

DODGE CHARGER R/T

The “Leader of the Dodge Rebellion” remains the quintessential muscle car, on and off the screen.

The second-generation Dodge Charger only lasted for a brief run, just two years—from 1968 to 1970. Yet its cultural hold has endured for the past 50 years, rendering it an onscreen villain and action hero alike. It personified menace in *Bullitt*, chased across the streets of San Francisco by Steve McQueen. Painted bright orange, it became the official ride of the good ol’ boys in *The Dukes of Hazzard*, where it pulled off death-defying stunts each week on television. Even today, Dominic Toretto’s supercharged and blacked-out Charger has been seen in every *Fast & Furious* movie—popping wheelies, driving off cliffs, and defying the laws of physics in an increasingly exciting franchise where its characters eventually drive it into outer space.

Several design elements contributed to the Charger’s shorthand as the quintessential muscle car. Its front grille stretches from side to side in a continuously unbroken black rectangle that recesses behind a jutting, square-jawed hood and fenders. In 1969, a center divider was added to split the grille. With its headlights hidden behind matching covers, gazing at the Charger’s front end was like losing a staring contest. This subsequent Charger was longer and lower than before, its rear three-quarters length accentuated by an upward-flowing shape over the rear wheels that extended a good two feet (61cm) past the rear axle. The “Coke-bottle” line imparted a crouching hot rod stance, apparent from every angle—even if the Charger was equipped with basic hubcaps like in *Bullitt*.

Designing a visually appealing fastback is its own challenge, akin to harnessing the golden ratio: there needs to be a keen eye for balance, curvature, and visual weight. Compared to the previous Charger, this fastback aligned with the side fender’s highest point, enhanced by the lack of a pillar to disrupt the eye. The result is a lower, longer roofline that looks like it’s cheating the air, making up for the blocky front end. With a 440 Magnum V-8 as standard on the top-trim R/T, the wind had plenty to run from.

However, one could check the box for a 426 Hemi and get the biggest race-ready engine in the Chrysler lineup. The fearsome 426 “elephant engine” proved itself a NASCAR legend—so successful that it was banned after its first year in competition. It served Dodge best in the aerodynamic Charger Daytona, where in 1970, it became the first stock car to break the once-impenetrable 200-mph (322-km/h) barrier at Talladega Superspeedway.

The Charger has defined the Dodge brand ever since. Its proper resurrection in 2006 brought a healthy dose of muscle to sedan form, and the brand has been represented in advertisements and popular culture doing donuts, drifting, and screeching into turns with such raw power that even Iggy Pop would be proud. All of this, at an attainable price point in the automotive market, without the need for luxury pretension or highfalutin European craftsmanship. It has served as a movie baddie, as well as the last action hero, proving its versatility as much as any Oscar-nominated character actor.

