



# Collecting Chryslers

By John Lee

## A Hemi and a sunroof makes for "special handling"

Dodge Division scored a hit with its first "pony" car in 1970, the Dodge Challenger. Up to that time Dodge had relied on special models of its midsize Chargers and Coronets and compact Darts to uphold its performance image.

But with the Plymouth Barracuda due for a total restyling in 1970, Dodge was handed the same basic package from which to create a 2+2 configuration to compete with Pontiac's Firebird and Mercury's Cougar.

The Challenger succeeded so well that it outsold the established Barracuda 83,000 to 55,500 units in its first year and the next season, though sales figures fell off drastically, the Challenger still sold nearly 30,000 units to just under 19,000 for the Barracuda.

With the Challenger, Dodge was clearly selling performance in a package that looked the part, so it's not surprising that 93 percent of the 1971 model run was fitted with V-8 engines, although the Slant Six was available. Nearly 17 percent were optional engines, which ranged all the way up to the 425-hp Hemi.

This would be the last year for the 426-cid Hemi as emission controls, safety and insurance considerations put the horsepower race under the caution flag. But for 1971, Dodge was definitely promoting the power/performance image.

The '71 Challenger pictured had "special handling car" marked on the build sheet, which did *not* refer to the heavy-duty Rallye suspension bolted into all R/T models. This car was evidently used for advertising and promotion and it's the only one known to exist with both a Hemi under the hood and a hole in the roof!

Besides the optional electric sunroof in the white vinyl top, the Challenger is fully

optioned. The R/T model (the initials stood for "road" and "track") was Dodge's high-performance car. The R/T package for the '71 Challenger included the Rallye suspension and instrument cluster with an 8,000-rpm tachometer and 150-mph speedometer, plus heavy-duty drum brakes, chrome exhaust tips and distinctive graphic stripes.

In place of the drums, this car was fitted with power disc brakes in front. The

optional Rallye wheels are 15x7 with F70x15 raised white letter tires. A four-speed synchromesh transmission and a Dana 60 rear end with 4.10:1 gears finish up the drivetrain.

On top of the R/T performance package, the car also has the SE (for Special Edition) trim package, including the white vinyl top and white leather and vinyl upholstery. Other extras are chrome wheel well and door edge moldings, twin

outside rear view mirrors and an AM/FM/cassette stereo with rear speakers and a microphone. Maximum visual impact was assured by the bright Hemi Orange paint trimmed in white.

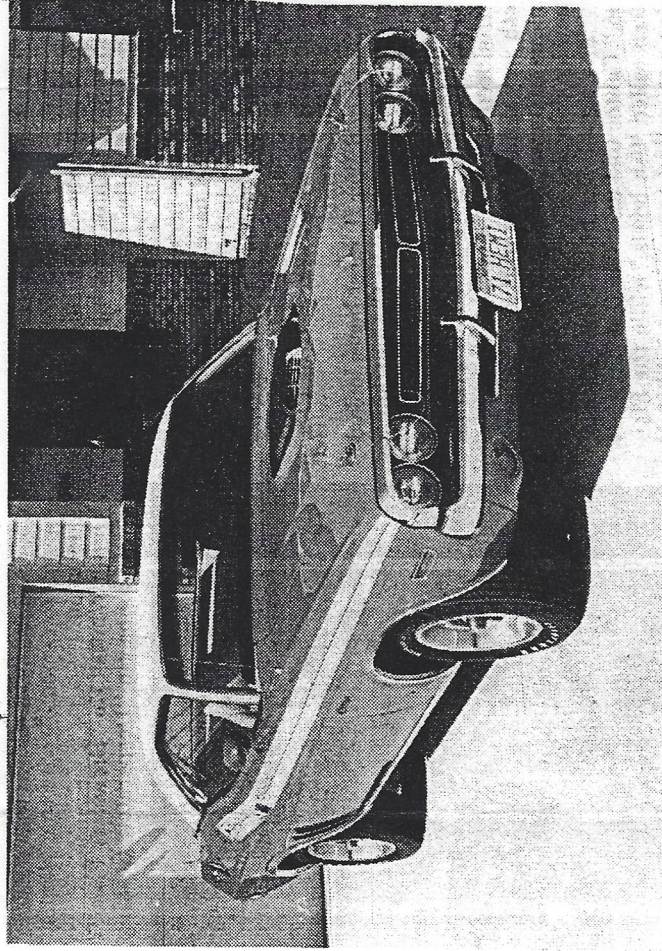
The street Hemi engine, a \$790 option on the '71 Challenger, had continued unchanged after its introduction in 1966. It had a bore and stroke of 4.25x3.75 inches, 10.25:1 compression ratio, hydraulic valve lifters and dual four-barrel Carter AFB carbs mounted in-line.

A flat-black finished air scoop was mounted to the carbs and poked through a hole in the hood. This was the impressive "Shaker" hood, so-named because you could watch the torque twist the engine as throttle was applied. For some reason — possibly because the engine was being phased out — the Hemi emblems on this Challenger's scoop are not Challenger, but instead for a '71 Plymouth Road Runner. The hood also had chrome NASCAR-style hood hold-down pins at the front corners.

Apparently, this car was used for advertising photography. It appeared in ads with professional hockey star Bobby Hull and, supposedly, a poster was made from one of the photos.

After its promotional career, the Challenger went to Chrysler Leasing and was later sold to a Chrysler-Plymouth dealer in North Platte, Neb. Two brothers bought it to go drag racing, but got cold feet when they discovered how expensive their effort was going to be and sold the car back to the dealer.

The next owner drove it only 3,000 miles in the ensuing 10 years and stored it in a farm shed. Since then it has been cosmetically restored and, at last report, was owned by an East Coast collector.



**This 1971 Dodge Challenger is a rarity in that it has a 426 V-8 Hemi, a vinyl top and an electric sunroof. The car was built for promotional and advertising purposes, a fact denoted on the build sheet as "special handling car."**