

time for the novelty to have worn off, there've been no disappointments.

"It's getting better all the time," he said.

Driving This "New" Dodge

Saying that the Dodge acts like a new car is neither an overstatement nor a revelation. It had turned 10,000 miles not long before I got behind the wheel, so the best way to look at it is as a test drive in a one-year-old Dodge that's sitting on a used car lot in 1957.

The first thing I do when I get into the driver's seat is make a fool of myself by grabbing for the Dodge's shifter, despite the fact that it's not there. What makes that even more embarrassing is that Jim Pendlebury and I had been talking about the push-buttons just moments earlier, but since I did put a few miles on a 1956 Dodge four-door a number of years back and that one was a three-speed on the column, I explain my error by chalking it up to old habits.

With that little faux pas behind me, the car and everything about it are familiar, right down to the odd, sort of blocky Art Deco lettering style on the dashboard. The controls might give a modern driver pause, but combined with the gauges, it's a good layout. Several owners of 1955 Dodges complained in the *PM* report about the steering wheel's position and the horn ring. Clymer, too, commented that the top of the ring was in line with the driver's view of the speedometer, but either Dodge changed those features between the two model years or I'm not the right height to find the problems. I didn't even notice the horn ring and to me, the wheel's position seems fine for a mid-1950s car.

I remember appreciating that four-door's driving position. Nobody would mistake it for that of a modern car (or even a sort-of modern car), but the high seat and the big steering wheel fit together well enough that a long trip in a Dodge like this isn't a chore. If there's a criticism to be made here, it's that there's absolutely no lateral support, but that could be said about the seat in nearly any car from the 1950s.

Besides, this was built for the highways and the open roads. It wasn't built for rallying and few who bought Dodges in 1956 were likely to push them hard enough that they'd slide around in the seat. That leads to another point about handling. Chrysler's power steering in the feature car's era and into the 1970s comes in for some nasty comments because of its nearly nonexistent road feel or lack of resistance, but in terms of the earlier models, that's something I've never quite



agreed with. True, it's absolutely nothing like the power steering of the last 15 or so years, but adjusting to it requires only a few miles.

The feature car is the best opportunity to evaluate the steering that I've had, since it can't be very worn with 10,000 miles showing. Pushing that D button, releasing the handbrake and heading out on a well-surfaced two-lane highway, I'm reminded how easily the Dodge could be up to speed, but there's no need to show off.

Still, 55 comes up quickly. Once there, the steering is light, but not so light that it's hard to keep from turning the wheel. I was able to drive more than a mile without any correcting before the crown pushed the car slightly to the right. We were still at 55, so that tells me how tight the front end really is.

Of course, at 55, it's also very clear that the Dodge has a lot left. Without even a single slow-moving tractor-trailer to be passed, it's tough to rationalize really stepping on it. On the other hand, a little stepping on it is fine and the dual exhausts do have a nice sound.

They aren't loud, though, and therefore wouldn't do much to hide noises in the car, if there were any to be heard in the first place. Again, it's almost a new car and should be quiet and tight, but it's also a hardtop and it's nearly 50 years old. It's less rigid than a sedan and no matter how well it's been protected, it seems like something should have dried, shrunken or solidified in all that time. Apparently, none of that has happened. There is no noise.

So, are there any faults in this car?

Well, the clear plastic seat covers (with their pattern of tiny raised bumps) seem tolerable, although I'll bet that I'd have a lot more to say about them if I'd driven

The trunk is substantial and, like the rest of the car, shows almost no wear.

the Dodge on a very hot or very cold day. They're contemporary but either dealer-installed or aftermarket, so blaming Chrysler for whatever they do to comfort wouldn't be fair.

We can, however, blame the Dodge's designers for a few problems. The first is that scourge of the 1950s, the wrap-around windshield. This one's not as bad as some, but the distortion is there. It shows up in what I'd call the lower third (or so) of the bend and isn't especially noticeable except occasionally when passing opposing traffic. The car in the other lane sometimes seems to jump, just enough to catch the driver's peripheral vision and make him jump.

I remember that from the four-door, just as I remember something else that was far more annoying. There's a lot of chrome confronting the driver, whether it's on the dashboard, the controls or the steering wheel. I confess that I like chrome, but depending on the weather, time of day and direction of travel, chances are good that at some time, the sun will be reflected right into the driver's eyes.

But none of that is really much to complain about, especially when taken as part of the whole package. I remember something else from that four-door. It wasn't anywhere near as nice and quiet as the feature car, but it was both easy and pleasant to drive for hours at a time. I drove this one for less than 10 miles, but I'd expect it to be every bit as well-mannered on a long trip and its owner's experience tells me I'm right.

"I know they're comfortable," John Pendlebury said, "because I drove one all the way to Florida."

What more do we need in a car? ■