

The two-speed PowerFlite automatic—with new-for-'56 pushbutton controls—was the standard transmission in D-500s, but the three-speed stickshift standard in other Dodges could be ordered. So, too, could overdrive. In the rear, heavy duty axle shafts were connected to any of three gear ratios up to 4.10. With the automatic held in low, magazine road testers of the time were able to get 0-60 mph times from the high eight-second range to the mid-nines. Top speed was near 120.

The 1956 Dodge (CA, August 1991) was announced to the public on October 7, 1955, with a pleasing facelift of the all-new '55 styling executed by Maury Baldwin. The most noticeable new touch was a tailfin integrated into the tops of the rear quarter panels, a subtle hint of bigger things to come. The 120-inch wheelbase first seen on the '55s was retained. Series remained the same—Coronets in D-62 six-cylinder and D-63-1 V-8 form, and the D-63-2 Royal and D-63-3 Custom Royal. Sierra and Suburban station wagon availability was reshuffled a bit for '56 and a new body style—the four-door hardtop—was added to every V-8-powered series. Like the existing two-door hardtops and convertibles, these pillarless four-doors were dubbed Lancers.

It wasn't until December 22, however, that the D-500 made its public debut. Unlike the Chrysler 300B (and the factory hot rods from Plymouth and DeSoto that would come out in the following weeks), the muscular Dodge wasn't confined to a single body type. Far more curiously, it didn't even appear to be a distinct series. While the other Mopar specials would wear exclusive trim, color schemes, and badging, the crossed-flags badge that signified a Dodge with D-500 equipment appeared on the hood and decklid of the Custom Royal two-door hardtop and convertible—and the Coronet two-door sedan. (A handwritten notation on a piece of correspondence between new-car sales manager Bert Carter and Dodge chief test driver Danny Eames suggests the Coronet convertible very soon was added to the D-500 roster.) As for paint, there was a "suggested" Oriental Coral/Sapphire White two-tone scheme—the colors had been selected by the artist wife of Dodge Division President William C. Newberg—but dealers were told from the outset that any factory color or combination could be ordered for a D-500.



As the model year wore on, Dodge began marketing the D-500 as an equipment upgrade for V-8 models rather than a complete road-to-roof high-performance car as introduced. A large, rectangular folder (left) described the performance goodies that could be ordered. The back panel was chock full of press raves about the car.



Stock-car and drag racers who used Dodges gravitated toward the light-weight D-500s, seeking out the Coronet two-door sedan and convertible (second from top). A hotter dual-carb D-500-1 engine powered the Dodges that scorched the Daytona Beach sands during the 1956 Speedweeks (above). Chief test driver Danny Eames romped to a class victory on the beach (right). Flossier D-500s like the Custom Royal two-door hardtop (below) were more popular for the street. (Owner: Chrysler Historical Collection)

