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Chrysler Sebring Product Heritage

Background: Chrysler Group's design and engineering leadership in the D-segment may be directly traced to its pioneering development work in the evolving compact car segment of the late 1950s. When a market for small imported cars rapidly developed during that decade, Chrysler sent teams of designers, engineers and marketing people to Europe to study the phenomenon, leading eventually to the company's investment in Simca and its decision to create an American-built compact car. The development project was code-named "Falcon" after the 1955 Chrysler Falcon two-seat concept car (the name would later be registered by Ford for that company's first compact). During Chrysler's "Falcon" project, more than 20 prototypes were built and 57 experimental engines operated for 750 million test miles.

Development: Chrysler design chief Virgil Exner, gaining fame at the time for his sleek "Forward Look" full-sized cars, rejected the idea of simply scaling down a large car to create a small one for the North American market. His goal was to create a smaller, lighter car without sacrificing passenger and luggage space. The result was the Valiant, a small car that reflected themes seen in Exner's earlier Ghia-built "idea cars:" a long hood, a short, sloping rear deck with a debossed spare tire, a classic grille that shared lines with the 1957 Chrysler 300-C, ridged fenders and a squared-off greenhouse.

Name: The Valiant name, chosen over contending entries such as "Columbia" and "Liberty," resulted from a survey of over 2,000 car owners in 15 American cities. First appearing in 1960, the car was advertised as "the Valiant by Chrysler Corporation." For the 1961 model year, the name was assigned to Plymouth; a Dodge version was called the Lancer.

Design: The Valiant's design was considered more expressive than that of its primary compact competitors, the Chevrolet Corvair and the Ford Falcon. Indeed, the Valiant's styling was considered controversial by some, underscoring the sought-after results of Chrysler's aggressive "love it or hate it" design philosophy.

Engineering: The Valiant also reflected well its mechanical origins in Detroit's "engineering company." With cylinders in line but canted at a thirty-degree angle, the Valiant's Slant-Six engine permitted a lower hood line. Over time, it earned a storied reputation for durability. It also displayed Chrysler's early leadership in aluminum die-casting; more than 50,000 aluminum versions of the Slant-Six were produced between 1961 and 1963. An aluminum casing also removed 100 pounds of weight from the three-speed, pushbutton-activated automatic transmission.

But the early Valiant's value extended well beyond the powertrain. Its much-praised alternator, another Chrysler engineering innovation, was standard on vehicles sold by the company in the United States. An October 1959 magazine article observed that "the Valiant may well be the quietest small car ever made," the result of its being tuned for lower road noise by computer, one of the first such programs by a major automaker. Computers were also used to test the Valiant's suspension for loads and stress. Celebrated for its smooth ride, the Valiant utilized a scaled-down version of Chrysler's excellent torsion-bar front suspension system.

Performance: With the addition of a "Hyper-Pak" dealer tuning kit, the Valiant became a remarkable performance car. The eight examples entered in the initial NASCAR compact stock-car race at Daytona (Fla.) in 1960 finished first through eighth, trouncing even European imports and V-8 models. Following a repeat performance the following year, NASCAR cancelled the series. During the same era the Valiant also won the Mobil Fuel Economy Challenge, providing an interesting mix of both fuel economy and performance capabilities in a small car.

International sales: The first Valiant's fast-rising reputation for distinctive design, solid engineering and dependability would quickly become known to Canadians as well as Americans. Later, Valiants would be sold in Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, New Zealand and other international markets.

Evolution: In 1963 the Valiant was restyled and its Dodge counterpart renamed the Dart. In addition to its original two-door coupe and convertible and four-door sedan models, a four-door station wagon version was added. The Plymouth Barracuda, Chrysler's first entry in the emerging "pony car" category, was built off the Valiant platform beginning in 1964.

Derivatives: The Valiant attained the peak of its success following a complete redesign in 1967 and a return to the essential two-door coupe and four-door sedan offerings. From this platform came such high-selling spin-offs as the 1970-76 Plymouth Duster and Dodge Swinger, the 1971-76 Plymouth Scamp and the 1971-72 Dodge Demon. Memorable Chrysler muscle cars of the Seventies, including the Dodge Challenger and the Plymouth Barracuda, rode on modified versions of the Plymouth platform. Together, these cars generated for Chrysler no less than 40 percent of the total American compact market in the early 1970s, a remarkable achievement.

Engines: From the initial success of the Slant-Six, Valiants were later offered with 273 cu. in. (1964) and 318 cu. in. (1967) V-8 engines. Valiant derivatives like the Duster and the Barracuda could be purchased with 340 cu. in., 383 cu. in., 426 cu. in. Hemi and 440 cu. in. V-8 engines.

A 40-year Comparison:

The "compact car" category of the 1960s and 1970s would evolve into today's "intermediate" segment. Here is how the 2007 Chrysler Sebring compares with one of its storied ancestors:

	<u>1967 Valiant</u>	<u>2007 Sebring</u>
<u>Wheelbase:</u>	274 cm (108.0 in.)	277 cm (108.9 in.)
<u>Length:</u>	479 cm (188.4 in.)	484 cm (190.6)
<u>Weight:</u>	1,266 kg (2,790 lbs.)	1,587 kg (3,499 lbs.)
<u>Engine</u> (one example):	Slant-Six	V-6
<u>Horsepower:</u>	108 kg (145 h.p.)	175 kw (235 h.p.)
<u>Displacement:</u>	3.7 L (225 cu. in.)	3.5L
<u>Bore/Stroke:</u>	8.6 cm x 10.5 cm (3.4 in. x 4.125 in.)	9.6 cm x 8.1 cm (3.78 in. x 3.19 in.)
<u>Compression ratio:</u>	8.4:1	10.0:1
<u>Transmission:</u>	Three-speed automatic	Six-speed automatic
<u>Suspension:</u>	Front: Torsion-bar Rear: Asymmetrical leaf	Front: MacPherson strut, coil spring Rear: Multi-link independent, coil spring
<u>Brakes:</u>	Front and rear drum	Anti-lock four-wheel disc

Reputation: By the time the last one was built in 1976, the Valiant had become the stuff of folklore (one, for example, had been selected to star in the movie Duel, a 1971 road-rage thriller directed by the then little-known Steven Spielberg). Observed the New York Times, "Darts and Valiants were the Energizer bunnies of compact cars, and many are still on the roads, their reputation for longevity intact."

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