

stunt films, involving apparently rugged use since some body damage was in partial repair. Padding for movie camera mounts still were present. In general, however, the car was in excellent condition, gave out with only one rattle when the windows and top were down.

Power assist items were steering, brakes and seat. The heater featured simple controls and operated most efficiently. The radio produced adequate but unspectacular reception.

Overall styling of the DeSoto is excellent and it contributes to Chrysler Corporation's current leadership in this area of design. If it has any weak point worth mentioning, it probably is in the grille, a clean layout by domestic standards but one which probably will not win universal approval by a long shot. The test convertible, just 55 inches from top to ground, hits a new high in lowness. Nonetheless, entrance and exit are easy, seating and visibility are superb.

The dash, like the rest of the corporation's, spurns flashing lights and sticks to simple and readable dials arranged in functional round casings. Only the horizontal thermometer-style speedometer keeps the instrument cluster from getting a 100 per cent rating.

In DeSoto's lineup, the compound-curve or wrap-over windshield is available only in convertibles. Its glass area is positively enormous, contributes immensely to vision and a feeling of contact with the road. Distortion is little for all practical purposes. The makers claim some benefits in reduced drafts when the top is lowered; this the windshield does do, but it by no means eliminates the breezes completely. They are heading in the right direction but this is only one step—not the entire answer.

One disadvantage with the windshield, one which had not been anticipated, was the tendency to dirty quickly. Apparently the slope or angle of the glass does not permit dust to slide off as easily as on the conventional type. Stops for cleaning are more frequent.

Night driving with the new dual headlights did not provide any obvious benefits over an up-to-date single lamp system. Perhaps measurements with precision instruments would establish some degree of improvement, but these are not readily appreciated by the unscientific eye of the driver. It has been suspected that the duals are a styling device, rather than a major advance in illumination.

In performance, with a 0-60 mph time of 9.7 seconds, the DeSoto straddles the line between the average and hot cars by 1957 standards. This, it is emphasized again, with only a two-barrel carburetor. Floorboarding the throttle results in

an excessive amount of wheelspin, but once the tires take hold the car really moves.

The transmission is a big improvement over the two-speed automatic box of '56; introduced last year in the Imperial it's now spread out over all the corporation's makes. Only change in the pushbuttons is an extra button for punching, which in normal driving is entirely superfluous.

The DeSoto's strongest point is one that can't be shown in photos or expressed in figures. It is a quality that was discovered in earlier tests of the Plymouth and the Dodge.

A car, in the final analysis, is something you ride in or drive. In the case of the DeSoto, its steering ease and general roadability are absolutely unsurpassed. It has to be experienced to be appreciated. Body roll is at a minimum, corners are as flat as can be, and driver and passengers find something honestly new in American car comfort. This is coupled with the finest seating position and steering wheel location ever created in Detroit. With the large windshield, low-slung cowl and broad, flat hood, the driver feels closer to the road.

If there is a catch in all this, it only is that the DeSoto is a big, heavy machine and cannot be powered around a sharp turn without a measure of caution. The secure feeling, enhanced by the power steering, is so great that it's deceptive.

The quality of the DeSoto, in terms of materials and workmanship, is up from preceding models. It's good, better than before, but could be improved further. One chronic weak spot (common on the corporation's cars for several years) are the door and trunk locks.

What does this all add up to? If you're big-car minded, like the prestige, size, etc., of something more than the low-priced class, the DeSoto is quite a package. And as a bonus, you may also keep in mind that for less money you also get one of the top three luxury bodies. ●

DESOTO TEST DATA

Test Car: 1957 DeSoto Firedome convertible
Basic Price: \$3305
Engine: 341-cubic-inch ohv V-8
Compression Ratio: 9.25-to-1
Horsepower: 270 @ 4600 rpm
Torque: 350 @ 2400 rpm
Dimensions: Length 218 inches, width 78, height 55, tread 61 front
60 rear, wheelbase 126
Dry Weight: 4100 lbs.
Transmission: Three-speed Torque-Flite torque converter
Acceleration: 0-30 mph 3.4 seconds, 0-45 mph 6, 0-60 mph 9.7
seconds
Gas Mileage: 14.5 mpg average
Speedometer Corrections: Indicated 30, 45 and 60 mph are actual
28, 42 and 55 mph, respectively



ENTRANCE AND EXIT are easy, despite fact that overall height is as low as they come. The reason, common to all 1957 Chrysler Corporation makes, is that the forward post and windshield do not

jut as far into door area. DeSoto provides a place for the license plate by recessing a mount into the trunk lid. Rear window must be unzipped before the top is lowered, but takes less than a minute.