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1966 Dodge Charger Restoration Guide

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1966 Dodge Charger

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

Base engine	318 V8, 230 hp Top engine 426 Hemi, 425 hp
Production	37,344 (commonly reported) Single-year coverage. Factory-correct specifications. No guesswork — where sources conflict, this guide says so.

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About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1966 Dodge Charger — one model, one year, nothing else. Every specification in this guide was checked against marque references, factory literature excerpts, and enthusiast documentation before it was written.

Our operating ethic is simple: we don't lie and we don't steal, we offer value. That means three things for this guide. First, no invented specifications — every number has a source. Second, where reputable sources disagree, the disagreement is disclosed in the text and in the Sources, Conflicts & Omissions section rather than papered over. Third, where a detail could not be verified, it is omitted and the omission is recorded — an honest gap beats a confident fabrication.

How to use this guide: start with the VIN and fender-tag (or door data plate) decoding sections to establish exactly what your car was when it left the factory. Use the engine, transmission, axle, paint, and casting sections to verify that what is on the car today matches what should be there. Use the rust and restoration-sequence sections to plan the work. And keep this guide in the shop — it is a working document, not a coffee-table book.

A final note: these cars are sixty years old. Parts have been swapped, tags have been lost, and memories have faded. Trust

the metal — casting numbers, date codes, and stampings — over stories. When in doubt, photograph everything and verify

against the factory service manual for your year.

1. Manufacturer History: Dodge

Dodge began in 1900 as the Dodge Brothers Machine Shop, supplying parts — and then complete cars — with a reputation for overbuilt durability. The first Dodge Brothers automobile appeared in 1914, and the brothers' obsession with quality made 'Dependability' the brand's watchword. After both brothers died in 1920, the company was sold to Chrysler in 1928, becoming the corporation's mainstream, slightly sportier division.

Dodge found its performance voice in the 1950s with the Red Ram Hemi V8 and Exner's Forward Look styling, then doubled down in the 1960s: the 1966 Charger invented the fastback muscle car, the Coronet put big-block power in a mid-size package, and the 1968 Super Bee answered Plymouth's Road Runner with Dodge's own budget brawler. The 1969 Charger Daytona and its Plymouth Superbird sibling took the aero wars to NASCAR's fastest tracks.

Like Plymouth, Dodge benefited from Chrysler's deep engineering bench: the LA small-block, B/RB big-block, and 426 Hemi engines; the A833 four-speed and TorqueFlite automatics; the 8-3/4-inch and Dana 60 rear axles; and torsion-bar front suspension that made Mopars handle. Dodge's muscle cars were typically a half-step more upscale than their Plymouth twins, which is why survivors in factory-correct condition are so prized today.

The muscle era ended with the 1971 model year for high compression, and Dodge pivoted to personal luxury (Charger), compacts (Dart, Colt), and eventually the minivan. But the 1967-1971 B-body

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performance cars — Coronet R/T, Super Bee, and Charger R/T — are cornerstone collector cars, and their restoration is supported by factory documentation, Galen Govier's decoding references, and a mature reproduction market.

2. Model History: Dodge Charger

The Dodge Charger arrived for 1966 as Dodge's answer to the personal-luxury performance coupe: a

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built on the Coronet's B-body platform, aimed squarely at buyers who wanted style and speed in one package. The 1966 Charger was an instant attention-getter — hidden headlamps, a full-width taillight panel, a fastback roofline, and an interior with four individual bucket seats and a full-length console. It sold 37,344 copies in its debut year, proving Dodge had found a formula.

The 1967 Charger was a mild refinement of the 1966 car — new grille, revised trim — and production fell to 15,788 as the novelty wore off and the market waited for something new. Something new arrived for 1968: a full redesign with Coke-bottle curves, flying-buttress C-pillars, and the R/T performance package (XS29) that made the Charger a genuine muscle car. The 1968 Charger is the icon — the car the Dukes of Hazzard made immortal — and it sold in huge numbers.

The 1969 Charger refined the 1968 design with a split grille and detail changes, and it became Dodge's NASCAR weapon: the Charger 500 (about 500 built) and the winged Charger Daytona (503 built) were homologation specials built to win on superspeedways. The 1969 R/T, with the 440 Magnum standard and the Hemi optional, is one of the great B-body muscle cars. Production for 1969 is commonly reported around 89,000 cars.

1970 brought a revised front end and the last year of the classic Coke-bottle Charger. Then came the fuselage restyle for 1971 — smooth, rounded body sides, a distinctive loop front bumper, and hidden headlamps on R/T and SE models. The R/T continued through 1971 (2,659 built), was replaced by the Rallye option package for 1972, and the Charger carried on through 1973 with federal bumpers and a V8-only engine lineup.

For the restorer, the Charger is pure B-body Mopar: slant-six and LA small-block engines at the bottom of the range, B/RB big-blocks and the 426 Hemi at the top, A833 four-speed or TorqueFlite, 8-3/4-inch or Dana 60 rear axle, and torsion-bar front suspension. The 1966-1967 cars are the stylish first generation; the 1968-1970 cars are the muscle-car icons; the 1971-1973 fuselage cars are the last of the breed and still undervalued. Every Charger year rewards the same discipline: decode the VIN and fender tag, verify casting numbers and date codes, and trust the metal over the story.

3. What Makes the 1966 Unique

The 1966 Charger is the original — the first year of the nameplate, and the car that invented the fastback muscle-coupe formula at Dodge. Built on the Coronet platform (XP29), it combined the B-body's running gear with dramatic new styling: hidden headlamps that rotated open electrically, a full-width taillight panel, a sweeping fastback roofline, and an interior unlike anything else in the price class — four individual

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bucket seats with a full-length center console running front to back. The 1966 Charger looked like the future, and 37,344 buyers agreed.

The 1966-only details are the restoration battleground. The grille treatment, the interior trim, the console, and the fastback-specific sheetmetal and glass are all one-year parts. The hidden-headlamp mechanism — electric motors rotating the headlamp pods — is a known trouble spot: verify operation, check the motors and linkages, and budget for rebuild parts. The full-width taillight panel and its trim are 1966-specific.

Engine offerings for 1966 were all V8 in the sales literature: the 318 two-barrel (230 hp) as the base engine, the 361 two-barrel (265 hp), the 383 four-barrel (325 hp), and the 426 Street Hemi (425 hp) at the top. The Hemi cars — 468 reported — are the blue-chip 1966 Chargers and require factory documentation. Note that the corporate 1966-67 engine chart also lists A/B/D codes (170/225/273), but six-cylinder and 273 installations are not documented as Charger offerings in the sales literature checked — any claimed 1966 six-cylinder or 273 Charger requires factory paperwork (see Conflicts).

VIN coding for 1966: XP29 with the engine code in position five — E = 318, F = 361, G = 383, H = 426

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