

Dodge Durango SRT Gets A Personality Boost

By Nauman Farooq

When discussing SUVs, the Dodge Durango doesn't come up in conversation much; however, this model has been doing decently well in the market since its launch back in 1997.

It is a very good vehicle, no matter the trim or the engine – I really quite liked every Durango I've tested in recent years.

But, to make it more memorable for the masses, what the Durango needed was a personality boost! That is what we got this year, when Dodge introduced the SRT version of the Durango.

This is a vehicle I've been waiting to drive, ever since I heard about its existence, and luckily got to do just that recently. How did it do? Did it live up to the hype I had created for it in my head? Read on!

Styling: The Durango is a handsome SUV, but not overly done. From the looks perspective, it doesn't shout about its presence, but nor is it boring to look at either.

Even in SRT trim, the looks are stealthy, and I like that. Eagle eye car enthusiasts will notice the larger opening in the front bumper, a sportier grille, a hood scoop, some sporty blacked out wheels, and two fat tailpipes. It looks like a body builder that is wearing a suit!

Interior: Step inside and you'll find lots of space for up to seven passengers, and the seats are comfortable, too. Cargo room is de-



pendent on if you have the third-row seats up or folded down, in either case, it'll give most buyers the practicality they're looking for.

Up front, you get an 8.4 inch touchscreen for your infotainment (Uconnect), which has a lot more features than I was expecting – you can individually set up the drivetrain to suit your liking

– plus all the usual Bluetooth and navigation functions.

Cool note about the navigation screen, it actually shows a little Durango driving around on the screen, rather than some generic arrow or car – I like details like that. The gauge cluster is a good mix of analog and digital gauges, which are easy to make sense off. The numbers on the analog

speedometer are a bit small to read, but then, they had to cram a readout that goes all the way to 300 km/h – that's very cool to see in a seven passenger SUV.

Powertrain: The reason for a 300 km/h speedometer is the motor. Under the hood lies a 6.4L V8 that produces 485 hp and 475 lb-ft of torque.

Power is routed to all-wheels via an eight-speed TorqueFlite automatic transmission, which shifts very smoothly and quickly – in fact, on hard acceleration, the shift speed is incredibly fast, and you can't help but smile as you accelerate down the road.

Launch it properly, and it'll sprint from 0 to 100 km/h in 4.7 seconds, and if you happen to be on the German Autobahn, it'll top out at just over 250 km/h – this is one seriously fast family hauler.

Driving Dynamics: Typically,

a vehicle of this sort, which is made to go fast, is not pleasant to drive in most scenarios, but the Durango SRT surprises once again.

The ride is comfortable – not like a cement truck, as are most fast SUVs – and furthermore, it handles well; so it can be enjoyed on the back roads and the open road!

All the controls are responsive, the level of performance is eye opening, and on wide open throttle, it sounds like a military weapon – I love it!

Fuel Economy: If there is something I don't like about this vehicle – and this should come as no surprise – is the fuel economy. I averaged 17.6 L/100 KM during my test week, and given that it'll only drink premium fuel, the Durango SRT is not cheap to run. But you know what, when you're having this much fun, you don't mind the fuel bill.

Pricing: The 2018 Dodge Durango SRT has a base price of \$68,845 – my test unit was worth just over \$80,000. That is not cheap, but when compared to what the Europeans will offer in competition, this Durango SRT is a bargain!

Verdict: I have never been a fan of fast SUVs, I think the whole notion of a performance SUV is an oxymoron, but the Durango SRT has changed my way of thinking. I like it so much, that if I had to pick just one vehicle to spend an entire year with, this would be it.

SUVs Compete For Spotlight At LA Auto Show

As buyers flock to SUVs and pickup trucks instead of sedans, automakers are revealing their latest offerings for the growing market at the Los Angeles Auto Show. Companies that have specialized in making smaller SUVs are now making roomier models and competing on technology features that enhance safety and pleasure.

Some of the latest models will be keeping virtual eyes on drivers to look for signs of drowsiness and ensure that little ones or pets aren't accidentally left inside the car, and others will be scanning the road ahead of the driver to adjust suspension if the driver's about to hit a pothole.

JEEP

Jeep, which hasn't made a pickup truck in over a quarter-century, is getting back into the growing midsize pickup segment with the Gladiator, a truck based on the iconic Wrangler. The pickup, unveiled Wednesday at the L.A. Auto Show, has two rows of seats, and a 5-foot-long bed that can carry 4-by-8 sheets of dry-wall or two full-size motocross bikes with the tailgate down.

It's equipped to go off-road and can tow 7,650 pounds with Fiat Chrysler's venerable 285-horsepower 3.6-litre V6 engine. A 3-litre diesel engine is coming later. The Gladiator goes on sale in April.

HONDA PASSPORT

Like a middle child out to prove he's different, Honda's latest SUV is larger than the popular, compact CR-V and smaller than the three-row Pilot. Honda is calling it the most rugged of its light trucks, highlighting its ability to go off-road in harsh conditions including sand, snow and ice while still being comfortable for daily driving. The Passport has a V6 engine with 280-horsepower and can tow up to 5,000 pounds in all-wheel drive mode. Honda did not disclose the gas mileage or the price.

MAZDA 3

If you're starting to get sleepy behind the wheel, the new Mazda 3 will let you know. The advanced driver monitoring system uses infrared cameras and LED to monitor the driver's eyelids and angle of the mouth and face to catch signs of fatigue or inat-



tentiveness, and will sound an alert if it senses the situation has become dangerous.

Its new design reduces blind spots in the driver's field of vision. There also will be a new knee air bag for the driver's seat, which aims to reduce injuries to the legs and chest.

Mazda is expecting improved fuel economy with the addition of i-ACTIV AWD, but mileage was not yet released. The price will be announced in early 2019 when it will go on sale in North America.

LINCOLN AVIATOR

Lincoln's latest midsize luxury SUV will "kneel" to greet you,

lowering its frame as the driver approaches to make it easier to climb inside or load cargo. It allows a driver to use a smartphone as a key, which can save driver preferences such as mirror, seat and steering column positions.

The three-row SUV offers a choice of gas or hybrid electric powertrain. The gas engine delivers 400 horsepower and the hybrid engine with the grand touring option offers 450 horsepower.

Inspired by flight, the car can detect potholes or uneven pavement ahead and adjust the suspension for a smoother ride.

KIA SOUL

The new Kia Soul compact crossovers keep the Kia's signature boxy look, and are available with a gas-powered or a fully electric engine. The Soul EV is powered with a 64 kWh battery with DC fast-charging equipment. The electric vehicle's range is still being determined through battery tests and results are expected in early 2019. A smart regenerative braking system with four different levels allows drivers to choose whether to optimize smoothness or efficiency.

HYUNDAI PALISADE

The three-row, eight-passenger mid-size SUV is designed for family road trips. An optional rear occupant alert system is designed to ensure drivers don't forget children or pets in the back of the car by monitoring back seat movement after the driver exits and beeping the horn and sending an alert to the driver's smartphone. It has roomy second and third rows and roof vents that provide a stream of air to passengers in the back row. A wireless charging pad is available to minimize cord clutter, and there are seven USB outlets.



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