

# PREVIEW DODGE CHALLENGER CONCEPT

## Once again, Dodge prepares a challenger for the Mustang.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL DELANEY

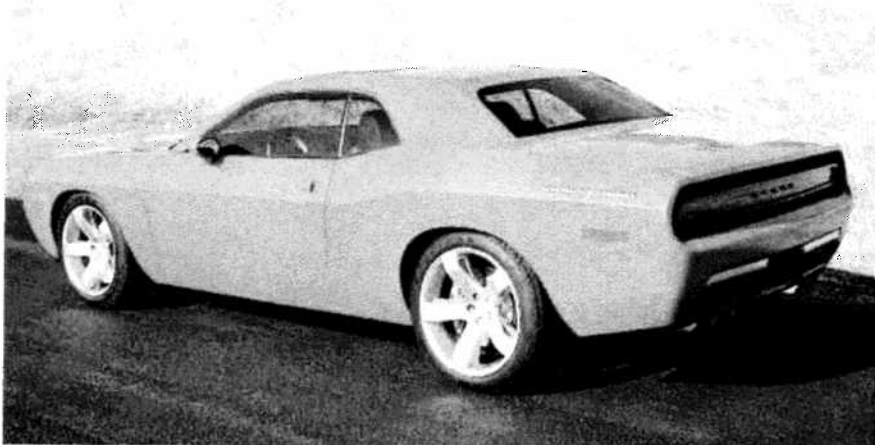
In the 30-plus years since a Challenger last rolled off a Dodge assembly line (the 1978–83 Dodge Challenger was a rebadged Mitsubishi), Chrysler, Dodge's parent group, has suffered some tough times. But those three decades were also peppered with major successes, and more than once Chrysler bet all its chips on a single line of cars—and won. Now that the automaker is again riding a resurgence, owing to the popularity of its LX platform (think Chrysler 300 and Dodge Magnum and Charger), perhaps the time is right for a reborn fire breather from the past to take on the popular Ford Mustang. What better time to reinvent the Hemi-powered Challenger muscle car from the '70s!

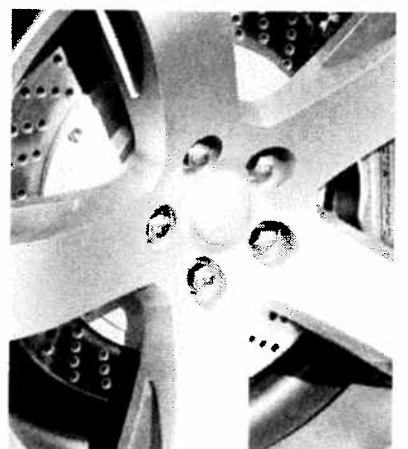
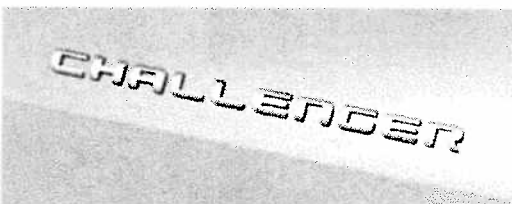
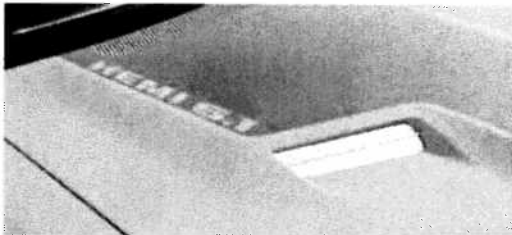
What you see here, accompanied by a wink and a nod, is the Challenger concept for the Detroit auto show. A production version seems inevitable, and unlike a couple other specials—the Viper and the Prowler—the Challenger has a good chance to sell in large numbers.

According to Tom Tremont, the vice-president of advance product creation, the inspiration for the shape of the Challenger comes from the 1970 Challenger. The original was built from 1970 through 1974, with minor changes made from year to year and about 190,000 sold in all. The designers said they chose the first Challenger as their inspiration because it is the purest and least-embellished model. Tremont's team at the Pacifica Advanced Design Center had to strip away much of the

modern design idioms to which they were accustomed. For example, after a few initial sketches, the Challenger lacked a retro stance and proportions so it was decided the popular short overhangs had to go. Stretching the distance from the bumpers to the tires fixed the proportions and also canceled the LX's shortened wheelbase as the Challenger's 197.8-inch length makes it longer than a Chrysler 300 or the original Challenger. Add a blunt front end that eschews any sort of thought toward slippery aerodynamics, and it's clear the designers had to fight many of their instincts. Other touches that recall past Challengers are the wide rectangular exhaust pipes that belt out the sound of an unrestricted exhaust, the four round headlights that look like sealed-beam units but house modern lights, neon taillights that utilize technology unavailable to designers more than 30 years ago, and black hood stripes that are in fact unpainted portions of the carbon-fiber-composite hood. The large wheels are just about the only part of the concept's design that is wholly modern. Original Challengers rode on skinny tires and 15-inch wheels tucked well within the body. The concept gets five-spoke 20-inch wheels for the front fenders; larger 21-inch wheels of the same design ride behind.

To make a coupe from a sedan and wagon platform, 4.1 inches were sliced out of the LX platform's wheelbase. Production Challengers will likely be on a short-wheelbase version of the next-genera-







### DODGE CHALLENGER

**Vehicle type:** front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 2-door coupe

**Estimated base price:** \$35,000

**Engine type:** pushrod 16-valve V-8, iron block and aluminum heads, port fuel injection

Displacement ..... 370 cu in, 6059cc

Power (SAE net) ..... 425 bhp @ 6000 rpm

Torque (SAE net) ..... 420 lb-ft @ 4800 rpm

Transmission ..... 6-speed manual

Wheelbase ..... 115.9 in

Length/width/height ..... 197.8/78.6/57.0 in

Curb weight ..... 4100 lb

**Performance ratings (mfr's est):**

Zero to 60 mph ..... 4.5 sec

Standing 1/4-mile ..... 13.0 sec

Top speed (drag limited) ..... 174 mph

**Projected fuel economy (C/D est):**

EPA city driving ..... 14 mpg

EPA highway driving ..... 20 mpg



tion LX platform, dubbed LY. The deletion comes from the rear-seat passenger floor and reduces the wheelbase from 120.0 inches to 115.9. The LX platform's multilink independent rear suspension and strut front suspension carry over largely unchanged on the rear-drive show car. It seems doubtful the Challenger will be offered in burnout-unfriendly all-wheel drive, although such a vehicle would give WRX and Evo owners something to ponder.

Open the long door, and the interior welcomes you with a three-spoke steering wheel and four round black-on-white gauges that evoke past Challengers. Front-seat space is on

par with the LX sedans because the wheelbase reduction wholly occurs behind the front seats. A metallic center console canted toward the driver has a pistol-grip shift lever that is connected to a six-speed manual transmission. Linked to the transmission is the 6.1-liter Hemi V-8 found in SRT8 versions of the LX platform. Rumor has it that production versions might get an optional 500-hp, 392-cubic-inch V-8 shown at the SEMA show. The engine puts out 425 horsepower and 420 pound-feet of torque. We don't expect the Challenger to weigh much less than the Charger's roughly 4100 pounds, which will make it far heavier than the 3575-

pound, but less powerful, Mustang.

A modern muscle car was briefly considered by the design staff, but in the end a romanticized view of the muscle-car era led to a retro design. It's probably not a bad idea considering Ford was expecting to sell about 165,000 retro-styled Mustangs in 2005. Like the Mustang, the Challenger's throwback look is only skin-deep, as Chrysler's much-heralded rear-drive platform lies beneath. At best, the Challenger is probably 18 to 24 months away from your Dodge dealership, but after waiting more than 30 years for a Challenger, the wait shouldn't pose much of a challenge. ■



1970

■ The Challenger is introduced. Engine choices range from a 125-hp six to a 425-hp 426 Hemi. Dodge makes 83,032 of them.

1971



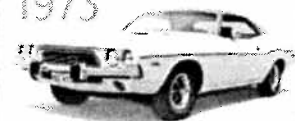
■ 1971 marks the final year for the 426 Hemi, 440 Six Pack, and convertible. Production plunges to 29,883 units.

1972



■ Power falls due to emissions regs and a new horsepower test procedure. The top engine is a 240-hp 340 V-8; 26,658 are produced.

1973



■ The base engine is a 150-hp 318 V-8. The 240-hp 340 V-8 is replaced by a 245-hp 360 V-8 late in the year.

1974



■ Discontinued until 1978 when a rebadged Mitsubishi wearing the Challenger name debuts. Only 16,437 were made in '74.