

CHRYSLER'S LETTER CAR

Going racing and winning at it is one avenue of action many of the more competition-oriented have said is the best possible way to establish an appealing sales image for a particular car that will remain long after the places and number of victories have faded from memory. You will get as many cons as pros on this line of logic but one outstanding example that substantiates it graphically is the Chrysler 300. Back in '55 when the 300's were first announced, the original "hemi" head hard-tops were the hot dogs of that era and wasted no time in proving so on the nation's circle tracks. In case you don't recall, the NASCAR championship was copped in two years' running ('55-'56) and even a turn on the old Daytona Beach course in '56 produced a record 139.9 mph two-way average for the Flying Mile.

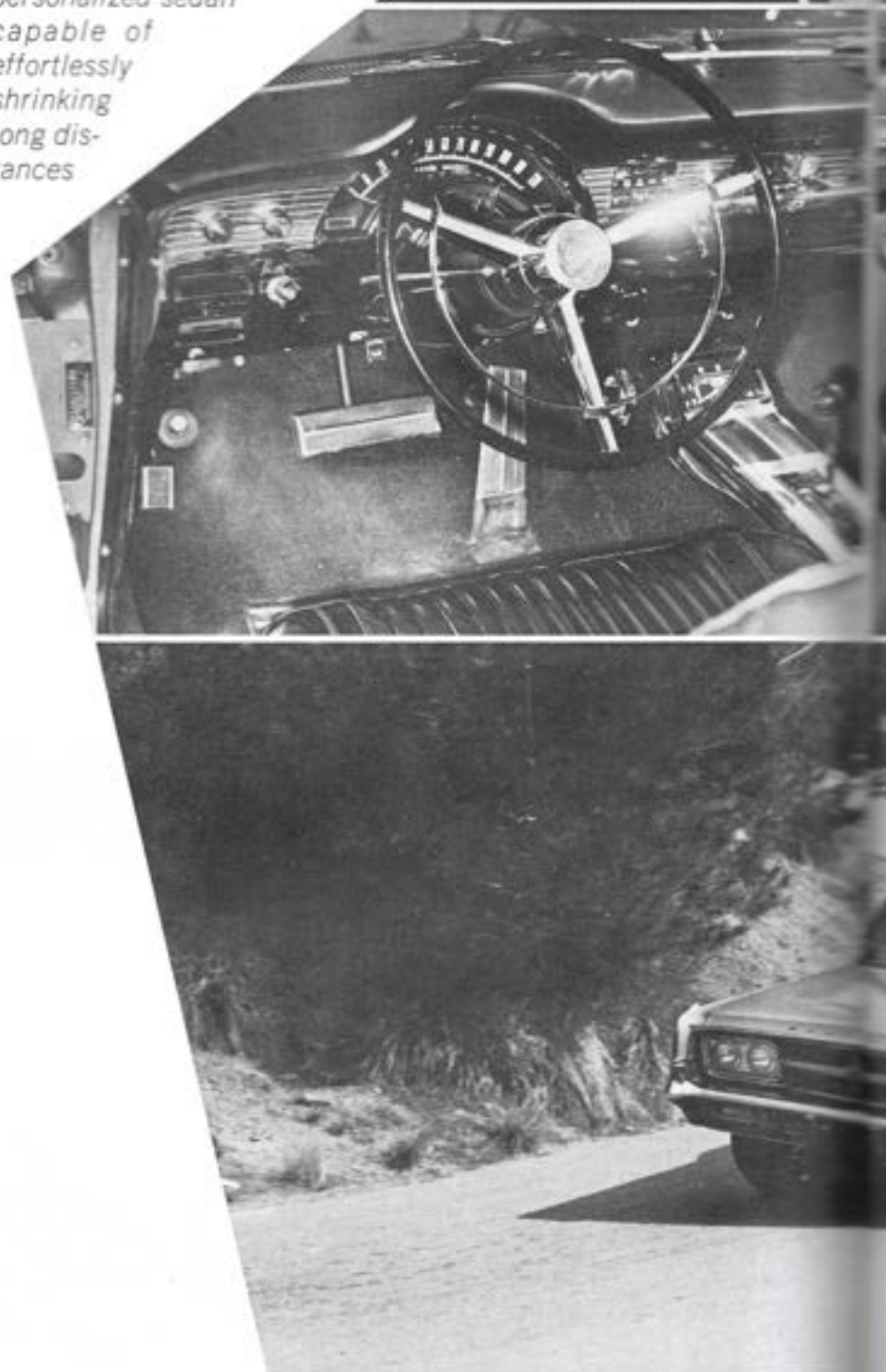
So here we are a decade later and the 300's are still with us; the breed has evolved since then but the image for the most part lingers on, helped in no small sense by a whole flock of recent rallye successes. For '65 the 300L (it has now reached the halfway point in the alphabet) is not in the same high-performance league today as some vehicles available but it still commands the respect of fellow motorists, as we learned as soon as a few miles of street driving were logged. It is eye-opening to see a knowing look spread across an observer's face when he recognizes the machine as one of the "letter" 300's. Part of the reason our Sequoia-green-with-a-black-padded-top test car garnered second glances was the influence of Chrysler's new chief designer, Virgil Exner, who has produced a shape that possesses less of the "either you like it or you don't" quality of former 300's. Some of last year's owners voiced the sentiment that their car embodied a more distinct character of style, and while this may be true, the fact that this year's lines are gaining wider favor with the general buying public is reflected by rising sales figures.

Make no mistake, however, the "L" still retains much of its old charm like real black leather upholstery that looks like class in the flesh and emits that special aroma missing from most cars since before the war. And no matter how many times you repeat the ritual of slipping behind the solid wheel and into the four-way power seat, the feeling comes through from the richness of the appointments that this machine belongs in the world of sweeping country club driveways, graceful mansions and other such exclusive haunts. Funny thing about it, though, the console-mounted TorqueFlite shift selector indicates the car is no panty-waist and a quick check of the engine and running gear fortifies the notion.

Gone from under the hood are the exotic, ram-tuned dual quad manifolds that have graced compartments of previous models and in its place is a single Carter AFB with 1.44-inch primaries and 1.56-inch secondaries. While

by Eric Dahlquist/technical editor

Hottest model in the Chrysler line, the new 413 wedge-powered 300-L is a lively, personalized sedan capable of effortlessly shrinking long distances

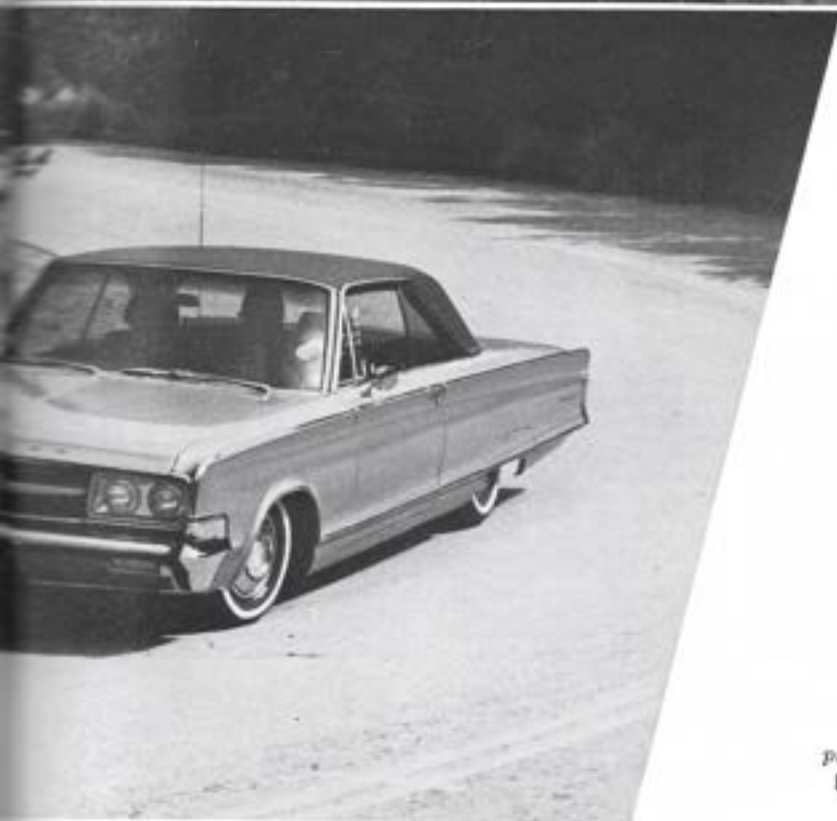
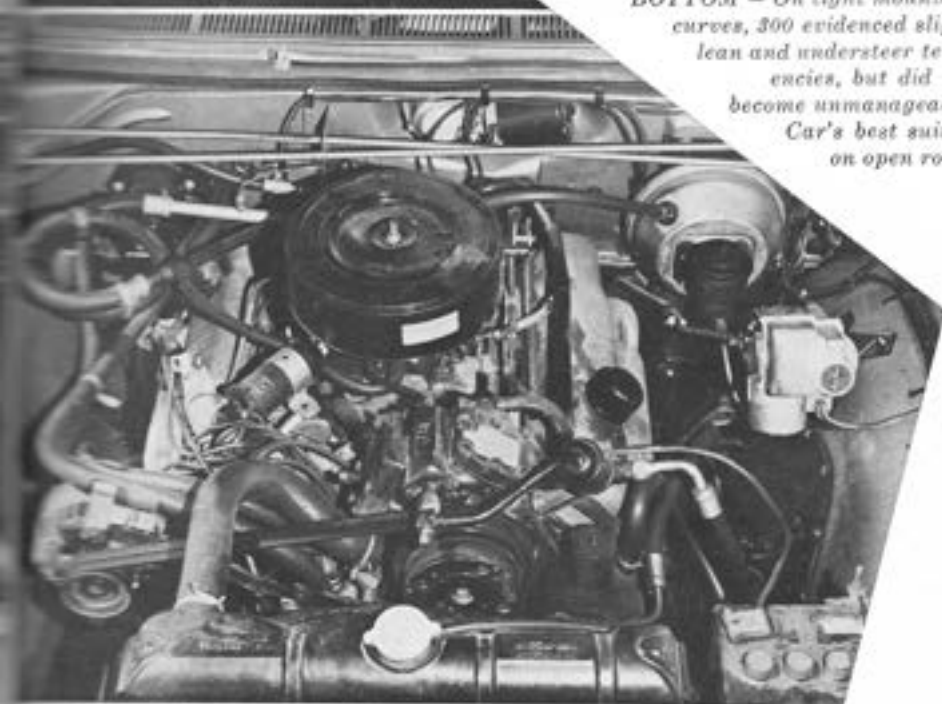




FAR LEFT - 300's master control characterizes elegant theme carried on throughout interior. Leather upholstery complements finely executed dashboard styling.

LEFT - Engine compartment is busy but despite accessories, power is more than sufficient for car's requirements. Convertible models are also available.

BOTTOM - On tight mountain curves, 300 evidenced slight lean and understeer tendencies, but did not become unmanageable. Car's best suit is on open road.



the single four-holer doesn't appear as impressive as last year's setup, it is adequate for the 413 engine and no doubt delivers improved gas mileage. Backing up the 10.1:1 compression wedge powerplant is a sure-shifting, three-speed TorqueFlite automatic, and for the rather-do-it-yourself-minded, the famous Chrysler four-speed box is offered at no extra cost. Those opting for the standard will also get a 3.23 Sure-Grip limited slip in the center section of the axle. No matter what transmission is the final choice the ratio will be the same in the rear.

With a curb weight of just a shade over two and a half tons we didn't anticipate blazing acceleration away from rest and several runs to sixty at the borderline between eight and nine seconds bore this out. However, we had heard that on some of these rigs, if the automatic transmission's throttle pressure rod to the carburetor isn't adjusted properly, the TorqueFlite doesn't pick up low gear, thereby retarding acceleration. After running one of the rod's clevises out a few turns and checking to see that the carburetor was opening to its maximum, we noted that the engine seemed to receive an injection of new life and the zero to sixties got down into eight-flat territory.

Despite this agility, the 300 is definitely more at home on the open road and here is the place where the driver really develops a strong bond of affection for the car. We scheduled in a three-hundred-mile jaunt during our test and this took us up the California Coast along Highway 101 through Santa Barbara and then inland, across the Coast Range Mountains, a more than sufficient sampling of terrain, to learn what the car is capable of. The 300 had the extra-cost, heavy-duty suspension package and we would make the judgement that anything less firm ought to allow an undesirable amount of wallow at the relatively high speeds where the car will cruise. Braking is up to the general standards of a machine this large and the effective lining area of 263.3 represents about twenty-five per cent above what can be had on the smaller Chryslers.

Aside from the creature comforts expected in something in the 300L's category, like power everything, and air-conditioning and a sweet AM/FM radio, the gadget that was really appreciated was the Auto Pilot that enables the driver to select a steady speed, set it, and forget it. Up hills and down dales, the car remains at its predetermined velocity until either the brake or accelerator pedal is touched, at which time the driver reassumes complete control. Along with the generally low interior noise level, the Cruise Control goes a long way toward reducing fatigue, not to mention improving gas mileage. Even with the Control, however, you can't expect a machine this heavy to break economy records. Stop-and-go traffic lowered the mpg figure to 11, while over the long hauls 14.5 was about tops.

We realize that the \$5931 as-tested price is out of the reach of many enthusiasts, but there are those young-at-heart individuals who desire something slightly rare, but well-done, in their automobiles. The Chrysler 300 fits this specification to a T, or should we say "L"? ■ ■

photography:
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