and steering through turns could feel a little skittish for AWD, although

it's a little hard to analyze, as it runs through its low gears quickly. Funny insight, though—while we appreciate its flat-top-flat-bottom track-style steering wheel, this may multiply (or itself create) that irregular feel. We look forward to more time, in more conditions, with full run of the modes, including even a RWD mode.

That was all in town, so we headed out to some of our favorite high country two-lanes. Here, any nitpicking analysis quickly melted away, as we became one with every hill and curve. We made few comments on these more thrilling roads—in short, summed up as 100 percent "shut up and drive!"

And this then stayed with us as we returned to daily duties and city streets. By this point, whether for sound effects or bursts of pep, you may find yourself likely to show off when the light turns green. And this suits its personality very well.

Great fun to drive, beautifully executed, all in all once again one of the best head-turners on the

(cont'd)

QUICK COMEBACK

Part rebirth, part reinvention, powertrain course correction has some rough spots, but we're just so glad it's come home

BY JOE SAGE



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Windsor, Ontario, Canada
BUILD	steel unibody / aluminum hood
SEATING CAPACITY	five
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	Mexico / USA
PARTS CONTENT	US/Canada 42% / Mexico 27% / Hungary 25%
ENGINE	3.0L twin turbo SIXPACK HO inline-6, DOHC, roller finger followers, 24v, dual VVT phasers, GDI 350 bar central injection, deep skirt cast alum w PM steel main bearing caps
HP/TORQUE	550 hp / 531 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	9.5:1
TRANSMISSION	8-spd auto / paddles
DRIVETRAIN	AWD
0-100 / TOP SPEED	3.9 sec / 177 mph
QUARTER-MILE	12.2 sec at 114 mph
SUSPENSION	F: multi-link, spring rate 70 N/mm, monotube shocks, 90mm jounce travel, 100mm rebound; R: integral link, spring rate 111 N/mm, monotube shocks, 100mm jounce travel, 100mm rebound
STEERING	constant ratio gear
BRAKES	fixed Brembo front / floating rear: F: 380x36mm vented; R: 360x32mm vented
WHEELS	20x11-in luster aluminum wheels
TIRES	305/35ZR20 all/season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	206.6 / 121.0 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	5.5 in
TURNING CIRCLE	40.0 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	39.1 / 36.9 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.6 / 37.2 in
CARGO CAPACITY	22.752 / 37.390 cu.ft
WEIGHT	4816 lb
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION	F/R: 55.4 / 44.6 %
FUEL / CAPACITY	91 oct prem unl / 17.5 gal
MPG	tba (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$54,995
PAINT: Peel Out	795
CUSTOMER PREFERRED PKG 22B: leatherette seats, vented front seats, heated rear seats, 8-way pwr front psngr seat, 2-way pwr lumbar psngr seat, radio/driver seat/mirrors memory, premium instrument panel, 16-in color driver display, Performance Pages, map-in-cluster display, Uconnect® 5 nav w 12.3-in touchscreen, integrated voice command, Alexa built-in (wifi req'd), wireless charge pad, surround-view cameras, bright pedals, connected travel/traffic services, heads-up display, attitude-adjustment lighting, side mirror lamps w logo, rain-sense wipers, power hatch, premium interior accents & door trim panel, bi-function LED premium headlamps, key fob windows down, power tilt/telescope steering column, black multi-function mirrors, GPS nav	4995
BLACKTOP PKG: dual rear exhaust w black tips, dark exterior badging	1095
20-IN WHEEL PKG: 20 x11.0-in luster aluminum wheels, 305/35ZR20 all-season tires	1095
FULL GLASS ROOF	995
ALPINE AUDIO: 18-speaker high-performance w subwoofer	1495
DESTINATION CHARGE	1995
TOTAL	\$67,460

2026 DODGE CHARGER LINEUP

2-door*	
R/T	420 hp... \$49,995
Scat Pack	550 hp... \$54,995
Daytona Scat Pack (EV)	670 hp... \$59,995

*4-door version of any model is \$2,000 addtl



Current heir to both bloodlines, our Charger pauses to visit with a recent Challenger cousin (left).

A Blacktop Package has dual black tips on performance-tuned dual-mode active exhaust (below).

control being found under comfort, which sounds more like a drive mode or seat adjustments. Do high beams being “disabled” when we need them most mean we’re not in auto mode but should be? Or we are in auto mode and that disabled them? A thin binnacle screen is stylish, but harder to stage a finger or two atop, to operate stalks or switches while in motion. That region is also tight to the point that it’s easy to unintentionally paddle-shift. Finding an interface to adjust the HUD is less than intuitive. Audio controls were more complex than average, and we never achieved great sound. The shifter is all electronic, also not uncommon, but ambiguity between reverse and park is ripe for a wrong choice in a tight maneuver. Things like that.

Of course, you just have to learn the ropes, as in anything. More time will reveal all the quirks and any solutions or workarounds. We always advise shoppers to get time alone in the cabin and dig into all their most important and most frequent settings. So much is revealed in a good orientation

road, the new Charger secures its birthright.

FEATURES— We did note a range of nitpicks during our week, though when you come down to it, many are minor and most, big or small, are very likely to be updated—over-the-air or otherwise, a topic easily found in online discussions of all sorts.

What set the stage for our features experience every time was the door handle engineering. Upon arrival or departure, from outside or inside, these are electronic and vague. We have a hunch that

many of these smartphone-like e-features came with a new EV-centric crew, and things will be updated as the old crew gets pulled back together.

A further sampling includes some overly attentive driver assist features, not unusual in this era, things that may be fine-tuned (or can be turned off, at the price of protections). Telling whether the vehicle is turned on or off is not always certain (also currently disturbingly common in the industry). Some features are oddly identified, such as climate

up front.

ALL IN ALL— With so many nitpicks, why do we love it so? It’s a valid question we kept asking ourselves. On the one hand, as the headline indicates, we are just so glad to have it back, so glad it exists. More broadly, maybe it’s like that significant other who can sometimes drive someone crazy with annoying details, but they could never live without. Moreso, as the meme goes, they think they can fix them—and in this case, being an inanimate (of sorts) object and most likely being already well underway, they probably can and will or even already have.

Pretty much no matter how you slice it, for customers and fans who turned away in frustration as the brand started its migration to all-electric, and so much that had been held dear simply seemed to disappear, this is all great news.

Have they resurrected of the old formula? Created a new formula? Some of each? The newest round of the new Dodge Charger family—the first round many will really dig into—is surely some of each. And there’s certainly room—with an enthusiastic audience waiting—for continued development. HQ does hear the requests for that V8. ■

