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Dodge Challenger: Forty Years of a Dodge Muscle-car Legend

February 9, 2010, Chicago - When the Dodge Challenger first entered in the muscle car ranks of Detroit's Big Three, it arrived with something its competitors didn't have: the greatest range of powertrain choices in the industry, from the small but durable 225-cubic-inch "Slant Six" to the fearsome "Elephant Motor" — the 426 HEMI®. With the best muscle-car powertrains in the business, Dodge Challenger has added, and continues to add, to its rich legacy, creating one of the most storied nameplates in automotive history.

Dodge Challenger's 40-year legacy includes:

1970

The Dodge Challenger made its debut in the fall of 1969 as a 1970 model. While it shared Chrysler's "E-body" short-deck, long-hood platform with the third-generation Plymouth Barracuda, Dodge Challenger's wheelbase was 2 inches longer, creating more interior space.

The Dodge Challenger was originally offered as a two-door hardtop or convertible, in base, SE (Special Edition), R/T (Road/Track) and T/A (Trans-Am) trim. But it was the range of powertrain choices that was truly remarkable:

- 225-cubic-inch I-6; 145 horsepower
- 318-cubic-inch V-8; 230 horsepower
- 340-cubic-inch V-8; 275 horsepower (290 horsepower in the T/A)
- 383-cubic-inch V-8; 290 horsepower
- 383-cubic-inch V-8; 330 horsepower
- 383-cubic-inch V-8; 335 horsepower
- 426-cubic-inch HEMI V-8; 425 horsepower
- 440-cubic-inch V-8; 375 horsepower
- 440-cubic-inch V-8; 390 horsepower

Driveline choices for various engines included Chrysler's TorqueFlite automatic transmission and a three- or four-speed manual transmission, which could be equipped with a Hurst "pistol-grip" shifter. Big-block Challengers could be ordered with a heavy-duty Dana 60 differential equipped with a limited-slip differential.

Even the paint schemes said "performance," with colors, including Plum Crazy and HEMI Orange, accented with "bumblebee" stripes. Customers could further customize their cars with twin-scooped hoods, "shaker" hoods and deck-lid wings.

Befitting the brand's performance heritage, Dodge raced the Challenger in its first year on the market. For the street, it was offered in the limited-edition T/A model to meet homologation requirements for Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) Trans-Am racing. The T/A was one of the first production vehicles to offer staggered size tires in the front and back; E60 x 15-inch front and G60 x 15-inch rear.

In 1970, Sam Posey drove the lone Trans-Am racing Challenger, prepared and run by Ray Caldwell's Autodynamics Race Shop. While he didn't win a race in the No. 77 car, Posey finished fourth overall in points.

Drag racers, including Dick Landy and Ted Spehar, also campaigned Challengers in the National Hot Rod Association's new Pro Stock class. In 1970 and 1971, the HEMI-powered Challengers (and Plymouth 'Cudas) virtually ruled the class.

On the big screen, a 1970 Challenger R/T starred in the film Vanishing Point, a high-speed pursuit movie that has become a cult favorite with muscle-car fans. The movie was remade for television in 1997.

Other 1970 Dodge Challengers have been seen in films, including Used Cars, Natural Born Killers and Phantasm I and II; and in television shows, including Mod Squad.

For the 1970 model year, more than 83,000 Dodge Challengers were sold.

1971

In 1971, designers made subtle styling changes to the Dodge Challenger, providing new treatments to the taillamps and grille. The single-taillamp design from 1970 became two distinct lights for 1971, and a new-for-1971 twin-inlet Challenger grille was painted silver on standard models and black on R/Ts.

Challenger R/T models also received a set of fiberglass quarter-panel louvers. An additional coupe model with fixed quarter windows was added to the lineup.

As in 1970, a wide range of trim levels, exterior colors and striping options made the Dodge Challenger easy for customers to create a special car. However, for 1971, Dodge dropped the T/A (it was no longer racing in Trans-Am), SE models and R/T convertible.

New EPA emission standards led to some powertrain changes; the optional 375 horsepower 440-cubic-inch was eliminated, as was the Six Pack-equipped 340-cubic-inch powerplant. The 383-cubic-inch Magnum engine was detuned to 300 horsepower by lowering the compression ratio for improved emissions. However, a 390 horsepower six-pack 440 V-8 was available, and the 425 horsepower 426-cubic-inch HEMI still topped the vast engine offerings.

A Dodge Challenger paced the Indianapolis 500 race in 1971. Dodge produced 50 Challenger convertible pace car replicas — all painted HEMI Orange with white tops and interiors.

1972

With escalating insurance rates and new EPA emissions mandates, more changes came to the Dodge Challenger in 1972. Also, the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) revised the torque and horsepower rating test from a “gross” to a “net” as installed in the cars. This reduced all ratings 20 to 30 percent, making them non-comparable to previous ratings.

Only three engines were available in the 1972 Dodge Challenger: the 225-cubic-inch Slant Six with 110 horsepower, the 318-cubic-inch V-8 with 150 horsepower and the 340-cubic-inch V-8 with 240 horsepower. All were equipped to use the then-new unleaded fuel.

With convertible sales in steady decline over several years, the 1972 Dodge Challenger was offered in hardtop form only. The sun roof had become a more popular alternative and was offered as an option for more than $400.

New front-end styling in 1972 featured a larger “egg-crate” grille. It was painted argent for standard Challengers and black on the Challenger Rallye performance model, which replaced the R/T. The Challenger’s taillamp design included twin lights on each side, with the center panel painted the same color as the grille. The Rallye model also was equipped with four small scoops on the front fenders.

1973

Beginning in 1973, the federal government mandated new bumper-impact standards that resulted in the only changes to the Dodge Challenger exterior — five-miles-per-hour bumpers equipped with large rubber guards that extended out from the bodywork.

Inside, grained vinyl was the only available seating material, but a new instrument-cluster design was part of the Rallye option package. The Rallye was eliminated as a separate model, although customers could create one with options.

Under the hood, the six-cylinder engine was no longer available; the 150 horsepower 318-cubic-inch V-8 was standard, with the 240 horsepower 340-cubic-inch V-8 as the only option.

1974

With performance car insurance rates skyrocketing, more safety equipment led the short list of changes for the 1974 model-year Dodge Challengers.

Inside, lap and shoulder belts were equipped with an inertia reel. In addition, there was a federally mandated seat

belt-ignition interlock, which prevented the car from being started if the driver or passenger didn't buckle up.

The Dodge Challenger offered a different engine option for 1974. With the 318-cubic-inch V-8 still standard, a 360-cubic-inch V-8 producing 245 horsepower replaced the 340-cubic-inch V-8 as the only engine option.

In April 1974, Challenger production ceased. During a five-year span, approximately 188,600 Dodge Challengers were sold.

1978-1984
Beginning in 1978 — the year the U.S. Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standard took effect — Dodge offered a new Challenger two-door coupe imported from Mitsubishi. It was offered with a standard 1.6-liter, 77 horsepower I-4 engine, with a 2.6-liter, 105 horsepower four-cylinder as an option.

Slightly restyled in 1981, the Dodge Challenger soldiered on until 1984, replaced by the growing stable of Chrysler Corporation's K-platform compacts and a new import from Mitsubishi: the Dodge/Plymouth Conquest.

During its six-year run, sales of the imported Dodge Challenger averaged between 12,000 and 14,000 units per year.

2006
At the North American International Auto Show in Detroit in January 2006, Dodge unveiled the Challenger concept to immediate acclaim. Based on the Dodge Charger's advanced rear-wheel-drive platform and legendary HEMI V-8 engine, the Dodge Challenger concept featured the long hood, short deck, wide stance and two-door coupe body-style that resembled the iconic Challengers of the 1970s. Over the next several months, the company received repeated pleas from consumers and the media to build the car.

2008
The Dodge Challenger returned with the all-new 2008 Dodge Challenger SRT8® at the Chicago Auto Show. The 2008 Dodge Challenger SRT8 offered all that pony-car fanatics crave: ground shaking performance, unmistakable design cues reminiscent of the original Challenger, world-class ride and handling characteristics and benchmark braking.

The Dodge Challenger SRT8's 425 horsepower (317 kW) and 420 lb.-ft. of torque (569 N•m) were the result of SRT's exclusive, proven 6.1-liter HEMI V-8 engine. Its 69.8 horsepower-per-liter rating exceeds even that of the legendary 1966 "Street HEMI."

Dodge Challenger SRT8 sports a five-link independent rear suspension allowing for independent tuning of ride-and-handling characteristics. The Challenger SRT8 featured SRT-exclusive 20-inch fully-forged Alcoa aluminum wheels with four-season Goodyear Eagle RS-A or optional three-season Goodyear F1 Supercar tires. All four wheels were equipped with red painted Brembo calipers that feature four opposing pistons on a fixed caliper for even clamping performance.

The 6,400 Dodge Challenger SRT8 models built for the 2008 model year were available in HEMI Orange, Bright Silver Metallic and Brilliant Black Crystal Pearl exterior paint colors. Interior highlights included race-inspired leather seats with added bolstering and an exclusive red accent stripe, exclusive stitched accents on the seats and steering wheel, four-bomb gauges with tachometer and 180-mph speedometer in the center. An SRT-exclusive Reconfigurable Display (RCD) with Performance Pages provided drivers instant feedback on zero to 60 mph time, 60 to zero mph braking, g-forces and 1/4-mile time, and limited-edition numbered dash plaque.

The first production 2008 Dodge Challenger SRT8 was sold at the 37th annual Barrett-Jackson Collector Car Auction with a winning bid placed by Craig Jackson, Chairman/CEO of the Barrett-Jackson Auction Company of $400,000. All of the proceeds went to charity.

2009
The introduction of the all-new 2009 Dodge Challenger SE and R/T models at the New York International Auto Show delivered the full lineup of Dodge Challengers to the marketplace. From the maximum Dodge Challenger SRT8, to the performance of the Challenger R/T with its 5.7-liter HEMI V-8, to the cutting-edge technology of Challenger SE with the efficient 3.5-liter V-6 engine, the 2009 Dodge Challenger offered a full menu of options for every customer.

Adding even more capability than the 2008 model, the 2009 Dodge Challenger SRT8 with its powerful 6.1-liter HEMI

V-8 offered a six-speed manual transmission, in addition to the proven five-speed automatic with Auto Stick. The six-speed—the Tremec TR-6060—was matched with a race-inspired dual-disc clutch that was first offered on the 2008 Dodge Viper SRT10.

The new 2009 Dodge Challenger R/T tucked its legendary 5.7-liter HEMI V-8 engine under a long, raised performance hood with functional hood scoops to increase engine cooling. The newest-generation 5.7-liter HEMI® V-8 engine featured dual Variable-cam Timing (VCT) and dual ignition (two spark plugs per cylinder) to increase power and torque, while improving refinement and efficiency.

When paired with the automatic transmission, the new-generation 5.7-liter HEMI® V-8 included the fuel-saving Multi-displacement System (MDS) allowing Dodge Challenger R/T Classic to operate economically on four cylinders, or produce 372 horsepower (277 kW) and 401 lb.-ft. of torque (544 N•m) when all eight cylinders are needed.

With its “pistol grip” shifter, the six-speed manual transmission Dodge Challenger R/T featured a performance-tuned dual exhaust with optimized engine back pressure and two low-restriction bottle resonators for maximum “throatiness.” The result, even more power at tap with 376 horsepower (280 kW) and 410 lb.-ft. of torque (556 N•m) ready to accelerate the Dodge Challenger R/T from zero to 60 mph in less than 6 seconds.

The new 2009 Dodge Challenger SE powered by the 3.5-liter High Output V-6 with a four-speed automatic transmission produced 250 horsepower (186 kW) and 250 lb.-ft. of torque (339 N•m).

Halfway through the 2009 model year, the Dodge Challenger R/T Classic offered menacing looks and, combined with the 5.7-liter V-8 engine, an unforgettable punch. Based on the Challenger R/T, the Challenger R/T Classic featured dual throwback A-line body-side R/T stripes in matte black, ‘Challenger’ fender badging in classic script, large 20-inch polished-chrome heritage wheels, classic egg-crate grille with heritage ‘R/T’ badge, body-color rear spoiler and bright racing style fuel filler door.

The 2009 Dodge Challenger SE Rallye added even more pony-car excitement with a more responsive five-speed automatic transmission (implemented as standard equipment on all mid-year Challenger SEs), throw-back hood and deck-lid dual stripes with accent color outer stripes, bright racing style fuel filler door, 18-inch rallye wheels with all-season performance tires, body-color deck-lid spoiler and Micro Carbon interior accents.

Original B5 Blue returned from the Dodge paint code archive for a limited-edition run of Challenger R/T Classic and Challenger SRT8 models.

Based on the production Dodge Challenger SRT8, Mopar® offered a modern factory-prepped Challenger Drag Race Package Car (as a special body-in-white). To reduce vehicle weight, major production component and systems were eliminated, including windshield wiper assembly, complete HVAC system, all airbag components, rear seats, power steering system, exhaust system and underbody heat shields, cross-car and side-impact door beams, rear-bumper beam and rear deck-lid spoiler. The drag racer offered three engine options — 6.1-liter or 5.7-liter HEMI or 5.9-liter Magnum® Wedge — as well as manual or automatic transmission options.

2010

The 2010 Dodge Challenger R/T and Challenger R/T Classic add even more performance and excitement with the Super Track Pack for the 2010 model years. This handling package includes 20-inch Goodyear Eagle F1 Super Car tires, front and rear Nivomat self-leveling shock-absorbers, a larger rear stabilizer bar, a 3.06 rear-axle ratio, performance brake linings and enthusiast-desired “ESC-off” stability calibration.

Even more exclusive, and true to Challenger’s high-performance history are the 2010 Dodge Challenger R/T Classic and SRT8 Detonator Yellow and Plum Crazy editions. The Dodge Challenger R/T Classic in Plum Crazy Pearl Coat is the first limited-edition to offer dual throwback A-line body-side R/T stripes in matte black or new bright white, while the SRT8 editions feature unique SRT-designed appointments and unique SRT performance seats with accented stripe.

Two of the wildest and rarest 2010 Dodge Challenger special editions will soon be available to Dodge fans and collectors to celebrate 40 years of Dodge Challenger performance: the 2010 Dodge Challenger R/T Classic and Challenger SRT8 Furious Fuchsia editions. With Furious Fuchsia Pearl Coat exterior paint and all-new Pearl White leather performance seats, these limited-edition Dodge Challengers deliver the best of modern American muscle-car characteristics — now in one of the most significant hues.

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