

AUTOWORD

Police Charger needs more power, better equipment

By Mark Maynard

Strap me into a 600-horsepower Dodge Viper SRT10 and I'd be less tempted to break the law than I was while testing the black-and-white Dodge Charger Police Package.

I thought a test of the Charger police pack would be a heckuva lot of fun for a week. And it was fun — for about a day of pulling pranks on friends and neighbors.

But Dodge didn't tell me that it is illegal in California to drive a police-like car with an active light bar. A couple of police officers did take the time to explain, however.

The Charger is a good cop-car foundation, but Dodge, through its relationship with Mercedes-Benz, has access to the best safety and performance equipment ... for a price.

The limit for a new cruiser in San Diego is \$25,000, I was told off-the-record by a uniformed officer. That doesn't allow for a car that strikes awe in the hearts of would-be criminals.

The base price of the Dodge Charger is \$23,475 — and that's with a 250-horsepower V-6 engine. Add the 340-hp, 5.7-liter Hemi V-8 option and the car's over budget by \$750. That leaves out typical police options, such as floor mats (\$30), an eight-way power-adjustable driver's seat (\$380), the driver-side spotlight (\$200), full-size spare (\$160) and vinyl back seat (\$120). All of which were on the test car.

The Police Group option pack-

2007 DODGE CHARGER

» **Engine:** 5.7 liter Hemi V-8 with multicylinder displacement and external coolers for engine oil, transmission fluid and power steering fluid

» **Horsepower:** 340 at 5,000 rpm

» **Torque:** 390 foot-pounds at 4,000 rpm

» **Transmission:** five-speed automatic

» **EPA fuel economy estimates:** 17 mpg city, 25 highway

» **Base price:** \$23,475, including \$675 freight charge

» **The competition:** Ford Crown Victoria, Chevrolet Impala

» **Where assembled:** Brampton, Ontario

Copley News Service

age, \$3,455, adds such extras as heavy-duty disc brakes, 160 mph speedometer, all-speed traction control, performance steering and performance suspension that includes load leveling and height control. There's a special floor console with panels for the light and siren controls, radios, screens and other electronic communication devices.

The package also has 18-inch performance tires and steel wheels with hubcaps. Shiny, bolt-on wheel covers are extra.

No Charger should leave the precinct without the Hemi V-8, which also adds a larger dual exhaust. But big deal. The car's heavy — more than 4,200 pounds with a driver and gear. And 340 hp does not make this an inspired pursuit



DODGE THIS - The Dodge Charger Police Package has the intimidating look for law enforcement, but not the size or horsepower. — CNS photo courtesy of Dodge

vehicle.

The standard seats with manual adjustment are inadequate for police wear and tear, but the optional eight-way power adjusted driver seat is just marginally better. The seats should be Mercedes' 10-way adjustable seats for driver and passenger. Include heat and ventilation, maybe even the rolling massage action. And design Kevlar seat upholstery for long-lasting fabric.

Improve ergonomics. The gear-

shift lever has been moved from the console to the dashboard because police electronics occupy all space where the floor shifter was, except for cup holders. The shifter is awkward to use and it interferes with instrument panel controls in the drive position. And that's an area that will be further cluttered by more electronics and video screens.

Word on the street is that the Charger has the mean look for law

enforcement, but it's too small on the inside for transporting scofflaws in the back seat.

Vehicle size is a consideration. Chevrolet is also testing the Impala, which is liked even less than the Charger, according to one San Diego officer.

The Ford Crown Victoria is still the favored cruiser, but it is less than ideal and built on an aging platform that won't be around much longer. — Copley News Service

CELEBRITY RIDES

David McCallum returns as voice of cartoon car

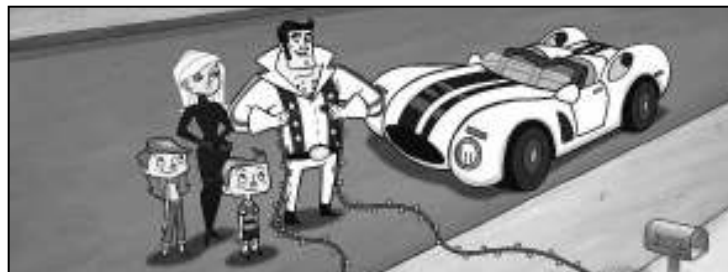
By Dave Waldon

The journey has been pretty sweet for David McCallum, an actor who at 73 finds himself in the enviable position of being on his second hit TV show.

As the witty, worldly medical examiner Dr. "Ducky" Mallard on the CBS crime drama "NCIS," the Glasgow, Scotland-born McCallum is enjoying a new wave of fame four decades after he helped save the world each week as Russian spy Ilya Kuryakin on the cult classic "The Man from U.N.C.L.E."

Cars played a role, to a certain degree, in his roles on both shows. And while he has owned and driven cars all of his life, he isn't one of those automotive prima donnas who must own and drive the swankiest vehicle available. Take McCallum's current celebrity ride of choice: a 2000 Jeep Cherokee. He purchased it used four years ago when he moved from New York to L.A. to assume his role on "NCIS."

"I flew into California, and I said to myself, 'If I could pick any car, what would it be?' And I thought that I needed a sport utility vehicle because I'd be going on location."



Actor David McCallum is taking a new turn as the voice of C.A.R. on the animated Disney Channel series "The Replacements." — CTW Features

Specifically, he sought out a second-hand Jeep in a shade of British racing green ("I believe that it's the nicest car color ever," McCallum said) that would cost about \$15,000.

Within days, he found a Cherokee in just the right color and, at \$16,000, just a bit more than his budget. McCallum has no qualms about one reel-life vehicle he's now involved with, perhaps because his role is the vehicle itself.

In the Disney Channel animated series "The Replacements," he supplies the very British voice of C.A.R., the supercharged mode of transportation of the "replacement" parents — Mom's a spy, Dad's a stuntman — literally ordered via the mail by two orphaned siblings. As is usu-

ally the case with cartoons, McCallum did much of his voice work without seeing what his character looked like, but he was mightily impressed once he did.

"He's pretty cool," he says. "The car has all sorts of gadgets that keep flying out — swords and toasters and whatever. And there's this sense of James Bond and the sense of the Aston Martin, although he looks more like an Austin Healey than anything. And he talks through his grill." — CTW Features



McCallum

Tips for avoiding tire pressure problems

By Sharon Peters

Q You wrote a column in which you said we should inflate our tires according to the numbers in the manual or on the inside of the vehicle's door, not according to the numbers on the tire. Why? What's the difference?

A Go with what the car manufacturer says. It'll give you a comfortable ride, and it's not unsafe.

"The Ford Firestone incidents six or seven years ago prompted car manufacturers to retest, rethink and increase the numbers. I think consumers can feel very confident with those numbers [on cars built in the last six years]," said Scott Hewitt of the Goodyear store in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Why would the number in the manual be different from the number on the tire?

Let's consider a normal situation: The vehicle manual says to use 32 psi in the tire, the new tires you choose have 40 psi stamped on the side. (Years ago, the difference between the two often would have been greater — 10 or 12 psi, or sometimes even more).

The 40 on the tire is the maximum inflation for that tire. It assumes a fully loaded (four people/full trunk) vehicle, Hewitt says,

which, of course, isn't always the case. Also, those tires might be purchased for any number of vehicles, and the weight of the various vehicles may be very different, the stance of the vehicles might be very different and the work the vehicles do might be very different.

So there are a lot of variables in the vehicles that this same set of tires might wind up on.

Many tire stores have an absolute policy of following the car maker's recommended number (no matter what the number on the tires is), and any consumer who wants to deviate from that must sign a waiver. Clearly, there are liability/legal concerns at play here.

Other tire stores inch somewhat closer to the tire's max level (I didn't happen into them during my calls, but I know they exist).

And finally there are individuals who make their own choices and go to the max because it makes them feel better, even though the ride can be pretty rough.

The fact is, under-inflated tires are very bad news. They reduce tire life, reduce fuel efficiency and can most assuredly blow out. But the numbers the car makers recommend do not qualify as "under-inflated," all the tire guys insist. Not even close. — CTW Features