

FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1981 Dodge Ramcharger Restoration Guide

Read these pages exactly as they appear in the full guide.
Nothing here is rewritten or summarised — it is the product itself,
so you can judge the depth before you spend a dollar.

Get the full guide: <https://restoreessentials.com/product/RE-GD-1981-DODGE-RAMCHARGER>

RestorationEssentials — instant PDF download after checkout.



RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

Factory-Correct Restoration Reference

1981 Dodge Ramcharger Restoration Guide

Model Years 1981

Model year	1981 - Ramcharger year 8 of 8 (1974-1981 span)
Generation	Second (redesign launch)
Drive	4WD (AW150) and 2WD
Roof	Fixed welded steel roof - NOT removable (new generation)
Identifiers	Welded roof seams and a one-piece hatch = 1981. A removable top = 1980 or earlier. There is no factory in-between.

Every specification in this guide was checked against factory literature, marque references, period road tests, and documented survivor vehicles. Where sources disagree or the record is silent, this guide says so rather than guessing.

Published by RestorationEssentials

How This Guide Works

This is a **single-year restoration** guide for the 1981 Dodge Ramcharger - one year, covered on its own because that is how these trucks were built and how they must be restored. Specifications were checked against the marque model history, Hagerty's and MotorTrend's published histories, and factory literature. Where sources disagree, this guide prints the disagreement instead of guessing.



Scope. Covers the 1981 Ramcharger ONLY, as what it verifiably is: the second-generation launch year. It shares the AD underpinnings with the 1974-80 trucks and almost no body or interior parts. Do not use the 1974-80 guides on this truck, or this guide on them.

Where 1981 sits in the run

- **Coming in:** 1980 closed the first generation: NP208, last removable roof.
- **Leaving:** The second generation runs to 1993 on this body: crosshair grille in 1986, fuel injection in 1988-89 - all beyond this guide.

Platform Snapshot

Fact	Detail
Model year	1981
Platform	Chrysler AD, shortened pickup chassis
Wheelbase	106 in (9 in shorter than the short-bed pickup)
Drive	4WD (AW150) and 2WD
Roof	Fixed welded steel roof - NOT removable (new generation)
Transfer case (4WD)	NP208 part-time
Grille / front tell	Egg-crate grille (new); dual rectangular headlights on all models
Engines	318 LA V8, 360 LA V8
Twin	Plymouth Trail Duster (1974-1981 run)

The 1981 Register - What Makes a 1981 a 1981

- SECOND GENERATION. The range guide called 1981 a 'bridge year' with first-generation bones; the verified record is cleaner: same AD underpinnings, new body - and the body is the truck.
- The roof is now welded steel and non-removable. The tailgate is gone, replaced by a one-piece rear hatch hinged at the top; the rear quarter glass extends to the roof.
- Egg-crate grille and dual rectangular headlights on ALL models - no round-lamp base truck exists for 1981.
- Squared taillights, with the reverse lamps moved to the bottom (they were at the top).
- All-new dashboard and instrument layout - which then ran unchanged through 1993, making 1981 the interior pattern year for the whole second generation.
- Engines pared to two: 318 and 360 V8s. No slant six, no big blocks - the menu is the Ram pickup's menu.
- The Plymouth Trail Duster survives exactly one year in this body and is dropped after 1981 - Plymouth's only SUV ends here.

VIN, Fender Tag, and Build Date

The VIN, the frame stamp, and the fender tag tell you what the truck is; the broadcast sheet tells you how it was built. On this model the build date itself can be a specification - 1974's door split turns on it - so read the tag before the truck, every time.



Engines: The 1981 Menu

All ratings are SAE net as published for the year. The fender tag and block stampings are the authority for the truck in front of you.

Engine	Output (net)	Notes
318 LA V8	V8 base	Carbureted (TBI arrives 1988)
360 LA V8	Top engine	Carbureted

Engine note. Only about two percent of first-generation owners ever removed the steel top, and rollover-protection expectations were rising - the fixed roof was a market and safety decision, and it also stiffened the body and ended the leaks and rattles. Judge the 1981 on its own terms: it is the most civilized Ramcharger yet and the pattern for twelve more years.

Restoring the 1981 engines

- 318/360 LA small blocks: the survivors - most trucks, best parts support. Keep the 360's balance hardware with the 360.
- Big blocks (1974-78): verify the radiator is the correct big-block unit and the manifolds are sound; claims need paperwork.
- 225 slant six: simple and durable; check the manifold and carburetor first.
- Casting dates should precede the build date by weeks.

Transmissions and Transfer Cases

Unit	Type	Application
3-speed manual	Column/floor by build	Base
4-speed manual (NP435)	Floor-shift, granny low	The 4WD favorite
TorqueFlite 727	3-speed automatic	Optional across the line

NP208 part-time case, carried from 1980. Axles remain Dana 44 front and Chrysler 9.25/8.25 rear on the shared AD chassis - the mechanical continuity is real; it is the body that changed generations.

Axles, Suspension, and Brakes

- Leaf springs at both ends - the Ramcharger kept them its whole life, and the articulation is part of the appeal.
- Dana 44 front axle; Chrysler 9.25-inch rear (8.25 on some builds); limited-slip available on the 9.25.
- Front disc, rear drum brakes, power-assisted; power steering optional.
- Full-time trucks (NP203 years): the front axle's bearing design is the known weak point - inspect first, budget honestly.

Body, Rust, and Sheet Metal

The Ramcharger shares the pickup's galvanized-steel head start and adds problems of its own: a huge removable roof (1974-80) whose seals age, and rear quarters that live in the spray zone. Work this map:

- Rockers and rear quarters - the documented Ramcharger rust zones.