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#44

# Hemmings Classic Car

THE DEFINITIVE ALL-AMERICAN COLLECTOR-CAR MAGAZINE



## DUAL-QUAD MUSCLE

## CHRYSLER'S 300G STYLISH



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# STYLISH MUSCLE

With its abundance of power and style, the 1961 Chrysler 300G is a champion grand tourer in the finest tradition







Words and photography by David Traver Adolphus

**Chrysler letter cars** always sold based on their combination of power and luxury; it's a recipe for success that still works today, as proven by the big money that these models now command. The luxury was obvious in the styling and high quality appointments, and the performance was more than just marketing: A C-300 with a 331-cu.in. Hemi won at Daytona in 1955 and 1956, as well as both years' Grand National championships. Chrysler retired the C-300 from stock car racing after that, but kept developing the powertrain, getting 375hp from the 300C 392-cu.in. Hemi in 1957—and another fastest flying mile at Daytona. The "Beautiful Brutes" had arrived.

Anyone who thought they were done with the car after that was about to get the surprise of their life, when the 1959 model introduced the 413-cu.in. wedge with crossram induction.

Nothing else from 1961 compares to the 300G. The exterior, which shares dimensions with other Chrysler full-sized automobiles and largely carried over, is the ultimate expression of the tailfin Forward Look era. The 1960 300F displayed a prominent continental-style tire cover on the rear decklid; in contrast, the G has an enormous, unbroken expanse of sheetmetal, highlighted on our driveReport car by the clear reverse lenses in the fins.

"It really doesn't have a bad angle, especially when looking from the front down the side," said Bill Korbel, our feature car's owner. "You can see how the angle of the fins matches the canted headlamps."

The FlightSweep styling era of Chrysler's Virgil Exner was at its end, and although the 300-series cars held onto a similar front end for another year, a very different style was in store for upcoming years.

The Cadillac DeVille shares the same styling philosophy and sold in the same price range, but the Cadillac had a much smaller V-8 and high production numbers. Lincoln could have had a contender, with a high-compression 430-cu.in. V-8 in a two-door hardtop selling for less, but they abandoned the body style after 1960 to concentrate on the new Continental. Ford's Galaxie Starliner was also similar in execution, but a step down the ladder in price, content, power and size. Today, as when it was new, the 300G combines muscle, luxury, and style in a field of one.

Inside the 300G, swivel seats make for an elegant entry into an interior that has looked good every day



# 300



It's a lesson Chrysler seems to have forgotten, but everything you touch and see reminds you of the quality of the car. Owner's hand controls visible left of the wheel



Chrysler couldn't include a valet to help you in and out; swivel seats suffice



Low rear seating compensates for shallow glass, but it's a long trip back to the seats



Can you imagine covering this with a plastic shroud? Ram tubes are one factor in extraordinary high-end performance; 413-cu. in. V-8 revs freely, doesn't act like a big-block

since 1960 (*Motor Life* called it "the finest in the industry"). Constrained due to a debilitating injury sustained as a passenger in a car accident when he was young, Bill has learned to lever himself out of his wheelchair and onto the seat, but he says he's been thinking about motorizing the seat to swivel and lift for him. It sounds just like something Chrysler would have done if they'd thought about it.

As rich as it is now, it's nearly impossible to imagine this interior in a new car, a completely coherent symphony in perforated leather, chrome, aluminum and steel, like the interior of an upscale club. Best of all, its focal point is the "control center" instrument cluster, complete with famed "Pearlescent" nighttime illumination.

Bill stuck with Mopars after the accident, and has owned a succession of muscle cars in his time. He moved upscale as the years went by; in his garage today are his dad's 1977 Newport, and a 1978 New Yorker Brougham he bought new. "I wanted another muscle car to drive, enjoy, and take to car-re-





lated events," he said. "Being a die-hard Mopar fan, my focus was exclusively on Chrysler products. I always liked the letter-series Chrysler 300s, and the G was my favorite, so I started my search."

In late 1985, after five years of looking, he answered an ad that said only "For sale: 1961 Chrysler." "I called, and the rest is history," he said. The clean, complete car, out of Ohio, showed 38,000 miles, and when we saw it he'd increased the mileage to around 53,000, using the 300G for what it does best: eating highway miles all day long.

Driving the 300G is not like hopping in any other car from 1961 and taking it for a spin. Bill's hand controls aren't too difficult to navigate: There's a multi-axis lever positioned behind the left side of the steering wheel, and mechanical linkages reaching down to the throttle and brake. You really only have to watch out for the rod attached to the accelerator, but we had our hands full just making the darn thing go.

A cross-ram 413 does not want to be attached to a push-button automatic, nor does it want to be driven gently around town in deference to local ordinance. It's a 47-year-old, 4,260-pound car with a three-speed TorqueFlite automatic transmission and 3.23 highway gears, and it will do 0-60 in 8.2 on its way to 130 miles per hour. It's not a shrinking violet.

The turning circle is typical early '60s Chrysler, a Queen Mary-style 46.6 feet, which, combined with an equally stately 219.8-inch overall length (that's 18 feet, three inches), means lots of repetitive back-and-forward motions to maneuver in tight spots.

It's classic dual-quad, high-compression big-block V-8 behavior, with an engine that Bill had "opened up" with a .030 overbore (for a 4.22-inch bore and 420-cu.in. displacement), mild performance cam, enlarged three-angle valves and ported heads. You've got a pair of Carter AFBs 30 inches apart on either end of the induction rams, which means a throttle linkage doing a lot of work with a rod-and-pin arrangement.

While Bill had it in synch, the

fact that a 300G will stall during gear changes from a standstill was widely commented upon at the car's introduction. *Motor Life* wrote that (in a manual transmission car) it was "nearly impossible to shift from high to second when necessary without slipping the clutch to keep from stalling. On two occasions before our actual test, the car was garaged to correct these faults and replace spark plugs.... But the situation was never fully remedied," which made us feel a whole lot better about our minor difficulties.

*Motor Trend* agreed, commenting, "The ram V-8 may peak at relatively low rpm but it can still be temperamental at really low speeds. Revs should be kept in an efficient range, not easy to do...the car was engineered for the open road, not city streets."

In part, pushing a button on the dash to shift takes practice, and you need to goose the throttle a touch. But your timing needs to be perfect, because when shifting in reverse, if you're either too early or too late, the engine will die.

Almost 500-lbs.ft. of torque available at 2,800 rpm gives you the opportunity to spin the wheels at will, especially in reverse. Don Verity, the Chrysler 300 Club's 300G expert, did tell us that, once set up properly, you shouldn't expect this much trouble in a warmed-up car.

We got it going eventually, and the 300G treated us to a ride that belies its size. It's too tight for broken roads, and we didn't put on any highway miles, but it's known as one of the best long-distance cruisers of all time. "On the highway, starting in mid-range and up, the ram-inducted 413 really comes on strong," said Bill. "It doesn't take any coaxing to run the speedometer well beyond the 130 mph mark," for which you can credit the oversquare dimensions of the Chrysler RB block.

Reviews described the high-speed stability of the car as "absolutely steady," "glued to the road," "superb" and, if you were a Chrysler copywriter, "as quick and as accurate as a Sharpe rifle."

"It's a feeling that needs to be experienced," said Bill. "The car will run with

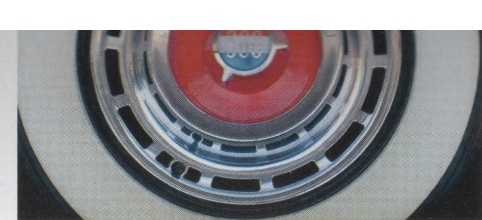
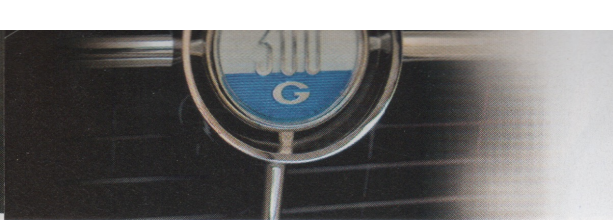
just about anything, and the handling is excellent as well, even with bias-ply tires."

Chrysler provided a three-speed manual transmission car for contemporary road tests. It was a truck-derived unit with an unsynchronized first gear, and was unable to use the engine's power well. The TorqueFlite combines with an additional gear reduction in the torque converter, as high as 2.22:1.

*"The car will run with just about anything, and the handling is excellent as well, even with bias-ply tires."*







Trunk is finished in cheap carpet and paperboard, a stunning contrast to the interior

Wide, six-inch steel wheels dress up nicely and contribute to roadholding

As manual transmission cars were consistently in the range of 8.2 seconds to 60 mph, we think that under ideal conditions, Bill's car could dip into the high sevens.

Chrysler also offered a handful of optional higher-revving 400hp Specials, but a 30-lbs.-ft. drop in torque offset the 25hp increase. Don reports that he's personally recorded a 15.55-second quarter-mile in a 300G.

While 1959-'61 300s were always popular, they've traditionally lagged in value, due in part to the low value of full-sized 1960s Chryslers: Newports and New Yorkers, which share a lot mechanically, still struggle to crack the five-figure mark. The 300's style and exclusivity helped, but when Bill bought his in the mid-1980s, complete, running examples could sell in the \$3,000-range, with a top car sneaking up towards \$5,000. And they traded hands more frequently, too. If you wanted a good car, you could probably afford one.

Twenty years later, it's a different story, and good luck finding one at any price. Last year there were still a few good cars around at \$50,000, but entering 2008, you're looking at \$70,000,

with dealers asking north of \$90,000. It's clear that the 300G has made the leap to the big time, and there's been a corresponding decrease in supply.

When you get behind the wheel, you know instantly that you're driving something special—those hefty price tags suddenly make perfect sense. From the "hard-nosed" front end to the "custom-crafted appointments" of the interior, Chrysler was right when they said, "One glance at the 'G' and you recognize that sports-bred blend of mood and motion....small wonder people stop and stare when the 'G' streaks into view."

Bill may have lost the use of his legs more than 40 years ago as a passenger, but behind the wheel of his 300G today, he's one of the kings of the road. 🏆

## WHAT TO PAY

### 1961 Chrysler 300-G

Low	Average	High
\$25,000	\$45,000	\$70,000



#### PROS:

- Never goes out of style
- Continent-devouring top speed
- Best looking engine bay in the world



#### CONS:

- Not for city driving
- Engine tune requires work
- Affordable 300-Gs are gone

## Owner's View

"This may sound a little strange to some people, but I like how it makes me feel. It reminds me of a time that was much simpler, and when I wasn't disabled. It has a definite effect on me. I guess you could say it's the best medicine I ever had. Even a few of my friends say they see a change in me when I get behind the wheel. I get such a kick out of driving this car.

"The throttle response makes it a lot of fun, and the exhaust note is music to my ears. I don't even listen to the radio, even though it does work, and is set on an oldies station. I love my 'G.' "

— Bill Korbel



## CLUB SCENE

### Chrysler 300 Club

17290 Timothy Way  
Gladstone, Oregon 97027  
503-655-9809  
www.chrysler300clubinc.com  
Dues: \$25/year; Membership: 550

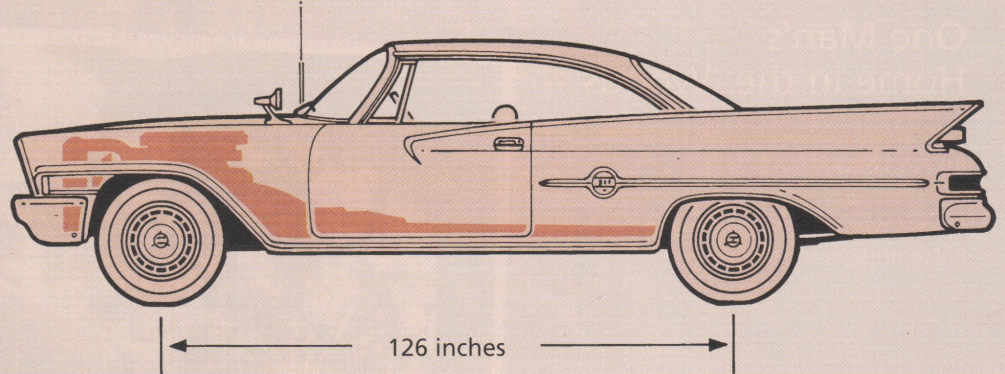
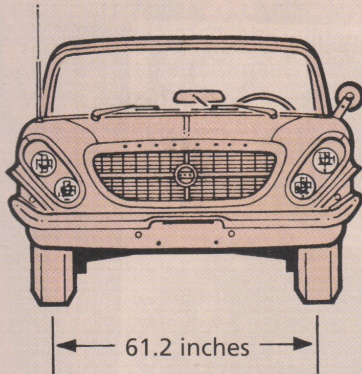
### Chrysler 300 Club International

P.O. Box 40  
Benson, Maryland 21018  
www.chrysler300club.com  
Dues: \$25/year; Membership: 925



# 1961 Chrysler 300-G

Illustrations by Russell von Sauers, The Graphic Automobile Studio ©2008 Hemmings Classic Car



## SPECIFICATIONS

Base Price \$5,411  
 Price as optioned \$5,630.70  
 Options on dR car Left exterior remote mirror, \$18;  
 six-way power seats, \$101.90;  
 Golden Tone radio, \$99.80

### ENGINE

Type Cast-iron OHV 90-degree V-8, wedge-type closed combustion chambers, cast aluminum intake manifold  
 Displacement 413 cubic inches  
 Bore x stroke 4.18 x 3.75 inches  
 Compression ratio 10.1:1  
 Horsepower @ rpm 375 @ 5,000  
 Torque @ rpm 495-lbs.ft. @ 2,800  
 Main bearings Five  
 Fuel system 30-inch ram induction tubes, dual Carter AFB 600cfm four-barrel carburetors, Carter M27695 diaphragm pump  
 Ignition system Dual breaker, vacuum advance  
 Lubrication system Full pressure  
 Electrical system 12-volts, alternator  
 Exhaust system Dual

### TRANSMISSION

Type Pushbutton TorqueFlite three-speed planetary automatic, with torque converter  
 Ratios: 1st 2.45:1  
 2nd 1.45:1  
 3rd 1.00:1  
 Reverse 2.20:1

### DIFFERENTIAL

Type Semi-floating hypoid  
 Ratio 3.23:1

### STEERING

Type Rack and sector, hydraulic power assist  
 Ratio 15.7:1  
 Turns, lock-to-lock 3.6

### BRAKES

Type Hydraulic, power assist  
 Front 12 x 2.5 inch drum  
 Rear 12 x 2.5 inch drum

### CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel unit-body  
 Body style Four passenger, two-door hardtop coupe  
 Layout Front engine, rear-wheel drive

### SUSPENSION

Front Lateral non-parallel control arms, torsion bars, Oriflow direct-acting hydraulic shock absorbers  
 Rear Seven semi-elliptical leaf springs, Oriflow direct-acting hydraulic shock absorbers

### WHEELS & TIRES

Wheels Pressed steel disc  
 Front/rear 15 x 6 inches  
 Tires Remington Cushion-Aire four-ply

### WEIGHTS & MEASURES

Wheelbase 126 inches  
 Overall length 219.8 inches  
 Overall width 79.4 inches  
 Overall height 55.1 inches  
 Front track 61.2 inches  
 Rear track 60 inches  
 Shipping weight 4,200 pounds

### CAPACITIES

Crankcase 5 quarts, 6 with filter  
 Cooling system 17 quarts  
 Fuel tank 23 gallons  
 Transmission 21 pints  
 Rear axle 4 pints

### CALCULATED DATA

Bhp per c.i.d. 1.1  
 Weight per bhp 11.2 pounds  
 Weight per c.i.d. 10.17 pounds

### PERFORMANCE

0-60 mph 8.2 seconds  
 ¼ mile ET 16.2 seconds @ 86 mph  
 Top speed 131 mph  
 Fuel mileage 11 mpg

### PRODUCTION

1961 300-G coupe 1,280