

Collectible AUTOMOBILE

1960-63 Imperial: Moment of Truth

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1964 Dodge Charger Show Car • AMCs Around the World**



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- '58 Oldsmobile and '49 Lincoln Photo Features



1964 Dodge Charger Concept Roadster

1964 Dodge Charger: Showtime in Highland Park

by Don Keefe

As Dodge prepares to dust off the Charger name and return it to duty on a high-performance sedan in 2006, a well-known “dream car” collector has restored the division’s first car to bear the name to its original glory—but with an exciting twist.

Like every other manufacturer of low- and medium-priced cars in America in 1964, the “Dodge Boys” spent the year watching buyers flock to Pontiac showrooms to buy GTOs (CA, November 1984). The fact that Pontiac had hit on the idea of an affordable, completely packaged performance car sent its rivals scrambling. Like the others, Dodge got the message loud and clear about how to market high-performance cars. Simply having the fastest cars on the road was not a surefire guarantee of sales success. A good dollop of image was going to be required, too.

Realizing that they were now in a reactive situation, Dodge product planners

knew that if they couldn't be first, they had to be best, and quickly embarked on a program to bring the new breed of muscle car buyer to their camp. They certainly had the hardware: Their drivelines were second to none. But until it could get a direct competitor for the GTO into production, the quickest way for Dodge to catapult itself squarely into the muscle car mindset was to build a show car that embodied the new era. Enter the 1964 Charger, an aggressive one-off show car that left no doubt about Dodge Division's high-performance intentions.

According to the original press release, the Charger was “inspired by the outstanding competition records set by



1. Having concluded its role as Dodge's show car for the 1964 season, the Charger roadster first evaded the crusher, then endured years of modification and gradual deterioration. Now in the hands of Chicago-area collector Joe Bortz, it has been returned to its show-circuit luster. 2-5. When Bortz acquired the car in 1999, its paint scheme had been reversed, and many alterations had been made to some of the body panels and the interior.

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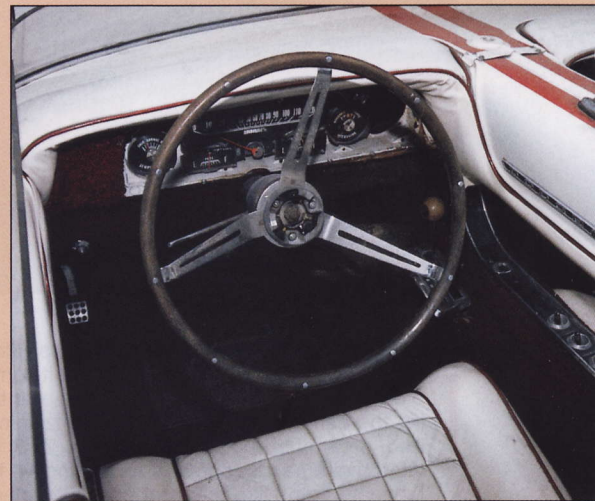
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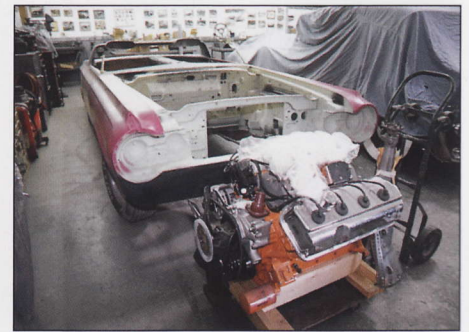
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1, 2. Bortz selected noted restorer Fran Roxas to turn back the clock on the Charger show car. He began by getting the unit-construction body down to the bare metal.
3-6. The Charger, in primer, draws nearer to being sprayed with maroon paint—and accepting the early Hemi racing engine Bortz wanted to install to fulfill the original, but unrealized, dreams of the car's designers. 7, 8. In the decades since the Charger first came into private hands, some of its distinctive body parts had been changed. Roxas had to fabricate items like the front and rear valance panels, and the tail panel.

Dodge production cars in recent years." While the Charger started life as a 119-inch-wheelbase B-body 1964 Polara (CA, October 1992), there was a lot to distinguish it from its production counterparts. Yet it was not a "pie in the sky" concept car in the manner of the Chrysler-Ghia specials of the previous decade. Instead, it was a "sliced and diced" production car that still had a tangible connection to the cars in dealer showrooms. That fact would tip off Dodge's plans for entering the muscle car field more effectively than a nonproduction-based concept car ever could.

The Charger was intended to be more than just a static display; it was meant to actually back up the persona with a functional and very high-performance driveline. Inspired by Dodge's proud drag racing tradition, the Charger made use of several custom design cues that were popular at the time, all catering to the horsepower craze that had captured the imaginations of the Baby Boomer generation.

Up front, the standard bumper and grille were discarded, replaced with a custom blacked-out grille that featured a rectangular chrome surround and a body-colored rolled front pan with four small vertical bump strips. (This customizing treatment cost the Charger two of the four headlights normally found on factory-issue Polaras.) The stock hood used a large scoop with a "426" callout on its leading edge to suggest what might lie beneath—though this was another bit of showmanship, as we'll see. As in the front, the rear bumper was forsaken in favor of a rolled pan. It, too, was body colored and sported a quartet of rubber-tipped bump strips. The Charger's burgundy paint job was accented by two parallel white stripes that ran down the center of the car.

The standard windshield was removed and replaced with a cut-down racing windscreen complemented by low-rise door glass. The Charger's racy image was further accentuated with a combination roll bar and dual headrest mount located over where the rear passengers would normally sit. The entire area was covered by sheetmetal, producing a true two-seat layout and an exceptionally long rear deck. These radical modifications worked with the lowered suspension to reduce the overall height of the car to a scant 47.75 inches.

Bodysides were set off with shaved door handles, "Charger" scripts on both sides of the roll bar, an abbreviated ver-

A One-of-a-Kind Hemi for Charger Number One

In an age when factory show cars often offered little more than "eye candy," it was commendable that Dodge had every intention of making the 1964 Charger one with show and plenty of go. With a 426-cid race Hemi under the hood, it would have been the ultimate expression of Dodge's will.

Unfortunately, it seemed that every time one of the rare new hemispherical-head engines was assigned for installation in the Charger, it ended up being shipped to a racer in need of an engine for the next week's race. With show schedules looming, there was no alternative but to keep the Charger's hood closed and send it on tour with a factory-stock 383-cid V-8. Forty years after the fact, though, the ultimate 1964 muscle car prototype arrived in the form of Joe Bortz's restored Charger show car.

There has been precedent in the world of dream-car collector world to fulfill the original intentions of the builders when they themselves fell short of their goals. In this particular case, Joe's definition of meeting the original intentions was pretty lofty. He wanted a Hemi in the renewed Charger, but he didn't want just any Hemi. He could have made it easy on himself by installing a new crate motor from Mopar Performance and calling it a very satisfying day. Instead, he wanted one of the original 15 race Hemis under the hood just like Mother Mopar had wished. Nothing less would do.

Bortz enlisted the services of noted Hemi authority John Arruzza, of Arruzza High Performance in Trinity, North Carolina, to make his special wish come true. Whether it took sacrificing Slant Sixes to the Mopar gods or dead presidents to various Hemi parts collectors, Arruzza accomplished the nearly impossible task and was actually able to locate enough original and new original-stock (NOS) componentry to build just such an engine. The recipe included a block with an October 1963 casting—the 13th Hemi ever cast and the oldest surviving unit. Anything older was raced to death years before.

Along with the correct block, Arruzza also used a set of original 1964 cylinder heads, a '64 NASCAR-spec intake, and Holley four-barrel



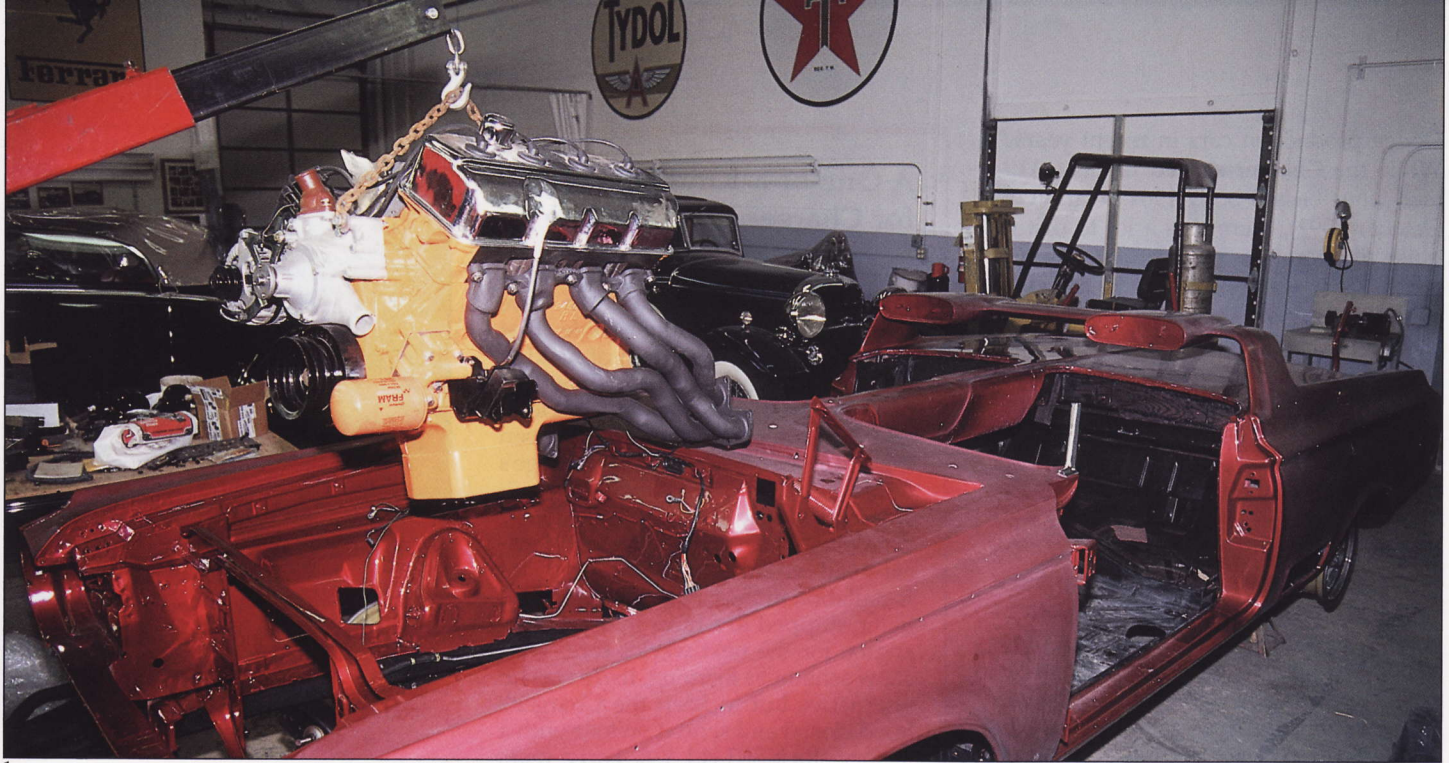
Tom Moshis (left) and Bill Petrow, of engine parts supplier Special T's Unlimited, inspect the 426-cid Hemi placed in the restored Charger show car.

carburetor. These parts were combined with NOS exhaust manifolds, valve covers, spark plug tubes, valve-train parts, and new aftermarket bottom-end components.

Upon inspecting the block, Arruzza found out that the rumors of casting problems that held down early Hemi production were, in fact, true. Two of the cylinders were so thin that they needed to be sleeved. With the casting defects corrected, he moved on.

Arruzza wisely added new reciprocating components in the block to prevent failures from metal fatigue. A Callies forged-steel crank swings Manley steel connecting rods and custom Ross pistons that provide a premium-fuel-friendly 9.6:1 compression ratio. Additionally, the valves are operated by a relatively mild solid-lifter camshaft that also provides for trouble-free operation, yet still allows the 426 Hemi to crank out well more than 600 bhp when fitted with the correct NASCAR magnesium intake manifold and Holley carb. That should be more than enough to put a large grin on Joe's face should he ever decide to really put his foot in it. Although he is not a racer, he has it in his mind to run the Charger at a dragstrip someday. Both Arruzza and restorer Fran Roxas have advised against it and told him that they won't be responsible for any failures that arise. Whether or not Bortz ever takes that quarter-mile trip remains to be seen, but he knows that either way, he now has a dream car that can actually make good on its promise.

Don Keefe



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sion of the production Polara side trim, and the unique exhaust ducts located between the doors and rear wheels. They could be made functional with the flip of a switch. Otherwise, exhaust gases would exit through the conventional dual exhaust outlets. A body-colored "racing" mirror was mounted on the left front fender. Custom Halibrand racing wheels were shod with Goodyear Wingfoot whitewall tires.

The Charger's interior bore little resemblance to its production counterparts. It was characterized by a large center cockpit divider upholstered with leather-trimmed crash panels. Combined with the full-length console, the divider gave a definite jet-fighter feel. A custom 8000-rpm Stewart-Warner tachometer was mounted on the divider, which also

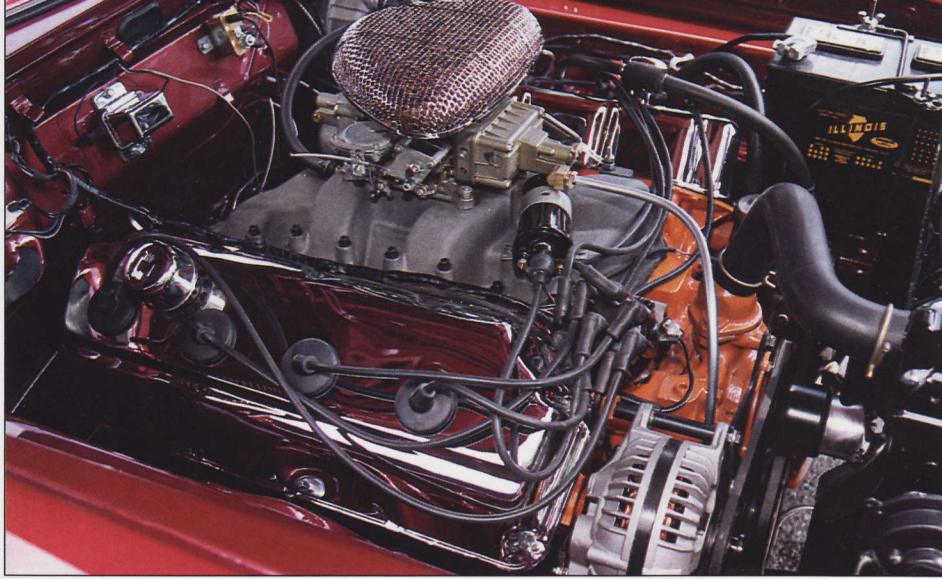
carried the racing stripes in an unbroken line from nose to tail. The driver was treated to a deep-dish walnut steering wheel and matching shifter handle, while the passenger was provided with a walnut grab handle.

The seating was decidedly unlike any production Dodge offering of the era, utilizing a special bucket design that was both luxurious and sporting. Custom "Superform" padding was covered by pleated charcoal leather with modest side bolstering. The occupants were safely restrained with Deist competition belts. Black pile carpeting covered the floorboards, and the foot pedals were finished in bright metal.

The sporty styling exercise was also supposed to be a showcase for Chrysler Corporation's latest developments in

high-performance engine design. With the horsepower race (*CA*, June 2002) going full tilt and the competition beginning to catch up, Chrysler engineers had gone back to their drawing boards and created a new-generation hemispherical-head V-8 for its racing activities. This imposing 426-cid mill—now formally known as the "Hemi"—was based on the then-current RB engine-family architecture, but was so heavily revised that it had to be considered a separate engine. It was also a completely different design from the corporation's Fifties-vintage hemi-head family, though it carried its predecessor's winning reputation.

Casting-core problems had delayed the initial run of Hemi engines, and when they did start arriving, they were in very high demand from race teams. Dodge



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1. With the engine bay painted, the big 426-cube V-8 was ready to be dropped in. 2. A client of restorer Fran Roxas was willing to part with a set of the same kind of Halibrand magnesium wheels that were on the Charger during its show days. 3. As work on the restoration advances, from left, Mike Gregory and engine consultants Tom Moshis and Bill Petrow review the progress. 4. Working with Hemi expert John Arruzza, Bortz secured the 13th 426 Hemi block cast. Arruzza then found enough period parts to build up a 1964-style single four-barrel race Hemi. 5. Car owner Joe Bortz (far right), restorer Fran Roxas (center, in shop coat), and others involved in the project raise a toast to their progress—though much still needed to be done.



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management had every intention of putting one of the first 15 of the mighty engines in the Charger, but availability was quickly becoming a problem. As far as the Hemi was concerned, priority one for Chrysler was getting it ready for its anticipated debut at the Daytona 500 stock car race in February 1964. It seemed that every time one of the hand-built engines was earmarked for the Charger, a racer blew one up and needed a replacement. The engine sent out invariably ended up being one intended for the show car.

So off the Charger went to the show circuit for the '64 season with the 305-bhp, two-barrel-carb, 383-cid engine from its Polara donor car under the hood. The hood remained closed, but by all accounts, it didn't seem to diminish the

interest of showgoers. The Charger never failed to attract crowds and impress performance enthusiasts.

After its tour of duty, the Charger was sold to Paul Stern, a prominent and influential Chrysler dealer from Hershey, Pennsylvania. Even though it was normal practice to crush one-off machines like this to satisfy corporate lawyers concerned with liability issues, Stern had enough pull with the corporation to snag the car, keeping it safe from the dreaded crusher. It was eventually inherited by his son, who "customized" it before subsequently selling it to another dealer. From there, it was purchased by Chicago restaurateur Joe Bortz, whose name is now nearly synonymous with prototype and one-off "dream car" collecting. Bortz has amassed a very enviable collec-

tion of these unique nonproduction machines, the Charger being yet another sparkling bauble in his treasure chest of one-of-a-kinds. In 1999, after 12 years of work, Joe was able to convince the owner to sell it to him. He is nothing if not persistent.

Before it could return to the pampered state of a factory show car, the Charger was in need of restoration. It benefited from many years of indoor storage and had not been ravaged by rust, but the car still was in need of help. It had been none too attractively altered from its original configuration by one of the previous owners, and some pieces were missing. The car had been repainted white with red stripes, and the new colors had not fared well over the years.

Additionally, the interior now resem-



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bled something from a Sixties-era fiberglass ski boat. The classy charcoal leather was replaced with a white square-pleated design with red piping. In place of the black carpeting was bright-red deep-pile material that, to all the world, looked like something that had been stolen from a brothel. As if that wasn't tacky enough, there was even red carpeting around the gauges on the instrument

panel. The "new" look may have been appealing during some era, but certainly not anytime lately.

Undaunted, Bortz sent the car to Chicago-area restoration expert Fran Roxas, who has gained prominence in the classic-car world with his masterful restorations of Duesenbergs and other high-end machines. He has even recreated vintage coachwork with exacting

precision, so he was aptly qualified to handle the job.

That, of course, is not to say that there weren't challenges to be overcome. Even with his vast experience, the job, which was completed last year, took more than four years. "The Charger was in good shape, except for where they customized it," Roxas explained in a recent telephone interview. "Several pieces were missing,

including the grille and bumper guards, as well as the front and rear valances, and the tail panel, all of which had to be recreated. We were able to build them by referring to original photography.”

The Charger’s headlamp area had also been “frenched” and rectangular headlamps installed. This needed to be returned to its original shape, as did the tail panel, which in no way resembled what was originally there. Roxas was also called upon to replicate several interior trim pieces, which were carefully researched using original photos and built with a lot of machine work. Indeed, the from-scratch copying of these missing parts was the most difficult aspect of this particular restoration. The bodywork, paint, and usual mechanical refurbishing were actually fairly straightforward, with little in the way of the normal surprises one encounters when restoring a 40-year-old automobile.

The Charger was completely disassembled down to its unit-body shell. Work could then begin to massage the sheet-metal back into its original shape, revitalize suspension components, and restore original finishes to the bright-metal trim pieces.

Time had taken its toll on some parts. The fuel tank had to be replaced and the existing interior needed to be removed and replaced with new leather, which was cut and stitched to be faithful to the original design.

Bortz made one unusual—and intriguing—decision about the ‘64 Charger’s restoration. He decided early on that the Charger would actually be finished the way it was always *supposed* to be: with an original race Hemi under the hood. Joe managed to locate the 13th Hemi block ever cast, the earliest known surviving example and literally one of the engines originally scheduled for the Charger’s engine bay. Destiny would finally be fulfilled for both car and engine.

The task of obtaining all of the necessary engine parts was put in the capable hands of Hemi guru John Arruzza, who used his extensive contacts to locate all of the pieces necessary to correctly accomplish what Dodge wasn’t able to back in 1964 [see sidebar]. After completing the project, Arruzza told Bortz that there are literally not enough parts still in existence to ever do this kind of engine again.

Once the engine was in place and mated to the 727 TorqueFlite automatic transmission, the same kind as was used originally, the focus turned to paint and



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1. Now completely restored, the Charger roadster clearly shows its origins as a 119-inch-wheelbase '64 Dodge Polara. No production 1964 Polara ever stood just 47.75 inches tall, however. 2, 3. Unlike factory-issue Polaras, the Charger used two headlights instead of four, allowing for a custom “shadow box” grille. Out back, though, a stock six-lamp setup was retained. Bodyside exhaust ports could be uncovered to increase performance. 4. An 8000-rpm Stewart-Warner tachometer mounted atop the two-seater’s cockpit divider and in the driver’s line of sight was among the period competition-car touches Dodge built in to the Charger.

final assembly. Bortz has always taken pride in the quality and correctness of the paint on his dream cars. At times, he has even tracked down the very people who originally painted his cars back in the day and hired them to repaint the cars in their original colors.

This time around, he had Roxas repaint the car. In order to get the correct color, they found an area where the original

paint was still visible. With the aid of a color spectrometer, they were able to take a digital sample, feed it into a computer, and have the color replicated to perfection. Roxas was then able to reapply the original deep-burgundy hue to the Charger’s rejuvenated sheetmetal.

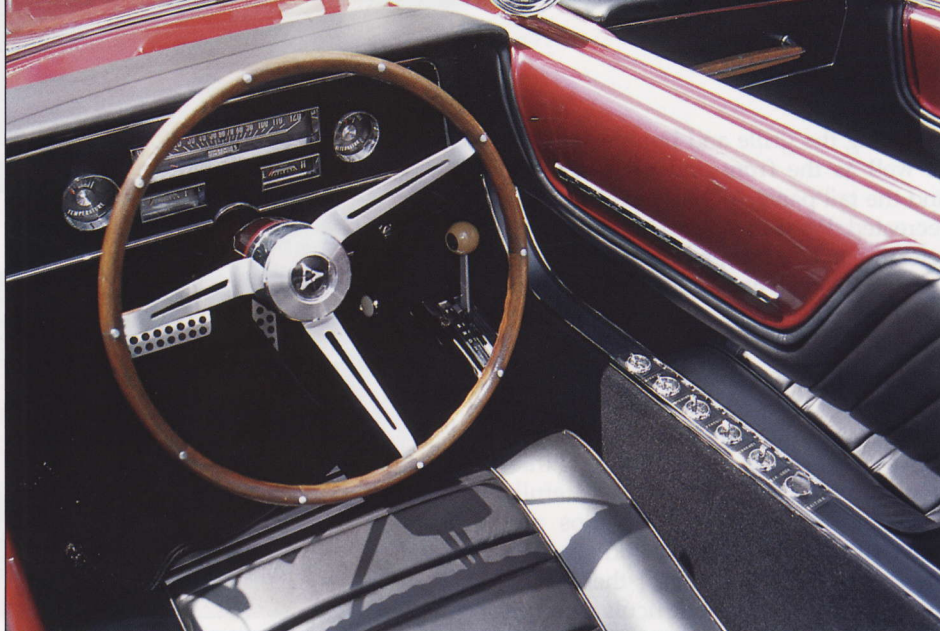
Luck played a bit of a hand in the restoration, too. Roxas managed to find a new original-stock set of the Halibrand

magnesium wheels from a customer who happened to be at his shop one day. During the Charger's lifetime, the Halibrands had been replaced by off-the-shelf chrome slotted wheels, though the originals did stay with the car. The customer noticed that the pitted originals were identical to a set he had at home. Needless to say, Bortz jumped at the chance to get them. They were shod with a new set of Goodyear Wingfoot biasply whitewall tires.

Bortz says he's very interested in running the Charger down a dragstrip one time, just to see what it would do. He believes that an 11-second elapsed time is within reach. "The only problem is that the stress could possibly hurt the engine or perhaps twist the body enough to crack the paint," he explained. "Maybe I'll wait a few years until the 'fine edge' is off the restoration and run it before the car gets touched up."

Of course, the 1964 show season was just the beginning for Chargers from Dodge. Showgoers in '65 and '68 saw the Charger II and Charger III, respectively. The former was an expressive fastback that tipped off what Dodge had in mind for a production car that arrived for 1966 (CA, December 1998)—with the option of a version of the 426 Hemi better suited to street use. Charger coupes (CA, December 1988, August 1989) continued in the line through 1978. Then, in the Eighties, the name was revived to enhance the image of the subcompact front-wheel-drive Dodge Omni hatchback coupe, including a cooking Shelby Charger (CA, August 1986). After 1987, the name lay dormant again for a dozen years, until the division trotted out a swoopy Charger R/T show car. Now Dodge is proposing to put the badge back in circulation on a rear-drive sedan powered by Chrysler's newest-generation Hemi V-8.

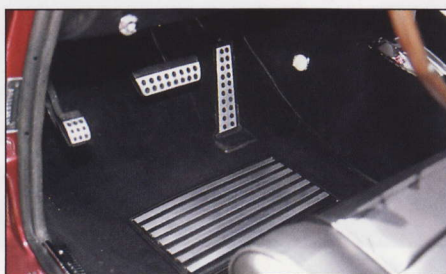
With the impending return of the Charger nameplate to the Dodge lineup, it seems fitting that the first car to bear the revered moniker has now reemerged to take its rightful place in the show-car world. It is pretty safe to assume that it will be a familiar sight at concours around the country. It may not have been the most graceful show car ever to be displayed—the proportions are pretty crazy and it's just not something to which design students will be referring for structured inspiration. However, the 1964 Charger is one of the most aggressive and muscular of show cars. You'd



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almost expect it to ooze sweat from its sheetmetal and spew clouds of vaporized testosterone from its unmuffled side exhaust ducts as it roars past, shaking the very ground on which it rolls. Bortz's faithful-to-the-concept restoration of the Charger makes it the alpha male of dream cars, with huge tattooed biceps and an attitude to match.

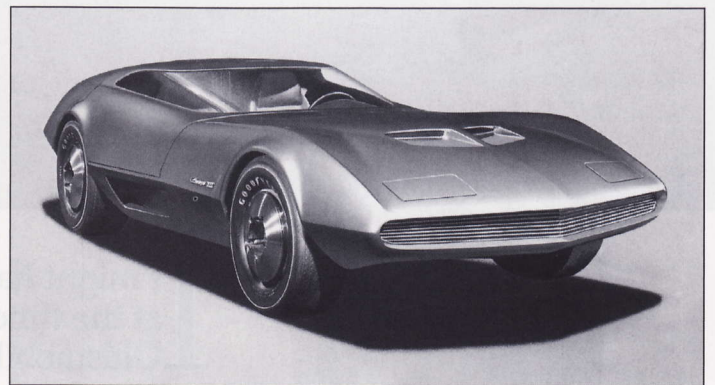
Dodge hit the nail on the head in 1964 when it presented the Charger show car to its first enthusiastic audiences. Its "grab you by the throat" persona boldly announced to the world that the Dodge Boys were joining the muscle car revolution and they were planning on taking over. Perhaps they'll be ready do it again in 2006. . . . CA



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1-4. The interior was returned to the look it had during its show-car days. The special bucket seats and other upholstered areas were covered in charcoal-colored leather. Black carpeting once more covered the floor, and pedal faces were clad with bright metal. Walnut wood was the material of choice for the sports-style steering wheel, the knob for the floor-mounted TorqueFlite transmission shifter, and the passenger-side grab bar. The driver has access to a row of accessory switches at his right. 5-7. Once Dodge went public with the Charger name for its 1964 show car, it quickly turned into a series. The 1965 Charger II (6) gave prospective customers a hint of what they could expect in showrooms the next year. The more futuristic Charger III (7) was shown in 1968, the year that a new generation of the production Charger went on sale.