

CHALLENGER

IMAGINE EVERYTHING THAT MADE THE ORIGINAL SO COOL, THEN DO IT EVEN BETTER WITH ADVANCED 21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGY.

Though designed for the 21st century, it's no surprise that some people mistook the Challenger concept car for the 1970 model that inspired it. During its development, "we brought an actual 1970 Challenger into the studio," says Michael Castiglione, the concept's principal exterior designer. "For me, that car symbolizes the most passionate era of automotive design."

Reaction to the concept was so strong that Challenger is now a production vehicle, slated for 2008. As legendary as the original Challenger was, the concept is not a replica – as Tom Tremont, Vice President – Advanced Vehicle Design, is quick to point out.

"Challenger draws upon the initial 1970 model as the icon of the series," he says. "But instead of merely re-creating that car, the designers endeavoured to build a Challenger most people see in their mind's eye – a vehicle without the imperfections, like the old car's tucked-under wheels, long front overhang and imperfect fits. As with all pleasurable memories, you remember the good and screen out the bad. We wanted the concept car to evoke all those sweet memories... everything you thought the Challenger was, and more."

For instance, the bumpers are clean (no guards), body colour and flush with the body. "This is something we would have loved to do on the original Challenger, but the technology just wasn't there," says Jeff Godshall, who was a young designer in the Dodge Exterior studio when the first Challenger was created. "With the Challenger concept, however, the Pacifica Studio designers were able to realize what we wanted in our perfect world."

Yet in some ways, the two Challengers share similar beginnings: a hot HEMI® engine, and a beefy rear-wheel-drive chassis that just begged to be shortened into a coupe. In the concept's case, that's the Charger and Magnum LX platform. To make the Challenger, designers cut the wheelbase by 4 inches, increased the car's width by the same amount and lowered it 1.2 inches. The result is 6 inches longer and 2 inches wider than the original. It projects a squat, tougher, more purposeful persona. Five-spoke chrome wheels – 20-inch in the front,



Above left: The updated retro cockpit features a pistol-grip shifter and leather buckets for more than a hint of nostalgia. Above right: In-your-face round gauges – including a performance computer – give the impression that you're staring down the bores of a HEMI. Bottom: The free-breathing 6.1-litre SRT HEMI gulps air through a hood scoop ducted to a low-restriction air filter for maximum performance.

21-inch in the rear – put more rubber on the road than the 1970 version and are set flush with the bodyside – conspicuously updating the car's look and performance.

Key to the look of the original was the exceptionally wide front and back ends. The new front end, with floating quad headlights, looks remarkably similar to the original, while incorporating the signature Dodge crosshair grille. In back, a full-width, neon-lit tail lamp is set into a carbon-fibre surround. In fact, much of the concept is fabricated in carbon fibre – a detail you'll notice when looking closely at the blackout stripe on the hood. It's created by exposing a strip of the raw material.

The concept has an updated version of the "Performance hood," complete with ducted hood scoops fitted with butterfly-valve intakes that open with the throttle. They feed a latest-generation, 6.1-litre HEMI V8 – the same engine that powers the SRT8 Charger. As installed in the concept car, it works its 425 horsepower and 420 lb-ft of torque to the ground via a 6-speed manual transmission (with a pistol-grip shifter, of course).

Inside, fully bolstered bucket seats reminiscent of the Dodge SRT vehicles keep you firmly in position during driving, with horizontal pleats providing just a hint of the '70s look. Other interior appointments are more than mere hints: Four round "in-your-face" gauge holes pay homage to the original dash – but add a computer that can calculate overall top speed, quarter-mile time and speed and top speed in each gear. The leather-wrapped steering wheel evokes the original car's "Tuff" wheel, right down to the steering column ribbing. Those you leave in the dust will be left with the enduring image of the signature Challenger square, chrome-tipped dual exhausts.

The new Challenger will offer an iconic HEMI V8-powered Performance coupe based on one of the most beloved ponycars ever created.



THE RETURN OF THE

CHALLENGER

IT MAY LOOK STRIKINGLY SIMILAR TO THE ICONIC 1970 ORIGINAL. BUT TRUST US – THE SEVENTIES WERE NEVER THIS SWEET.

