



In March 1956, Dodge opened the D-500 to every body style. Two-doors were still favored, but some wagons and sedans—this Custom Royal four-door (*opposite top and above*), for example—were made. The interior (*opposite, second row from top*) was pure Custom Royal. Discreet checkered flag badges on the hood (*opposite, third from top*) and decklid (*opposite bottom*) were its only outward signs. Broad valve covers (*left*) hid twin rows of mechanical lifters in each cylinder bank. (Owner: Hubert Thompson)

stunned to find that his cars' dominance increasingly was greeted by the catcalls of restive fans. For someone who had gotten into racing primarily to promote his outboard motor firm, this was bad for business, and he disappeared from NASCAR about as suddenly as he arrived. Perhaps it was just as well. During 1957, the AMA membership voted to ban the promotion of racing activities. With less publicity value to be gained from building ever-wilder cars, there was less interest in developing them.

Of all the Dodges of the Fifties, production records for the '56s are the hardest to come by. At least a couple sources cite a model year total of 240,686, but individual model breakdowns are virtually nonexistent. When they were interviewed several years ago, Engle and Eames both estimated D-500s accounted for less than five percent of '56 Dodge output. Attrition had to be high, given the hard lives many led in competition and as police vehicles. An estimated 250 may still survive. Rarer yet is the D-500-1. A few "street" jobs are known to exist. (The equipment was available to anyone.) As for the factory race cars, Engle pegged their total at 75 to 100

units, numbers that tie in to the maximum number of dual-carb manifolds produced by Kiekhaefer. Perhaps five to 10 are still around, but as of this writing, none have surfaced.

Its marketing focus may have been fuzzy, and it might have become obscured by its better-defined corporate cousins, but by any measure, the 1956 Dodge D-500 was a lot of car. Good thing, that. **CA**

#### Clubs for 1956 Dodge D-500 Fans

Chrysler Product Owners Club, Inc.  
806 Winhall Way  
Silver Spring, MD 20904  
(301) 622-2962

National Chrysler Products Club  
160 Joyce St.,  
Fayetteville, PA 17222  
Telephone: (717) 352-7673

National Hemi Owners Association  
1693 S. Reese Road  
Reese, MI 48757  
Telephone: (517) 868-4921

WPC (Walter P. Chrysler) Club, Inc.  
P.O. Box 3504  
Kalamazoo, MI 49003-3504  
Telephone: (616) 375-5535

## Doing it By the Numbers: The 1957 Dodge D-501

Even though the D-500 concept as it applied to Dodges for the street began to be compromised during the 1956 model year, the kind of race-ready stormer pioneered by the D-500-1 carried on into 1957.

The centerpiece of the '57 car, which was listed as the D-501, was a 354-cid Hemi like the base engine found in the '56 Chrysler 300B. Equipped with mechanical valve lifters and twin four-barrel carburetors, it generated 340 bhp at 5200 rpm. The compression ratio was pegged at 9.0:1.

The idea for a Chrysler-powered Dodge apparently had been floated in '56. According to Danny Eames, then Dodge's chief test driver, and R. Dean Engle, the division's engineering head, one prototype D-500-2 with a Chrysler 300B engine was built at the Highland Park facility at the request of competition stock car owner Carl Kiekhaefer. To what use this car was put is unknown, however.

Like the D-500-1, the 501 had special heavy duty chassis parts, but the 122-inch-wheelbase chassis under the completely redesigned '57 Dodge (CA, August 1993) now incorporated a torsion-bar front suspension. A power bulge provided adequate hood clearance and the only obvious visual clue to the D-501's identity. According to the *Encyclopedia of American Cars*, just 101 were built in Coronet two-door sedan and convertible bodies (although drag racer Ed Lyons was photographed with a D-501 two-door hardtop at Daytona Beach); prices were \$3314 and \$3670, respectively.

Considering that they weighed from 170 to 260 pounds less than a 300B depending on body style, D-501s figured to be awesome performers in competition. Racers say otherwise.

Lyons, Arnie Beswick, and Dave Ryan all dragged the D-501 in '57, but say they just could not get it to perform as they desired. The '57's power curve came in sooner than that of the '56 D-500-1, and being heavier in front, it was more difficult to launch with the consistency of the '56 race special.

"The '56 D-500-1 was every bit as fast on its best runs as the '57 D-501 and was definitely more consistent," said Beswick, who later carved out a great reputation as a Pontiac pilot. Lyons and Ryan also felt the '56 D-500-1 had the edge. In fact, when Lyons successfully defended his World Series of Drag Racing super stock top eliminator title in August 1957, he did so at the wheel of a new fuel-injected Chevy two-door sedan.