

rior attractive and the overall construction tight enough to eliminate rattles and squeaks, although he commented that road noise seemed high.

Clymer liked the car's riding qualities, adding that it showed "considerable roll when sharp corners are taken at high speed. However, there is a feeling of safety in operating the car and fast road speeds can be maintained mile after mile." That's somewhat at variance with what the owners felt, as they placed handling at the top of the list. One respondent wrote that "handling is excellent. Power steering is very precise..." while another observed that the Dodge was "a good woman's car. Easy to handle and easily parked." (That comment probably wouldn't see the light of day in 2005, but the driver who made it was identified as a "Virginia housewife".)

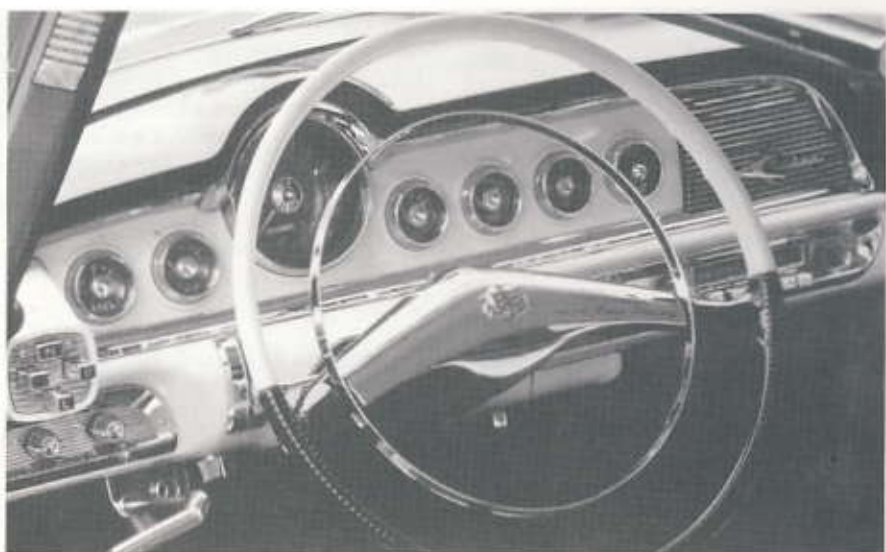
Owners were not pleased with fuel consumption—13.4-mpg city and 17.3 highway were the averages—but they did like the engine's performance enough to give it the second place. Clymer called the Dodge's performance "terrific" and observed that "it eats up average hills as if they were level ground and loafs along at 95 mph."

The performance that Clymer so appreciated came from what had become the Super Red Ram, now at 270 cubic inches and 183 horsepower. That was still a hemi, but it was joined by a Red Ram of the same displacement with a single-rocker design, a rearranged-valve configuration and a reshaped combustion chamber that was described as "polyspheric." Those changes only reduced horsepower to 175, but they cut complexity and cost.

A Time of Fins and Push-Buttons

Since sales climbed from about 151,000 in 1954 to about 275,000 in 1955—a good year for nearly everyone—Chrysler saw little need to tamper. For 1956, the biggest styling changes came at the rear. The stamped speedlines that had trailed back from the tops of the wheelwells were gone and those fins had begun to grow. Not much changed at the front, where the split grille remained split. Emblems and chrome were moved and the grille's teeth were modified, but the fact that it still looked very much the same didn't mean Chrysler had decided to coast.

Inside, a major difference was that the automatic transmission's shift lever was replaced by a set of push-buttons mounted at the dashboard's left corner. The actual shifting is accomplished by cable to the transmission and Chrysler applied the push-buttons across the board for several years. Whether that was a gimmick or an



The Dodge's dashboard is loaded with chrome and at the extreme left is a piece of technology that Chrysler used longer than did any other American company, the push-button shift.

attempt to make driving more convenient can be argued with passion, but what was under the hood left no reason for debate. V-8s ranged from the basic 270 cubic inches and 189 horsepower through three versions of the 315. At the bottom, the Red Ram produced 218 horsepower, with the Super Red Ram at 230 and the D-500 at 260. The latter was a twin-carb version of the Super Red Ram whose less-obvious changes included higher compression and a performance cam. And even the trusty old flathead six was up to 131 horsepower.

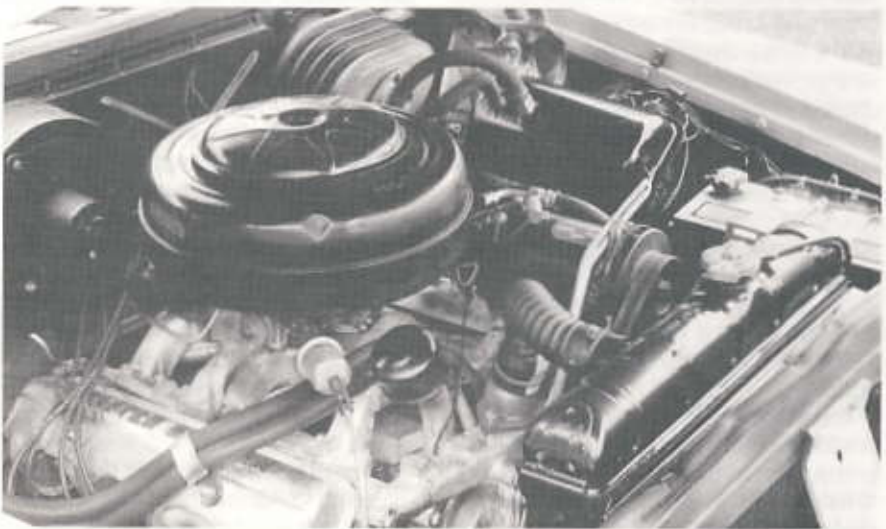
The sum of all of this was a car that should be far more coveted today than it is, but the good news there is that it's very unlikely to meet its twin in traffic. Besides being a noticeable car, it's also a memorable one and in the case of the

feature vehicle and its owner, that's especially true.

An Amazing Original

"When I got married," said John Pendlebury, of Nicholson, Pennsylvania, "I had a '56 Dodge hardtop. I went on my honeymoon with it, then we eventually got rid of it. My wife died when she was 35 years old and I said for sentimental value, I've got to find another one some day. And I eventually did."

That happened in 2003 and with about 7500 miles showing, the Dodge exemplified the almost mythical car that every restorer knows is out there and never really expects to find. The details of its survival as a near-perfect original are somewhat hazy, but Pendlebury's son, Jim, said he and his father had been look-



It's hard to believe that the pride of the Dodge line a few years earlier had been a flathead six. By the mid-1950s, Chrysler was offering all sorts of engines that could make its cars take off.