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Dodge lets the SRT do the talking with its most potent sedan

JIM ROBINSON
 Road Worthy

The 2006 Dodge Charger SRT8 is not for the faint of heart. With its 6.1-litre Hemi V8 boasting 425 hp and 420 lb/ft of torque, it packs more punch than any other series production Dodge sedan ever made and that includes its rip-snorting muscle car namesake.

The original Charger was launched in 1964 and grew in power and straight-line performance every year until the "Oil Crisis" or 1973 snuffed out 400 hp, five-mpg cars almost overnight.

Where the 2006 Charger SRT8 is light years ahead isn't just in the go-power, but in the handling. Because it's based on a Mercedes-Benz C-class chassis, the suspension and ride quality make for a full-size sedan that can glide downtown at rush hour, take four in comfort across the province but with hubris spitting power just a tap of the gas pedal away.

SRT stands for Street and Racing Technology and it is the in-house tuner arm of DaimlerChrysler. SRT is populated by a bunch of car crazy engineers who have put their hands to just about everything in the Dodge and Chrysler model lineup to come up with some outrageous conveyances like the Dodge Ram SRT10, a pickup truck with a hopped up version of the 10-cylinder engine used in the mighty Dodge Viper supercar.

For the SRT8, they start with a Hemi V8 powered Charger (which is pretty potent in its own right). Out goes the standard 5.7-litre Hemi and in goes a 6.1 Hemi V8, but it's a Hemi with a difference. The intake and exhaust manifolds are changed. For instance, the exhaust goes from a 2.5-inch diameter header to 2.75 inches. Besides the increase in displacement, the hemispherical (thus the engine's name) combustion chamber is redesigned and the compression is raised from 9.9:1 to 10.3:1. For this, the block is reinforced and oil squirters cool the pistons, plus the oil pan has been modified for a high rate of return.

Power is sent from the five-speed Auto/Stick transmission with manual shift mode through a heavy-duty, four-flange drive shaft to the independent rear end.

The already competent suspension gets new springs with changed rates, special SRT-tuned shocks, and large-diameter sway bars and, lastly, the ride height is lowered by one-half inch.

Tires are Goodyear F1s on 20-inch alloy wheels. The brakes are huge. At the front are 360 mm (14.2 in) ventilated discs with four-piston Brembo calipers. At the rear are 350 mm (13.8 in) vented discs again with four-piston Brembos.

The 20-inch wheels are a dead giveaway this isn't your garden variety Charger but sealing the deal is a prominent scoop grafted into the hood.

Inside, it is hard to miss the 300 km/h (180 mph) speedo and the beefy, bolstered sports seats with SRT8 logo and suede inserts to hold you in. In terms of safety, it's equipped with advanced multi-stage airbags, anti-lock brakes and Electronic Stability Control (ESP).

Equipped to deal with the best Germany has to offer, the Charger SRT8 is surprisingly inexpensive at \$44,790. There are three different option packages offering things like a navigation system, UConnect hands-free communications system with Bluetooth, heated front seats and side airbags and chrome-plated alloys like my tester which had a sticker price of \$50,345.

Turn the key on the SRT8 and it comes to life with no drama despite the rather high compression ratio. Touch, just touch, the gas pedal and the rear tires bite and propel the car forward. In a matter of a few feet, you are already at the street speed limit. As wide as the tires are, and despite the firmness of the suspension, there is no rock-hard, jolting ride which was one of the huge downsides of owning a 1970s muscle car. Given the source of the platform, it's not surprising the ride is like a Mercedes-Benz.

Hit the on-ramp and give it a whiff of gas and the SRT8 accelerates with a purpose. You can tromp the gas, but why bother?

According to Dodge, the SRT8 hits 100 km/h from rest in about five seconds, 0-100-0 mph in about 16 seconds and will brake from 100 km/h in about 110 feet.

And according to the government the SRT8 Charger has a fuel consumption rate of 16.5L/100 km city, 10.9L/100 km highway. Premium fuel is recommended but it won't void the warranty if you use regular from time to time. Considering all the stresses inside that engine, using premium all the time is probably the prudent course.

When you drive the SRT8 Charger, you tend to drive at or near the speed limit. It's easy to go fast; but in this car, laying back brings a kind of satisfaction because only the wheels, hood scoop and 3.5-inch chrome exhaust tips hint that this is real sleeper.

It can be a grocery getter, and long-distance tourer, or a fearsome competitor all in one.



The 2006 Dodge Charger SRT8 is the fastest production Dodge sedan ever built. The only things giving away what lurks under the foot are the 20-inch wheels and the prominent hood scoop.



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