



Hemi-powered Dodges were formidable drag-strip performers in 1956. Arnie "Farmer" Beswick's D-500-1 Coronet (top) was a fast finisher. Beswick snared his share of honors with it (second from top). Meanwhile, Dodge pilot Ed Lyons turned the first documented quarter mile over 100 mph on the way to winning the Automobile Timing Association of America super stock championship in August 1956 (third from top). Lyons and his D-500-1 (above left) had an unbeaten streak that stretched into the following year. Beswick and Lyons were known to be able to turn in times under 14 seconds, ETs that would have looked good a decade later in the muscle-car era. Although most race-ready Dodges came as white two-door sedans, Nicky Colbert—the son of then-Chrysler president L. L. Colbert—hit the strip in a black Custom Royal two-door hardtop with a D-500-1 mill (above right).

breakage. Most D-500-1s were painted all white. (These unassuming, stripped-down entry-level cars sometimes were referred to as "Sally Rands" after the exotic fan dancer of the Thirties.) Of course, there were always exceptions. Lee Petty, patriarch of NASCAR's most famous clan, raced a white-over-coral Coronet D-500-1. Nicky Colbert, son of then-Chrysler president L. L. "Tex" Colbert, had an all-black Custom Royal two-door Lancer that he campaigned very successfully on drag strips in the Midwest and South. (Author Dennis Kennedy owned this car in the early Sixties.)

Some of the biggest names in stock car racing piloted Dodges in '56. Tony Bettenhausen headed up the Dodge contingent on the United States Automobile Club circuit. In NASCAR, the Dodge ranks were led by Petty and the Kiekhaefer drivers who included at one time or another Buck Baker, Speedy Thompson, Herb Thomas, Jack Smith, and—in convertibles—Frank Mundy. Kiekhaefer-backed cars won an astounding 30 races in NASCAR in 1956, eight of them conquered by Dodges. Baker, who ended up as the season points champion, claimed five victories behind the wheel of a D-500-1. Thomas (who went on his own part way during the season) was second in the standings, and Thompson, who won a pair of races in a Kiekhaefer Dodge, was third, just ahead of Petty, a two-time winner in his self-owned car. Meanwhile, in NASCAR's new convertible division, Dodge pilots fared less well in the season points chase, but still won nine of the 47 events. Mundy captured the checkered flag six times, but the team of Danny Letner and Allen Adkins also proved competitive in Tom Harbison-owned '56 Dodge ragtops.

At the same time, drag strips beckoned to the Hemi-powered cars with their great acceleration. In fact, the D-500-1 could be considered the first super-stock Dodge, a prototype of the muscle cars for the strip and street that would thunder onto the scene in the following decade. A '56 Dodge is likely to have been the first stock-class drag car to break 14 seconds and top 100 mph in the quarter mile, numbers that still would have looked good a decade later when a new generation of Hemi hit the streets.

The first documented pass at more than 100 mph was scored by Ed Lyons on August 26, 1956, at the 3rd Annual World Series of Drag Racing in Lawrenceville,