

spent behind the wheel. Shoulder- and elbowroom is usually generous, while steering wheel placement allows quick and easy maneuvering in traffic. Seat padding is on firm side but not uncomfortable. Instrument grouping is good and readable. Glove compartment (on far right side) is small.

Vision: Vision is good for a hardtop (usually 2 inches lower than a sedan) despite some distortion in upper corners of sharply curved windshield. Cornerposts are relatively thick but produce no blind spots. Gently sloping hood allows a good forward view of road while both front fenders are just visible over rather high cowl. Rear window affords ample view but as in front, a tall person will have to slump slightly to see below roofline when using rear-view mirror. Side or fender mirrors are a necessary accessory for this car.

Operation of controls: Undoubtedly the

however, if we touched (but didn't really push) any of the other 3 buttons, the engaged button would pop out, leaving the transmission in the previously selected gear and us with absolutely no visual means of knowing what gear the car was actually in. From experience, we found it was far too easy to inadvertently touch another button while selecting a gear and have all buttons in the "out" position with the car actually ready to leap away. We are happy (and proud too, if our early criticism of this feature played a part) to report that a spring on the activator plate has ended the problem on all Chrysler products built since about January 1. A light shining thru the button indicating what gear is engaged would also be a welcome change; at present the light shines thru all buttons, with no differentiation.

Dash controls are easy to reach and operate. Heater, defroster and fresh-air vents perform their designed functions

brakes, is the standard cowl-hung unit introduced last year.

Acceleration: The 230 brake horsepower claimed for this year's next-to-top engine shows a marked improvement in all-around performance. You will especially like improvement in the passing ranges of 30-50 and 50-80 mph (where it should be); as much as 4.4 seconds have been lopped off last year's best time.

Of course, performance drops off down thru the range of the many engine options available. The 218-hp "Super Red Ram" (same as the "Super-Powered, etc." test car except for a 2-barrel carburetor) should give adequate performance but will not necessarily be more economical. The next option, the 189-horse "Red Ram," seems like a poor bargain, considering the small extra cost of the punchier models. The 6-cylinder 131-horsepower "Getaway" engine is strictly for the economy minded



photos by Jim Lodge

most publicized item on the '56 Dodge is its new pushbutton shift control (standard with PowerFlite). Located on an extension of instrument panel to left of the wheel (photo above, right) and out of the way of youngsters are 4 pushbuttons, arranged so as to place N for NEUTRAL at the top, R for REVERSE to the left, D for DRIVE to the right and L for LOW on the bottom. Selection is merely a matter of pushing the desired button. A hydraulic interlock will automatically place the transmission in neutral should the driver inadvertently select R when the car is moving forward above 10 mph. Control from the selector to the transmission is accomplished by means of a single cable and series of liners. Unit being purely mechanical, maintenance should be at a minimum.

Our test crew found pushbutton driving a welcome addition to comfort with one exception: it had no positive selection lock. For example, if D was engaged, it would remain in its depressed position (indicating that it was engaged) until another positive selection was made. Unfortunately,

with efficiency and relative quietness. Windshield wipers are electrically operated and do an effective job except for center and side areas of the curved windshield (photo at left above).

Ease of handling: Dodge has retained its "full-time," coaxial-type power steering with its 3½ turns from lock to lock (5 turns on mechanical type). This, coupled with power assists in practically all other departments, makes for today's most nearly effortless driving. Unless you're used to full-time power steering, you may have a tendency to over-control going into a turn. On the credit side, it is quick to respond and with a little practice should create no particular driving problems. Crosswinds won't give you any trouble. In the city, this car comes close to being the ultimate in driving ease.

Brake and accelerator are positioned for quick and easy foot movement, the brake pedal being wide enough (8 inches) for left-foot braking. Pedal on non-PowerFlite equipped cars, with or without power

(when coupled to overdrive) but obviously must work pretty hard to keep up with present-day traffic. Its long-stroke design, tho troublefree, has a shorter life expectancy than the V8s.

PowerFlite transmission is smooth and responsive thruout full driving range; you're wasting your time to try and out-think it when selecting shifting points. During our full-throttle acceleration runs, automatic shift into DRIVE range occurred at approximately 4000 rpm. By manually shifting from LOW (intermediate gear) into DRIVE at up to 400 rpm over this normal shift point, we could better our 0-60 time by only 0.4 second. The same technique over the quarter-mile course reduced our time by only 0.3 second, a saving hardly worth the effort.

Braking: This year, Dodge is featuring a new power brake design on PowerFlite equipped cars, incorporating a cowl-mounted bellows maintained at atmospheric pressure (photo next page). Upon brake application, engine vacuum collapses the