

nights. Couples flocked by the thousands to the Aragon, and viewers made Welk's half hour of music the number-one show for its time slot in Los Angeles.

Nancy Carter, the wife of Dodge regional manager Bert Carter, happened to be a fan. When the Southern California Regional Dodge Dealers Association wanted to sponsor a television program, Nancy Carter suggested Welk. In 1952, the California dealers overwhelmingly chose him over singer Connie Haines and rival bandleader Xavier Cugat.

*The Lawrence Welk Show* aired in LA until 1955. Dealers reported that 49 percent of Dodge owners in southern California bought their cars because Lawrence Welk sent them—some before they even knew how to drive.

After the show went nationwide July 2, 1955, on the ABC network, the bubbles started to fly. One of the first things Welk's viewers saw was a 1955 Custom Royal Lancer two-door hardtop.

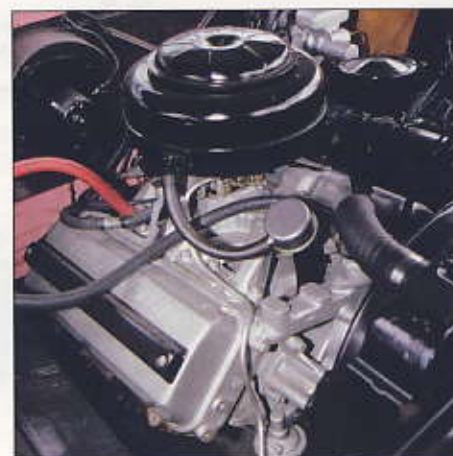
The Custom Royal took over as the prestige Dodge. Buyers had their choice of a four-door sedan, convertible, or hardtop coupe. The sporty convertible and hardtop models were known as Lancers. Meanwhile, the Royal moved down to become Dodge's midrange series in four-door sedan, Lancer hardtop, and Sierra station wagon styles.

Of all the new Dodges, the Custom Royal Lancer hardtop wore the new "Flair Fashion" best. A Dodge ad in *Life* called the Lancer "a car of noble proportions, gallant and gay, and born to rule the road in flashing style." A dressy couple stood beside their Lancer. The car sported one of the new three-tone paint jobs: Sapphire White over Jewel Black over Heather Rose. A meandering chrome beltline with a "sweetheart dip" at the hip made triple color combinations possible. Come April, this trim was extended to four-door sedans, which were also billed as Lancers.

Veteran automotive writer Floyd Clymer road tested a Custom Royal sedan for *Popular Mechanics*. The standard 270-cid 183-bhp Super Red Ram V-8 powered his Dodge. (Royals used a polyspherical-head 175-horse version.) Clymer drove from Los Angeles to Phoenix, Arizona, then back via San Diego—a distance of 849 miles.

"Dodge has terrific performance," he wrote. "It eats up average hills as if they were level ground and loafs along at 95 miles per hour. The speedometer showed 108 top speed, but it is fast by about 5

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1, 2. For 1955, Dodges were redesigned with new "Flair Fashion" styling. Top-of-the-line models were now known as Custom Royals; hardtops and convertibles added the Lancer name. (Former owner: Harry DeMenge) 3-6. Custom Royal hardtops (and, later, sedans) could sport one of Dodge's new three-tone paint schemes. Lancers wore chrome tailfins. Customs had a standard 270-cid Super Red Ram "hemi" V-8 that was rated at 183 horsepower and a bright, but tasteful, cloth-and-vinyl interior. (Owner: S. Wayne Mann)