

# Shifting Gears

## [The Return of the Dodge Dart](#)

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**By Roger Witherspoon**

It's back.

The Dodge Dart, the popular, stylish little car that zipped along the roadways and was a favorite of millions of American motorists a generation (or two) ago, is being reintroduced as the first American designed and made small car of the rejuvenated Fiat-Chrysler partnership. The Dart is a long awaited venture for Chrysler, which merged with Fiat during bankruptcy to combine their respective strengths: Chrysler design, and the Italian company's experience with small cars.

But why name it Dart, after a car which was ubiquitous following its introduction in 1960 and sold to more than 3.6 million motorists before

being was retired in 1976? And while there are souped-up Darts running on modern drag strips, those are old shells with modern innards.

“It was really the best name out there,” explained Ryan Nagode, the chief interior designer of the 2013 Dart. “We tried a lot of names – names we made up, names we borrowed, letter combinations, letters and numbers – you name, it we tried it. But in focus groups of all ages, the Dart was the most popular.

“For older drivers, they remember the Dart fondly from their younger days. And for the young drivers, who weren’t around back then and had no idea of the old Dart, they thought the name was cool. It implied it was slim and swift and aerodynamic and they liked it. It’s the only name that appealed to both groups – older and younger drivers. So we went with it and brought the Dart back.”

Perhaps he’s right.



“I loved my Dart!” exclaimed Marilyn Elie, a retired, Westchester County, elementary school librarian, who owned the car when she started her career some 40 years ago. I would talk to it, sing to it, and it never failed to start for me and take me everywhere. It worked for me long past the time when everyone said it was too old and should be traded in.

“Then I went away for a while and didn’t talk to it and by the time I came back, it had quietly died. I still miss it.”

The new Dart is not simply a reprise of the original, in the way that the current Ford Mustang—with an updated engine and electronics – is stylistically reminiscent of the best of that breed from the ‘60s. It is built on the platform of the mid-sized Alpha Romeo, which gives it the closer wheelbase and turning radius of a compact car, while its interior space is slightly larger than that of the popular, mid-sized, Hyundai Sonata and Chevy Malibu.

Under the long, sloping hood, the Dart’s power plant comes in three, performance flavors:

- Rallye: 2.0-liter , aluminum engine cranking out 160 horsepower and 148 pound-feet of torque; and Rallye, sportier 1.4-liter turbocharged engine producing 160 horsepower and 148 pound-feet of torque.
- Limited: For an additional \$1,300 Dart lovers can get a sportier model with a 1.4-liter, four-cylinder, turbocharged, aluminum engine producing the same 160 horsepower, but jumping the all-important torque to 184 pound-feet. There isn’t much difference in regular commuter driving. But on the open road, the turbocharger makes a mark. Driving up the steep grade of the Hudson Highlands rising just past West Point the Standard model struggled to move the speedometer into the high 80s. But the Ltd easily surged up the winding, open road. Both cars have speedometers topping out at 120 miles per hour. On the Rallye, that’s not wasted space.
- Sport R/T: Dart’s performance model, with 18-inch wheels instead of the 17-inch wheels on its two automotive siblings, has a 2.4-liter aluminum engine cranking out 184 horsepower and 171 pound-feet of torque.

The Dart, in all models, is a front-wheel drive car that comes with a choice of a six-speed manual or a six-speed automatic transmission with an electronic manual mode. A manual transmission in a car used primarily for urban commuting – complete with regular traffic jams – can make the motoring experience seem as if one is going to a gym to continually exercise the right

arm. And that is more punishment than motoring pleasure. The electronic manual mode is appreciated on long hills, however, as it is easy to tap into a lower gear for more power and then tap back into automatic mode. They also project an EPA mileage of 25 miles per gallon in city driving and 36 MPG on the open road using regular gas.

Inside, Chrysler gave considerable thought to the riding experience for both old and young drivers. The seats are wide, Nappa leather, padded, manually



adjusted, but heated in the front. In the rear, there is more than enough leg room for passengers in the range of a small NBA forward standing six-foot, five-inches in his new Nikes.

For sound, the Dart has AM/FM and Sirius Satellite radio, as well as a 506-watt Alpine surround-sound system with nine speakers and a subwoofer, which is more than enough to awaken the average neighborhood. Chrysler is offering an installed, quirky, Garmin navigation system with Sirius traffic and weather guides as an option. The standard, 8.4-inch information screen – which also is used for the crystal clear backup camera – makes it easy to see the navigation or other systems.

Then, there are interesting touches.

The front passenger seat folds out to reveal a hidden compartment about three inches deep. It's big enough to hold a iPad, though one wonders who



would choose to sit on their expensive electronic tablet?

“What’s with the marijuana compartment,” Nagode was asked at a press preview.

When he stopped laughing at what was obviously a common nickname, he said “that’s not its purpose. It’s a place to hide small items which you have to leave in the car – like a tablet – but don’t want to leave in public view where it might encourage someone to break a window and grab it.

“It’s not intended to stash drugs.”

Good intentions aside, there are slots on either side of the center console to hold cell phones, placing them about six inches from the power outlet. The glove box is about 18 inches deep, enough to easily hold an iPad. Inside the deep storage bin under the center console arm rest are the connections for the USB, MP3, and iPod ports, as well as the CD player. In most cars, the small holes for the auxiliary music connections are hard to find in daylight – and impossible to locate at night when one is driving. On the Dart, however, the connecting ports are backlit, providing at a glance an instant locator. There is also a soft backlight around the dash, cup holders, and door. One can also utilize the Bluetooth for both cell phone communications and to play 1,000 or so of your favorite tunes. The, phone, navigation and entertainment systems can all be voice activated and controlled.

Chrysler is taking a chance by coming out with the Dart as its first entry into the small, crowded, sharp-elbowed, fuel-efficient market with cars priced under \$25,000. It’s anyone’s guess as to whether or not the sleek little Dart can slip past the established models and lodge in the front of the pack.



## **2013 Dodge Dart Rallye**

### **Midsized Sedan**

**MSRP:** **\$21,475**

**EPA Mileage:** **25 MPG City** **36 MPG Highway**

**Towing Capacity:** **1,000 Pounds**

### **Performance / Safety:**

2.0-Liter, 4-cylinder, fuel injected, aluminum engine producing 160 horsepower and 148 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission; antilock, 4-wheel disc brakes; traction and stability control; front wheel drive; independent MacPherson strut front suspension; multi-link

independent rear suspension; 17-inch cast aluminum wheels; 10 standard airbags; Halogen projector headlamps.

**Interior / Comfort:**

AM/FM/Sirius Satellite Radio; 506-watt Alpine premium surround sound with 9 speakers and subwoofer; Bluetooth; CD player; MP3, iPod, and USB ports; heated front leather or cloth seats; folding rear seats; backup camera; leather, telescoping steering wheel with fingertip audio and cruise controls;