

Intrepid R/T 2000 - The name brings back a lot of memories

By JIM ROBINSON
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Say "R/T" and anyone who loves performance cars will start waxing lovingly about the Dodge Charger R/T, one of the most potent muscle cars of all time.

Although there are numerous magazines and TV shows about the muscle cars, the actual era was quite a short in time. It started tentatively in 1964 when the Pontiac GTO exploded on the car scene. By 1968, the rest of the car industry had caught up with their big engine, high-torque road burners. But by 1972 the insurance industry had started to step in and then came the death knell with the "Fuel Crisis" of 1973. As wonderful as they were, muscle cars were used for the most part as daily drivers. Because they were relatively inexpensive, you could buy a 400 hp rocket and drive it to work during the week and out to the track on the weekend.

Chrysler is extremely aware of its past and the company also knows how to incorporate nostalgia with modern technology. Just look at the Prowler or the P/T Cruiser as examples.

But most of the MoPar muscle cars were actually family sedans and coupes with large engines, some sourced from big trucks.

The "R/T" moniker made a comeback two years ago on the side of a concept coupe called the Charger R/T. It had the same "coke-bottle" shape as the original and is rumored to be headed for production.

In the meantime, the success of Chrysler's other so-called letter car, the 300M, has prompted Chrysler to put its most powerful V6 engine and sequential automatic transmission in a variant of the "LH" platform (that includes LHS, Concorde and 300M) that's being called the Dodge Intrepid R/T in the United States and the Chrysler Intrepid R/T in Canada.

I never had a chance to drive the first R/T but I did pilot a 1972 (I believe) Dodge Polara sedan back in 1974 with a 440 cu. in. engine putting out close to 400 hp or about the same as today's 8-litre Viper. With what seemed like unlimited torque you could light up the rather skinny tires with a dab of the throttle. At almost any speed, pressing down on the gas sent the hapless rubber scrambling for grip as the torque simply overwhelmed what traction there was.

Perched up on simple oil shocks and rangy rear leaf springs, you soon learned that power is a wonderful thing if you can use it. Ergo, a spin in a MGB was a revelation.

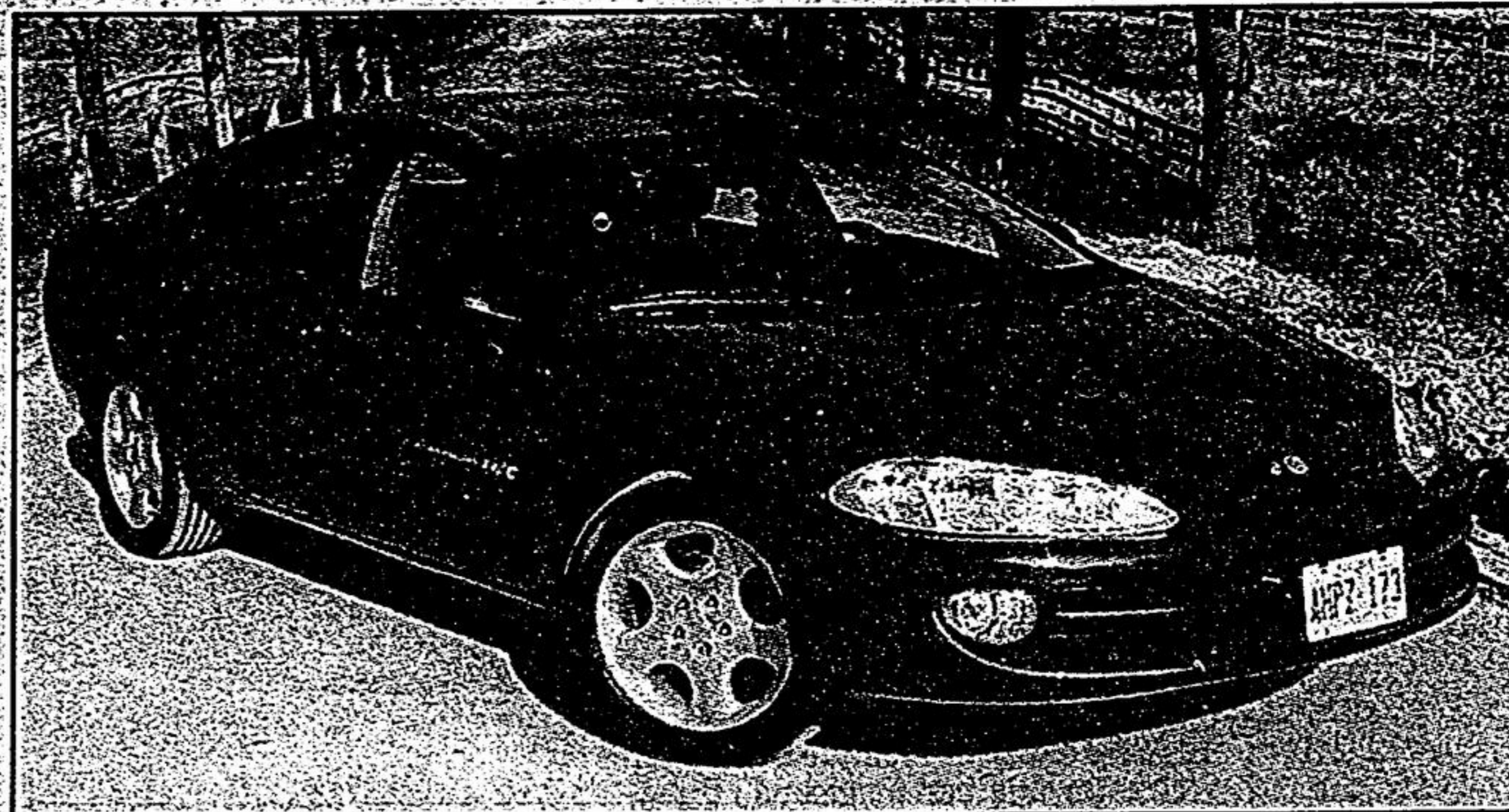
But back to the present and the 2000 Chrysler R/T and a word on the fit and finish of this car, as turned out by the good men and women of the CAW up in Bramalea. Trying to get doors and hoods to fit uniformly on cars like the LH is no easy task. Instead of flat panel like the old Polara I drove, the new LH cars like the R/T have bodies with compound and complex curves all in one fender let alone the whole side. It takes a lot of work and practice to get it right. Happily, Bramalea is doing a great job. It's no surprise to me why the J. D. Power excellence awards keep going to Canadian facilities. This is world class work.

My R/T was fitted out in a nice metallic red (Inferno Red Tinted Pearl Coat to be precise) with offsetting black interior. These LH cars are truly huge inside and I've got to say those yards and yards of charcoal cloth and plastic (as good in quality as they are) are a bit too somber for my taste.

While it may start life coming down the Bramalea assembly line as an Intrepid ES,

the R/T gets significant changes. Whereas the Intrepid is offered with a 2.7- or 3.2-litre V6, the R/T has the 3.5-litre, quad cam from the 300M installed. In the R/T you're looking at 242 hp and 248 lb/ft of torque - quite bit more than the 2.7's 149 hp or the 3.2's 168 ponies. The best part is it produces this power on regular gas. Transport Canada estimates fuel consumption as 15.9L/100 km (18 mpg) city and 10.8L/100 km (26 mpg).

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The Chrysler Intrepid has been expanded to offer the high performance R/T that recalls the days of the MoPar muscle cars bearing the same name.



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