

Chrysler 300 AWD keeps a grip on the full-size sedan segment

By JIM ROBINSON

From its inception, the styling of the Chrysler 300 set it apart and it struck a chord with North American buyers.

With its lusty 5.7-litre or 6.1-litre Hemi V8, the 300C and 300 SRT-8 respectively, have the power to match the very aggressive looks.

But also offered are the 300 Touring and Limited with 3.5-litre V6. Although all 300s look the same, the power and the glory of the Hemi had an attraction that was shown on Chrysler salesroom floors across North America.

Not that the V6 languished. It also turned in solid sales numbers.

But with fuel costs rising as if there is no ceiling, the 300 V6 is a very viable option for those who want a true full-size sedan that is more economical on gas.

With those big alloy wheels and rugged styling, the 300, no matter what model, has presence moving or standing still.

For 2008, there are minor changes to the front and rear fascias and tail lamps and a new rear deck lid that incorporates an SRT-inspired integrated spoiler and relocated high-mounted stop light.

The classic proportions of long hood, short deck and dramatic profile remain to give the Chrysler 300 its continued award-winning looks for 2008.

Inside there is a new instrument panel and centre console design, highlighted with satin silver bezels. Soft touch surfaces on armrests and door panels and a newly designed and relocated cruise control stalk, add to the comfortable interior. Available light-emitting (LED) diode lighting in the front cup holders and front- and rear-door map pockets provide additional driver convenience.

The DOHC V6 in the Touring and Limited produces 250 hp and 250 lb/ft of torque. In the front-wheel-drive (FWD) version there is a four-speed automatic transmission with Chrysler's AutoStick sequential manual shift mode. When ordering the all-wheel-drive (AWD) version of the Touring and Limited, they come with a five-speed automatic also with AutoStick. AWD is also optionally available on the 300C but not the SRT-8.

Once a very costly extra only found on luxury cars, technology and mass production has brought AWD into the reach of all car buyers. The appeal of AWD has been embraced by Canadians who appreciated that four wheels with grip will always be better than two, especially after the winter we had in 2007-2008.

Much of the engineering behind the 300 comes from Chrysler's brief wedding to Daimler. Interestingly, mechanics tell me the current 300 is a joy to work on as opposed to the first generation 300M that just makes them shudder when you mention the name.

Suspension is unequal A-arms at the front and a multi-link independent system in the back. The 300 comes with four-wheel disc brakes with ABS with Electronic Brake Assist and Electronic Stability Program (ESP) which is the Mercedes-Benz adaptation of pitch and yaw control. What ESP does is sense when a car is starting to slide out of control and activate brakes and retard ignition to slow and put the car on an even keel.

Cruise control, air conditioning and a power heated mirror system are all standard, as are power heated mirrors, power locks and one-touch power windows.

The 300 is a true full-size sedan with a huge trunk measuring 441 litres (15.6 cu. ft) of cargo area and 2,996 litres (105.8 cu ft) of passenger room. Thanks to the 3,048 mm (120 in) wheelbase, the back seat passengers have more than enough foot and legroom and with a width of 1,600 mm (63 in) three can sit in the back without crowding.

Tested here is the 300 Touring AWD with a list price of \$36,095 with such things as 60/40 split rear seat, fog lights,

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