



The powerful potential of Dodge D-500s was demonstrated by such NASCAR drivers as Lee Petty (top left) in the Grand National ranks and Frank Mundy (top right) on the convertible division circuit. Stock-car racing action from 1956 found Dodges dueling on the oceanside straightaway at the Daytona Beach race (second from top), filling the front row at a speedway race (third from top), and mixing it up with a Ford, a Chevrolet, and a Mercury. The year's most dominant team belonged to Carl Kiekhaefer, whose Dodges and Chryslers won 30 races. Kiekhaefer driver Buck Baker won the season title.

reported the D-500 as a separate model to the Automobile Manufacturers Association. A February 1956 revision to the AMA's "Consolidated Specification Questionnaire" lists the Coronet, Royal, Custom Royal, and a "Dodge '500'" at the top of the report. The document shows a special column of chassis and powertrain specs beside the columns for the D-62 Coronet six and the three D-63 V-8 cars; a later page of the document that concerns body-style offerings by series shows the

D-500 as being available as a two-door hardtop, convertible, and two-door sedan. Finally, there are the views of people central to the D-500 to consider. For instance, Dodge's chief engineer at the time, R. Dean Engle, has said his department viewed the car as a rival to the Plymouth Fury and resisted the move to expand it to additional body types.

Its marketing may have gotten muddled, but one thing about the D-500 was clear from the start: its exciting performance potential. The first hint came in September 1955, when a team of test drivers headed by Danny Eames took to Utah's expansive Bonneville Salt Flats for a two-week speed and endurance test. A Californian, Eames had been hired by Bert Carter in 1953 to carry out performance-oriented programs for Dodge. Under the auspices of the American Automobile Association, Eames, Betty Skelton (CA, February 1995), and Ak Miller hustled a D-500-powered '56 Custom Royal four-door sedan across the flats around the clock. When the test ended, they had completed more than 31,000 miles and racked up 306 AAA speed and endurance records, 27 of which were unlimited closed-car class marks. (Prior to the endurance test, the same car covered a mile of salt at 114.05 mph to set an AAA record for a flying start at that distance.)

From there it was on to Daytona Beach, Florida, for the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing-sanctioned Speedweeks in February 1956. Eames piloted a Coronet two-door sedan down the beach to a flying-mile average of 130.577 mph, easily winning the class for cars with engine displacements from 305 to 350 cubic inches and setting a record in the process. The only faster production model in any class was a Chrysler 300B driven by Tim Flock. In the standing-start competition, Eames's Dodge proved to be untouchable; at 81.786, it was a hair faster than Brewster Shaw's runner-up 300B. Even *Time* took notice:

"Spectators were far more impressed by the achievement of Dodge's chief test driver Danny Eames, 37. With only one mechanic to help him, and working only with tools and spare parts available in a regular Daytona Dodge agency, Danny prepared his D-500-1 himself. The result was truly a stock car, tuned for the last ounce of performance," the newsweekly reported in its March 5, 1956, issue.

The D-500-1 to which *Time* referred was yet another chapter in Dodge's per-