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1971 Dodge Challenger Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1971 Dodge Challenger

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

Key facts at a glance

Production

26,299 (see Conflicts) Single-year coverage.
Factory-correct specifications. No guesswork — where
sources conflict, this guide says so.

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Single-year coverage. Factory-correct specifications. No guesswork.

SAMPLE EXCERPT — full guide available at the link on the cover sheet



About This Guide

This is the RestorationEssentials factory-correct restoration guide for the 1971 Dodge Challenger — 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 1971 Dodge Challenger

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 Challenger

The Dodge Challenger arrived for 1970 as Dodge's long-awaited pony car — a year after the Plymouth



...a moved to the new E-body platform, and Dodge finally got its own version. The Challenger was bigger, roomier, and more comfort-oriented than the Mustang and Camaro it chased, with a full range of engines from the 225 Slant Six to the 426 Hemi. It sold 76,925 copies in its debut year — a strong start that the market would never repeat.

The R/T (Road/Track) was the performance flagship for 1970-1971: the 383 Magnum standard in 1970, with the 340, 440 Magnum, 440 Six Pack, and 426 Hemi optional. The R/T came as a hardtop (JS23), an SE hardtop (JS29, with the smaller formal rear window and luxury trim), and a convertible (JS27). The 1970-1971 convertibles are among the rarest and most valuable E-bodies — especially Hemi convertibles, which are seven-figure cars.

1971 brought the federally mandated changes and the beginning of the end: the 440 Magnum was dropped from the Challenger (the Six Pack continued), compression ratios began falling, and production collapsed to about 26,000 cars. The 1971 R/T — about 4,000 built, with just 71 Hemi cars reported — is the rarest R/T year.

For 1972 the R/T was replaced by the Rallye option package, the convertible was dropped, and the big-blocks were gone — the lineup was 225, 318, and 340 only, all net-rated. 1973 dropped the six-cylinder (318 standard, 340 optional) and added federal bumper guards. Production ended after 1974, and the Challenger name would sleep until 1978 (as a Mitsubishi import) and return in earnest for 2008. For the restorer, the Challenger is E-body Mopar: unit-body pony car with torsion-bar front suspension, a huge range of factory engines, and superb parts interchange with the Plymouth Barracuda. The E-body reproduction market is the deepest in the Mopar hobby — but so is the clone market. R/T and Hemi claims require the VIN, the fender tag, the broadcast sheet, and factory documentation to agree. Trust the metal.

3. What Makes the 1971 Unique

The 1971 Challenger is the last year of the R/T and the end of the high-compression era — and the rarest R/T year, with about 4,000 built. The 1971 cars wear the controversial 'sad mouth' grille (1971-only), revised taillights, and detail changes inside and out. Production collapsed to 26,299 cars (one source reports 27,377 — see Conflicts) as insurance surcharges and emissions regulations crushed the pony-car market.

The 1971 R/T engine story: the 440 Magnum was dropped from the Challenger lineup — the big-block options were now the 440 Six Pack (V-code, 385 hp) and the 426 Hemi (R-code, 425 hp), with the 383 1971 Dodge Challenger

Magnum (N-code, 300 hp) standard and the 340 (H-code, 275 hp) optional. Reported R/T engine splits: 2,509 with the 383, 1,078 with the 340, 250 with the Six Pack, and just 71 with the Hemi. The 71 Hemi R/Ts are among the rarest E-bodies ever built.

Also new for 1971: the 198 Slant Six (125 hp) joined the 225 as a base-engine option — the smallest engine ever offered in the Challenger. Compression ratios fell across the range for 1971: the 340 dropped to 10.2:1, the 383 to 8.5:1. The writing was on the wall.

VIN coding for 1971: J = Challenger, H/S = series, body 23/27/29, engine code in position five — B (198), C (225), G (318), H (340), L (383 2-bbl), N (383 Magnum), V (440+6), R (Hemi) — then 1 for the year.

Note: no U-code (440 Magnum) for 1971 — the 440 4-bbl was dropped.

Restoration notes specific to 1971: the 1971-only grille and trim are the identifiers and the sourcing challenge. The low-compression 1971 engines have their own casting numbers and component details — verify against 1971 references, not 1970. With about 4,000 R/Ts built and just 71 Hemi cars reported, every 1971 R/T deserves full documentation, and Hemi claims require factory paperwork.

Year-to-year changes at a glance.

■ 1971-only 'sad mouth' grille; revised taillights and trim.