

2005 Chrysler 300C
Confessions and Revelations
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For: The Wheel – February 2005



OK, here's a brain teaser: When was the last time you rode in, or drove a Chrysler sedan? A trip to the A&W with your Mom and Dad? The time you borrowed the Newport to take Cindy to the drive in? Or was it the sales conference in Chicago when you got stuck renting one from Avis? My true confession: I honestly don't remember ever being in one since my buddy Brian Gillespie had a cool yellow 300 two door back at Forest View High School in 1971. Black leather buckets, black vinyl top – the car was much cooler than the Impala SS. Well, that was then, this is now. The new Chrysler flagship 300C is a revelation. With one fell swoop, they have established themselves as leaders in the luxury and sport sedan class. When do you remember hearing an automotive journalist declaring an American sedan as an incredible value and virtually alone in its bang for the buck? Well, read on.... The 300C, depending on options, is priced at the same level as the Toyota Camry, VW Passat, and Acura TL. All of these are wonderful cars and just a bit more conscientious with their use of gasoline. However, the 300C beats those cars in almost every category that counts. Ride, space, power, refinement and overall functionality. While the styling is pretty extreme for a car that's intended to be mainstream, the 300C, at the mid \$30,000 price range, competes head on with import and domestic sedans from BMW, Cadillac, Mercedes and Audi – at an average of \$15-20,000 less!

Here are the basics: The 300C is a large car by any comparison at 4046lbs and 196" long, so beware of compact parking spaces. What you get is not only two tons of car, but tons

of room in the front and back seats, room for your ten gallon hat, and enough space for a side of beef in the trunk. But wait – keep reading – this is not your uncle’s Chrysler – this car is a delight to drive. With the legendary Chrysler 5.7 liter Hemi engine, and a Mercedes tuned suspension, your first impression will be that of a much more expensive import sedan that goes like a bonafide hot rod. Putting out 340HP is very nice, but 390ft lbs of torque is almost reason enough to don a HANS device to handle the pull that comes with a stab of full throttle. Amazingly, this all happens in a deathly quiet cabin that belies the squarish body style and offers almost no wind noise at freeway speeds. We even had family members note that we did not have to speak up at all to carry on normal conversations. This can actually be a benefit that can lead to a more harmonious long drive. But did I tell you about the Hemi? Oh yes, well it’s worth mentioning twice – this engine will offer the owner an enhanced sense of self-worth as long as he/she drives it among cars with merely mortal engines.



Offering some more in-depth impressions, the car is great but not perfect. Our biggest disappointment was the front seats. Nicely trimmed in gray leather, the designers chickened out on their style. They are fine to look at, but they simply don’t have much body sculpting for support, unless you give them credit for a long seat base that is good for thigh support. Driving for a period of time, I actually missed the seats in my SUV which provide much more lateral wrap. The good news is, the seat travel combined with a tilt/telescope wheel allowed us to find the ideal driving position. Oddly, the steering wheel is quite nicely trimmed but felt like that of a Peterbilt semi – it’s just way too big. The soft white gauges are classy and easy to read, the Nav system is the best we’ve seen, although we still think the Acura’s touch screen is the way to go with controls. The heating and A/C system is excellent and the analog controls were a refreshing departure from other more ambitious and user-unfriendly systems. This was the first car where we clearly noted that the dual temperature controls actually did their job. We discovered that we could have icy cold air on the driver and super hot air on the passenger – strange but true. Once on the road, this car has a very refined ride. It actually had a Mercedes feel. Not harsh, but not soft. Control and response is excellent, as there is enough of a sporting feel to enjoy the spirited run on a freeway ramp, and the huge rotors and calipers did a very nice job getting us stopped without fade. We took the C for a tour of Thunderhill

Raceway and found pretty much what we'd expected. This is a big car with a firm ride that becomes a bit tipsy on the track. We had modest expectations, as the C was shod with Continental "eco-plus" tires. On track we'd call it respectable, considering what the 300C purports to be, we had to hold on tight with some substantial understeer and body roll through the esses, but the truth be known, the Hemi made the run worth it. We wouldn't suggest regular track runs with this car, but if the opportunity ever comes up, it's worth giving it a try – we had a good time out there and ran with some very sporting cars while abusing the tires a bit. What's very interesting is that Chrysler has announced a 6.1 liter, 425HP SRT8 version of the 300C for later this year. My assumption is that this will be a direct competitor to the wonderful CTS-V. Is this a great country or what?

The Chrysler 300C is an outstanding, best in class family sedan with character, performance and plenty of panache as well. This just isn't a boring family car. In fact, we were shocked to discover that the Hemi runs on 89 octane unleaded, where almost any other productive engine we've encountered insists on the expensive stuff. This, combined with an average of 20 miles per gallon, allows us to consider this car as reasonable when it comes to economy. The 300, as a platform, also leads the way toward the taller sedan, giving a better view of the roadway ahead. (Does this foretell a problem if everyone is driving tall cars/SUV's?) Suffice it to say that you'll feel like you're in command from this driving position.

There is one last point that should be made, and it's a credit to the Chrysler design team, as well as those who conceived this car to begin with. Never in our experience have we driven a car that so successfully fulfills two market niches with one platform. While we would never advise the 200 HP V6 in this car, the consumer can buy this car in base form with the 3.5 liter, 250HP V6 option, and have an excellent car for a retail price in the mid twenties. As one studies the 300C, a car that plays with the big boys, the economical elements of its build are nicely hidden. Yes, there is a lack of burl, the leather may not be as supple, and there is no power glove box door. But this car morphs from practical mid-priced sedan to high line power player seamlessly. The 2005 Chrysler 300C has been named the Car of the Year by Motor Trend magazine. Even this writer for an enthusiast magazine has to concur, without reservation. The 300C represents a new benchmark of value for other manufacturers to pursue. The Europeans and Japanese carmakers must reevaluate their pricing. Cadillac now has a thorn in the side of their sales growth. And Lincoln has been absolutely left in the dust. The 300C will have an impact. One that is a benefit to all serious sedan shoppers. And we can't wait for the Charger coupe with this sweetheart Hemi under the hood.

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