

Wheels & Car Care

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Chrysler 300M

The 2002 Chrysler 300M Special sits lower and looks meaner with a more aggressive stance. It's a four-door large sedan with a front engine, front wheel drive. It has a 3.5 litre DOHC V6 engine (255 hp, 256 lb/ft). It gets 13.1L/100 km (22 mpg) city, 8.3L/100 km (34 mpg) highway.



Chrysler's 300M builds on the muscle cars of 50's

By JIM ROBINSON
Road Worthy

The 300M has been a great success for Chrysler since its launch in May 1998 as a 1999 model. It is one of the four large sedans based on the 'LH' platform and produced in Bramalea, Ontario.

Along with the Intrepid, Concorde, and LHS, the 300M was introduced with much (in fact some thought too much) ballyhoo. The 300M was to be one of the so-called 'letter series' sedans that Chrysler produced in the 1950s and into the 1970s. Starting with the 'C' in 1955 each year would bring a new letter and more power. With Ram Hemi engines first and monstrous 413 cu. in. V8s, these were very, very fast cars—big boy muscle in every sense of the word.

But in 1998, muscle was still something carmakers didn't go bandying about especially in family cars. Lined up against the Ford Crown Victoria and Chevrolet Lumina, big power wasn't as important as lots of room for the aging buyer who was interested in this segment.

So, the 300M seemed like a nice idea to round out the LH offerings to a nice, even four. With clipped tail and bobbed nose, the 300M was also advertised as being just under five metres in length to make it more salable in Europe.

At the time, I thought the 300M would be a limited success to add a little lustre to the bread-and-butter Intrepid. Once again (some call me Seldom-Right-Robinson) I was out of step with the buying public who snapped up 300Ms like they were going out of style. Maybe because they stand out so well, 300Ms seem to be everywhere including in my next door neighbour's garage.

But this is 2002 and 'performance' is definitely in the air. Cars produced for decades with four-cylinder engines now have V6s and even W-8s. Some makers are bringing 12- and

even 10-cylinder cars to market in the next two years.

Not to be left behind, Chrysler offered the 300M 'Special' for 2002 in order to offer something a little hotter for those wanting big car room but sports sedan attributes.

The first thing Chrysler did is lower the ride height and insert a stiffer, performance tuned suspension using firmer shock damping. At the rear, taller jounce bumpers and steering with a firmer 'feel' take away most of the dead-on-centre feel associated with front-drive cars.

The most noticeable difference visually are very, very



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handsome 18-inch alloy wheels. To these are fitted Michelin Pilot 'ultra high performance' tires. Also dialed in are higher performance brakes with harder brake pads. Another part of the package are ground effects skirts done in a charcoal grey. Grey was chosen to compliment the five colours (black, blue, silver, light green and 'light almond'). I think the mouldings should have been done in body colour to give the car that deeper side look that is so chic on the BMW 745i and the new E-Class Mercedes-Benz. A nice touch are the twin, silver-tipped exhausts that peak out of the rear skirt.

Power is the LH 3.5-litre DOHC V6 with four-speed automatic AutoStick transmission. For the 300M, power is increased to 255 hp from 250 hp and the torque is up to 258 ft/lb. The exhaust has been given a nice little 'rasp' so that a hint of power can be heard, and enjoyed.

Available is a tire pressure monitoring system. Low speed traction control and an engine immobilizer are also welcome features. Inside the 300M Special, passenger space (2,976 litres/105.1 cu. ft.) is gargantuan while the trunk (476 litres/16.8 cu. ft.) should take every piece of luggage you have in your home.

When you get into the 300M, the swooping roofline seems to intrude on space until you get seated and realize just how far away your passenger is sitting. On a recent luncheon trip, Freddy The Flashbulb rode in the back seat and commented on the room, and this from someone with a minivan.

It has been awhile since I drove a 300M, but this vehicle seemed swift indeed. With the AutoStick in sequential mode, you can extract even more straight-line speed.

I was also impressed by the gasoline consumption which was about one-eighth of a tank a day to and from work, which I usually get from econocars. The fuel tank is 14.3 gallons (65 litres) which is a normal size. Transport Canada lists consumption of the 300M at 13.1L/100 km (22 mpg) city, and 8.3L/100 km (34 mpg) highway.

As always with any car made in Ontario, I did a walk around of the panels to check for even alignment. The make-it or break-it area are the shut lines around the trunk lid or the engine cover. On my tester, they were near perfect proving once again the CAW assemblers are among the best in the world at their job.

There is currently a nice crop of high-lux, high-bucks luxury sedans on the market. If you look at the 300M in terms of its German or Japanese competitors for passenger volume, the 300M Special's list price of \$43,305 seems almost meagre. If you compare it against the exceptional mid-size luxury sedans on the market today, the 300M is still less, but it offers much more room. Take it from the vantage of price or from the vantage of volume, the 300M Special is specially positioned to keep on being one of Chrysler's big sedan successes.

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