CHARGER MEETS THE CHALLENGE

A comparison of two or three cars in one

BY JOE SAGE

Dodge made a big push into EVs just a couple of years ago, as regulatory winds were shifting fast, with market demand expected to follow. They dropped the familiar (and immensely popular) gasoline Charger (four-door sedan) and Challenger (two-door coupe), together having served a largely don't-change-a-thing market (existing and aspirational) through long years and generations.

In their place, to the degree possible, came the Charger Daytona EV in 2024, first a two-door (despite the Charger badge), then also a four-door, with R/T and Scat Pack names now applied to EV powertrains, hoping to carry the spirit forward.

It's fair to say the winds did not change so much nor as fast within the customer base, who seemed less likely than anticipated, or hoped, to dive right in and universally embrace that whole direction at that time. Fortunately, Dodge had kept their wits about them, and still had the necessary powertrain teams to quickly shift gears again, rebounding to internal combustion by creating SixPack twin-turbo Chargers, in both four-door and two-door form.

(And yes, SixPack, an engine, and Scat Pack, a model or trim level, can be confusing—with both the gasoline-powered R/T and Scat Pack having the SixPack engine, while the Daytona EV also has the Scat Pack trim level.)

With the 670-hp Charger Daytona EV also continuing (and in either door count), that makes six Charger variants, from $49,995 to $61,995 base, all of them potent, all of them all-wheel-drive, each one distinct within the same basic body shell.

This whole phase seems like it took a lot longer than it all feels in retrospect (or so far). Yet here we are. The evolutions and resulting powertrains aim to deliver exactly what a range of prospective buyers want, across an ever broadening lineup.

We described all this as a "quick comeback—part rebirth, part reinvention, a powertrain course correction"—as we dove right into the gasoline versions last winter, with a week in the 550-hp Charger Scat Pack Plus HO (High Output) 2-Door (0-to-60 in 3.9 seconds, top speed 177 mph).

This time, we have the 420-hp Charger R/T Plus SO (Standard Output) 4-Door (0-to-60 in 4.6 seconds, top speed 127 mph). With a base price of $51,995, a lengthy Package 21A ($4995, see specs sidebar), Blacktop Package (simple but enticing at $1295), an also lengthy but don't-wanna-miss-it Performance Handling Group ($2995), plus Alpine 18-speaker audio, a full glass roof and After Dark paint, our sample is out the door and into our garage for $67,160 (including $1995 destination).

Points of comparison between our two include a higher compression ratio for this SO, as well as the aforementioned differences in 0-to-60 and top speed (both enough for almost anybody). The R/T is also about 120 pounds lighter. There is a fuel difference that may be just an asterisk for some, a deciding point for others—91-octane premium is required for the HO, 'recommended' for the SO. You could save a little on gas. You're unlikely to majorly notice the difference in acceleration that much on a daily basis, and top speed is something most are unlikely to ever see (unless for track use).

We've always been impressed by Dodge's price walk on these cars. There used to be far more trim levels and powertrains, but now as then, all are kept within a pretty much 'everybody' price range, even when adding further variables and options, somehow largely keeping them from overlapping.

As for finer points, Stellantis a.k.a. Chrysler has a very longstanding reputation for a very detail-oriented engineering culture, calculating and fine-tuning details in each application—avoiding any nickel-dime what's-on-the-shelf approach. (Credit also presumably to Auburn Hills bean counters for recognizing the value of this. In the end, reputations are always worth a lot more.)

On these two Chargers, this appears to lead to slightly different spring rates, brake specs and such (while the Scat Pack's Brembos may be equal parts engineering and branding, so a nod also to the marketing department). Note: specs last winter were incomplete, so some differences may be model-specific or a year's further evolution.

A nominally full-size four-door sedan is a rarity worth celebrating in its own right in today's market. Not your grandfather's land yacht, the new Charger has that general capacity, modernized—all the moreso, thanks to almost 40 cubic feet of cargo space via the non-obvious liftback, when the rear seats are down—yet comes across lean and mean, animal wild. All perfect for the mission.

The drive experience can seem a bit of a mix, partly based on the EV evolution, partly on the return to the familiar. Our extensive notes can probably be summed up variously between jumpy electric behaviors (e.g. steering) and somewhat unbounded power (in line with its reborn ICE performance roots). Each is likely to please one group or the other (EV or gasoline enthusiasts) the most.

Probably our favorite drive time was on open four-lane mountain highways and two-lanes—the animal spirit has its way here. In town, we had a lot more notes—specifics of powertrain, steering, brakes, experiments with drive modes, all working together against the urban challenge.

In many ways, this is exactly as it should be. The market segment will be delighted by the very presence of the gasoline Chargers and happy to get their hands on one. As noted last winter, we're just so glad they're back. This current set of two- and four-door versions, with gasoline and EV powertrains, is doing a masterful job of keeping all itches scratched. Expect further evolution. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY ..... Windsor, Ontario, Canada
BUILD ..... steel unibody / alum hood / 4 doors
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD ..... Mexico / USA
PARTS CONTENT ..... US/Canada 44% / Mexico 33%
ENGINE ..... 3.0L twin turbo SIXPACK SO (Standard Output, std on R/T) inline-6, DOHC, roller finger followers, 24v, dual VVT phasers, GDI 350 bar central inj, deep skirt cast alum w PM steel main bearing caps
HP/TORQUE ..... 420 hp / 468 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO 10.41:1
TRANSMISSION ..... 8-spd auto / paddles
DRIVETRAIN ..... AWD
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED ..... 4.6 sec / 127 mph
QUARTER-MILE ..... 12.9 sec at 107 mph
SUSPENSION ..... **F:** multi-link, spring rate 65 N/mm, touring monotubes (R/T), 90mm jounce travel, 100mm rebound; **R:** integral link, spring rate 80 N/mm (R/T), monotubes, 100mm jounce travel, 100mm rebound
STEERING ..... constant ratio gear
BRAKES ..... (R/T) **F/R:** floating: **F:** 354x28mm vented; **R:** 350x22mm vented
WHEELS ..... 20x9 Diamond Cut Baltic alum
TIRES ..... (R/T Plus) 255/45R20XLA Nexen
LENGTH / WHEELBASE ..... 206.6 / 121.0 in
GROUND CLEARANCE ..... 5.5 in
TURNING CIRCLE ..... 41.0 ft
HEADROOM (F/R) ..... 39.1 / 36.9 in
LEGROOM (F/R) ..... 42.6 / 37.2 in
CARGO CAPACITY ..... (4-dr) 22.752 / 38.028 cu.ft
WEIGHT ..... 4741 lb
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION ..... **F/R:** 55 / 45 %
FUEL / CAPACITY ..... 91 prem recm'd / 17.5 gal
MPG ..... 17/26/20 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE **$51,995**
PAINT: After Dark 695
CUSTOMER PREFERRED PKG 21A: heated/vented front seats, heated 2nd row seats, 16-in driver display, performance shift indicator, Performance Pages, heads-up display, attitude lighting, st wheel paddle shifters, surround-view cams, enhanced alarm, wireless charging pad, power hatch, ext mirror lamps w logo, Uconnect 5 nav w 12.3-in touchscreen, map-in-cluster display, connected travel & traffic services, rain-sensing wipers, Alexa built in (wifi req'd), traffic sign information, ParkSense front and rear assist 4995
BLACKTOP PKG: dual rear exhaust w black tips, dark exterior badging 1295
PERFORMANCE HANDLING GROUP: leatherette/suede high-back performance bucket seats, 12-way power front seats w 4-way power lumbar, black one-piece performance spoiler, line lock, launch control, custom drive mode, perf suspension, 275/40ZR20 a/s tires, Brembo high-perf brakes 2995
FULL GLASS ROOF 1395
ALPINE AUDIO: 18-speaker high-performance w subwoofer 1795
DESTINATION CHARGE 1995

TOTAL **$67,160**

2026 DODGE CHARGER LINEUP

	2-door	4-door
Charger R/T		
420 hp SIXPACK	$49,995	▼ $51,995
Charger Scat Pack		
550 hp SIXPACK	54,995	56,995
Charger Daytona Scat Pack		
670 hp full EV	59,995	61,995