

Auto Sunday

Subaru Forester setting records

BY ANN M. JOB
For The Associated Press

The Honda CR-V hasn't done it. The Ford Escape, Toyota RAV4 and Hyundai Tucson also have been unable to boost sales this year over last year's levels.

But the Subaru Forester crossover sport utility vehicle, which debuted months ago as an early 2010 model, is setting sales records. In fact, Forester sales in the United States are up 32 percent over 2008 levels to more than 43,000 this year through July.

The reason for its appeal? The Forester is a practical, rational purchase in a time of economic uncertainty. Shoppers who want value find the five-door, five-passenger SUV is right-sized — not too big and not too small.

With only four-cylinder engines available — with 170- to 224-horsepower — it gets decent fuel mileage of at least 19 miles per gallon in city driving. It has the lowest starting retail price — \$20,990 with standard all-wheel drive — of any mainstream crossover SUV equipped with all-wheel drive.

It earned five out of five stars in government frontal and side crash testing, and the Forester is a recommended buy of Consumer Reports magazine.

Factor in that the Forester, which was overhauled as a third-generation model for 2009 and given its arguably best styling ever, offers a nice mix of amenities, and you can see why this people- and cargo-carrying SUV is getting a lot of attention.

The \$20,990 price is for a base model with manual transmission. The lowest-priced 2010 Forester with automatic is \$22,190.

Today's Forester is larger than the wagon-like Foresters of the past. In fact, at some angles, it looks on the outside like a Ford Escape, and it's 1.6 inches longer, from bumper to bumper, than the CR-V.

Three adults in the back seat sit close to each other, but they have rear-seat legroom of 38 inches, which is better than what's in the Tucson. It's also enough to allow me to extend my legs comfortably in the back seat, even with front seats pushed back on their tracks.

The new styling, plus the 17-inch alloy wheels on the test model — gives the vehicle a robust look, and the mostly quiet interior and accommodating seats made the test Forester a welcoming traveler.

Managed by a four-speed automatic, the power came on smoothly without a noticeable lag or uncontrolled jolt of "oomph." The Forester moved without fuss through traffic.



COURTESY OF SUBARU
New styling is proving popular for the 2010 Forester.

At a glance

Price as tested: \$29,694
Engine: 2.5-liter, double overhead cam, intercooled and turbocharged four-cylinder
City/highway fuel economy: 19/24 miles per gallon
Length: 179 inches
Wheelbase: 103 inches
Curb weight: 2,416 pounds
Built: Japan
Destination charge: \$695



The Daytona proved just how far Dodge was willing to go to be king of NASCAR racing

DAYTONA



BY MALCOLM GUNN

Wheelbase Communications

Parked on the showroom floor beside a hulking Monaco wagon or plain-Jane Dart sedan, the 1969 Dodge Charger Daytona must have looked like it was from another planet ... or at least another world.

Truth be told, that wasn't far off the mark since back in the late 1960s, car sales were heavily connected with racing and, of course, winning. Since you had to race what you built for the street, the Daytona's slippery shape — and the strange bodywork that went along with it — was solely intended to play along (and play with) the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing rules of the day.

Sure, the roof and doors appeared to be regular-issue, but the protruding snout and giant-sized wing that extended high above the trunk were anything but. Who in their right mind would want to be seen driving such an oddball contraption?

Chrysler Corp. probably didn't care at the time since its focus was on race-track speed, not the street cars that had to be built to attain it.

A bewildered public could actually thank NASCAR rules makers for the Daytona, so named for Daytona, Fla., speedway where the NASCAR season kicks off.

That was then. Today's so-called "stock" cars are all hand-built to a common standard using custom-formed sheet metal that's carefully bent and shaped around a stout steel frame, intricate roll cage and other high-tech safety systems. However, from NASCAR's earliest beginnings in the late 1940s until the mid '70s, life on the track was governed by a different set of rules. Teams couldn't build a specially prepared race car that wasn't based on a real "stock" car that the public could purchase from the local dealer. It was called homologation, and it existed for one simple reason: keep the "stock" cars "stock" and keep the Big Three playing fair.

Fair? While it would have been relatively easy to build a few specially designed ringers and make them available to a select group of buyers (as was the case for the factory-backed drag-racing stocks that competed in the Super Stock class), NASCAR strictly prohibited the practice by setting minimum production numbers. If automobile manufacturers built a specialized car intended for high banks of Daytona, for example, they had to first create production

versions for public consumption. General Motors, Ford and Chrysler were willing to do just about anything to win both the horsepower race and, ultimately the sales race, even if it meant bending the rules, or at least interpreting them to suit their needs.

In the quest for lap speed — then averaging 200 mph on some tracks — it became necessary to look beyond mere horsepower. However, NASCAR rules prohibited giant spoilers, shovel-nosed ground effects or any other wind-cheating devices to be grafted to any race car, unless they were available from the factory. And what self-respecting manufacturer would dare to create such a production model? NASCAR obviously wasn't counting on Chrysler to pull out all the stops to gain an advantage over Ford and General Motors.

Both Chrysler's Dodge and Plymouth divisions already had a race-proven engine in the 426-cubic-inch "Hemi" V-8. What was needed was a more streamlined street car to homologate for racing. The decision was made to make the Dodge Charger more competitive by moving the grille flush with the front bodywork and altering the angle of the rear window so that it followed the contour of the roof line, all in an effort to reduce drag and gain precious speed. Initially, 500 of these cars, dubbed the Charger Daytona 500, were produced for public consumption, all in accordance with the homologation rules.

On the track, the cars were faster than the stock-bodied versions, but proved unstable at high speeds. It was back to the drawing board and into the wind tunnel. What the Charger actually needed was more down-force to keep it glued to the track.

The radical solution was to add a pointy 18-inch extension to the nose plus a giant stabilizer wing mounted above the rear deck. Outrageous, of course, but very effective and entirely within the letter, if not the

spirit, of NASCAR regulations.

Nearly all 505 of the radically altered winged Charger Daytona models (the "500" designation was dropped) built for public consumption arrived with 375-horsepower 440-cubic-inch V-8s, while a handful came with the 425-horse Hemi that was capable of launching the 4,000-plus-pound car to 60 mph in around six seconds.

The Daytona was no drag-racer, but in "super speedway" trim, the monstrous looking Charger proved its worth on NASCAR's faster oval tracks, winning 80 percent of the races in which it competed, including the season opener Daytona 500.

However, Dodge failed to achieve as many victories as Ford due to the predominance of short tracks on the NASCAR schedule where the aero-body offered no real advantage. Following the 1969 season, Chrysler moved the program to its Plymouth division (Super-Bird), which carried on for another year with considerable success until NASCAR, fearing a field of mutant models running around its race venues, legislated the cars out of existence.

Each of the 500 or so private-citizen Charger Daytona buyers probably endured much derisive laughter for making such a seemingly imprudent purchase. Today, though, the highly sought-after Daytona (which can sell for up to \$100,000) basks in the aura of its own lore and legend, a remnant of headier times when NASCAR's competitors literally ran amuck.

• E-mail feature writer Malcolm Gunn at www.wheelbase.ws/mailbag.html.



A close examination of the 1969 Dodge Charger, as beautiful as it is, shows the problem with the grille when the high speeds of competition are brought into the equation: it's a brick wall. For the Charger Daytona, Chrysler added a more aerodynamic 'snout.'

There's value in keeping an older car longer

Q. My car did not qualify for the "Cash for Clunkers" program. What should I do? It seems to run and drive OK but it is getting older. What can I expect out of an 8-year-old Impala with 125,000 miles on it?

A. In my opinion you are better off not having traded your Chevy in. I think you will be able to get many more miles out of it. The key to long life for your car will be maintenance. You have already mentioned that it seems to be running pretty good, so chances are some routine maintenance will get you in like-new condition fairly reasonably.



Doug McAllister
Under the hood

With an average car payment somewhere around \$450 per month, you will see the financial advantages to keeping the Chevy by doing some quick figuring. In this scenario, 10 months of car payments would add up to \$4,500. You could do a lot of fixing for that and even handle a major component failure like a transmission if needed.

You could even throw in a full detail that would make the old girl shine and smell like new again.

But you say the car is barely worth \$4,500 — why would I want to put that much in it?

If you think about all your options, this one makes the most financial sense. If you buy a new car, you will be saddled with the car payment plus the car will lose 25 percent of its value right off the bat.

You could buy a replacement used car but you never know what you are getting and you may have to perform repairs on that one right away, so now you have laid out some cash for the used car plus payments and now repairs.

You can plug in whatever numbers you want to use but, no matter how you cut it, the old Chevy is looking pretty good at this point!

Q. What should I do to get my car ready for winter?

A. A good winter check up would usually consist of the following:

- Oil change
- Battery test
- Test the coolant strength
- Test heater and defroster output
- Inspect tires for enough tread
- Check all lighting
- Inspect belts and hoses
- Test wiper and washer system
- Inspect brakes and anti-lock system
- Inspect steering and suspension components
- Perform repairs to any deficient area and provide maintenance service where needed.

It is worth noting that any component on the car that is marginal is more likely to fail when extreme cold temperatures hit. Since we didn't have any extreme hot temperatures this summer, there may be some areas on your vehicle that need attention.

• Douglas Automotive is located at 312 S. Hager Ave., Barrington, (847) 381-0454, and 7218B Virginia Road, Crystal Lake, (815) 356-0440. For information, visit douglassautomotive.com. Send questions to underthehood@dailyherald.com.