

FUNDAMENTAL

SOLID HERITAGE AT THE CORE OF A WELL EXECUTED UPDATE

By Joe Sage

We've been watching the group now known as FCA US LLC "reenergize" its lineups for a few years now. So effective has this been, it's hard to believe how much change is so recent. Dodge, Ram and Jeep have been on a tear, and sales of all three are leading the industry. Fiat and Alfa Romeo have also joined the party. Chrysler's lineup is simple: large car, midsize car, minivan. Last year came an entirely new midsize Chrysler 200, based on an Alfa Romeo platform. The 200 had had a nameplate, prior, but not a lot of presence. Everything about the new 200 was transformative.

The Chrysler 300, on the other hand—a big rear-drive American sedan, bearing a nameplate with enviable heritage spanning 60 years—was all new in 2005 and has had strong presence since the day it was born. The 300 was refreshed in 2011, with a resculpted body and tech upgrades, but significantly kept the essence of the original. No need to be transformative: its fundamentals were already sound. We still tend to distinguish gen two mostly by its grille (which we still think had less impact than the original eggcrate). The gen-two Chrysler 300 (which visually had a fair amount in common with the less popular 200) gave the brand a 49 percent sales bump and 2.5 percent market share.

A new model can sometimes seem a

shocking departure the first time you see it, only to soon seem so mainstream its predecessor looks suddenly quite dated. The Chrysler 300 has never taken the shock route, sticking with essence and evolution. Nonetheless, the third-generation redo for 2015 gives us a different twist on the above. The second-gen had made us miss the first. Not so, this time. Overall, changes are again subtle and evolutionary, but everything is so visually well balanced, we now finally and fully find the oldest version dated. Bulls-eye.

The new Chrysler 200 has been a rapid success story, with sales 30 percent higher than the previous 200 plus discontinued Dodge Avenger combined. Sales have topped those of Chevy Malibu, VW Passat and Kia Optima, "but we have lots yet to do," says Chrysler president and CEO Al Gardner. His goal with the Chrysler 300: to deliver "pure American mainstream."

And that, they do. We appreciate a big American sedan—anyone six feet tall and up is likely to. And the huge popularity of

full-size SUVs for everyone soccer-mom-size and up suggests that everyone is just as likely to appreciate this package.

The 2015 Chrysler 300's styling evolution is most immediately noticeable via a 33 percent larger grille, where front and center, we find the Chrysler wing, proud and prominent. All sheetmetal is new—cleaner, bolder and crisper in the rear.

The new Chrysler 300 largely follows the model scheme system of the 200 (minus its lowest end and adding one at the higher end), with 300 Limited, 300S, 300C and 300C Platinum models. These are available variously with either a 3.6-liter Pentastar V6 or a 5.7-liter HEMI V8 and with rear-wheel drive plus optional all-wheel drive with the V6. All have a new 8-speed automatic (marking the first time this has been combined with a V8). Power and economy stats are strong: the HEMI model has the same horsepower as before, but gains one MPG, while the V6 hits 31 MPG while delivering just under 300 hp—or a full 300 hp in the uptuned, sporty 300S model.

Recognizable though the overall 300 image may be, the changes are many. Once your eye starts traveling the power bulges, wheel arches, the mobius strip of a new front fascia, the recesses of the lights—you can keep busy with quiet appreciation for a lifetime of ownership. Chrome has been reduced considerably, a premium move we welcome.

Interiors get a complete rework, and it's a beauty. The instrument panel is all new, as are the seats. Luxurious materials com-

bine with powerful shapes to reinforce the 300's all-American presence. Think "Chrysler Building" as you look at these seats—strong yet elegant. As in the Jeep Grand Cherokee, Chrysler 300 interiors come in a variety of themes—in Jeep's case named after natural wonders, in the 300's after American cities—from Manhattan and Detroit, to La Jolla and Sausalito.

The center stack's 8.4-inch Uconnect touchscreen (largest in the segment) is augmented by a 7-inch screen in the instrument binnacle—including full nav info—with conventional dials to either side. An accurate and easy-to-use rotary shifter rounds out the driver interface.

The driving experience benefits from traditionally solid road feel via electric power steering, and from a variety of tuned suspensions to suit the flavor of each model and selectable on the fly.

Adaptive cruise control and forward collision systems allow for a warning phase up to a full stop, "in most cases with no impact." In stop-and-go traffic, the cruise will continue within two seconds, or you can hit resume.

The Chrysler 300 over its prior two generations has become increasingly popular over a wider and wider range of demographics. The new model scheme—with prices ranging over about a 40 percent spread—promises something for anybody and everybody. No matter how often you've seen the prior generations of the highly popular Chrysler 300 in traffic, you will surely have your head turned by the new one. ■

The lead photo and the rear three-quarter on facing page are the Chrysler 300C Platinum. The interior and front shot on facing page are the Chrysler 300S.

For more on the new Chrysler 300 lineup, see the LA Auto Show section on page 46.



2015 CHRYSLER 300 SPECS

3.6 LITER PENTASTAR V6

STANDARD ON: 300 Limited, 300S, 300C, 300C Platinum (on both RWD and AWD models)
HORSEPOWER/TORQUE292 hp / 300 lb-ft
FUEL87 octane regular
MPG19/31 (city/hwy) (RWD)18/27 (city/hwy) (AWD)

5.7 LITER HEMI® V8

(with 4-cylinder mode fuel saver tech)
OPTIONAL ON: 300S, 300C and 300C Platinum (RWD)
HORSEPOWER/TORQUE363 hp / 394 lb-ft
FUEL87 oct ok / 89 oct rec
MPG16/25 (city/hwy) (RWD)

TRANSMISSION8-spd auto (AutoStick optional on some models)

TRANSFER CASE (AWD): Active, fully variable split front/rear, w/ front axle disconnect

STEERINGElectric power steering

FUEL CAPACITY18.5 gal

CURB WEIGHT4029-4326 lb

TOW CAPACITY1000 lb

SUSPENSION:

300 Limited, 300C RWD: ...Comfort-tuned

300S (RWD):Sport-tuned

300C Platinum RWD:Touring-tuned

AWD models:AWD Touring-tuned

TIRES/WHEELS:

300 Limited:215/65-17

300C (RWD):225/60-18

300 Limited, 300S 300C and

300C Platinum AWD:235/55-19

300S, 300C Platinum RWD and

optional on 300C RWD:245/45-20

BRAKES:

TOURING (RWD)12.6 vent F / 12.6 solid R

SPORT (AWD)13.6 vent F / 12.6 solid R

FINAL ASSEMBLYBrampton, Ontario

PRICING

2015 CHRYSLER 300 LIMITED\$31,395

2015 CHRYSLER 300S\$34,895

2015 CHRYSLER 300C\$37,895

2015 CHRYSLER 300C PLATINUM\$42,395

All-wheel drive as avail/any+\$2,500

DESTINATION CHARGE\$995