

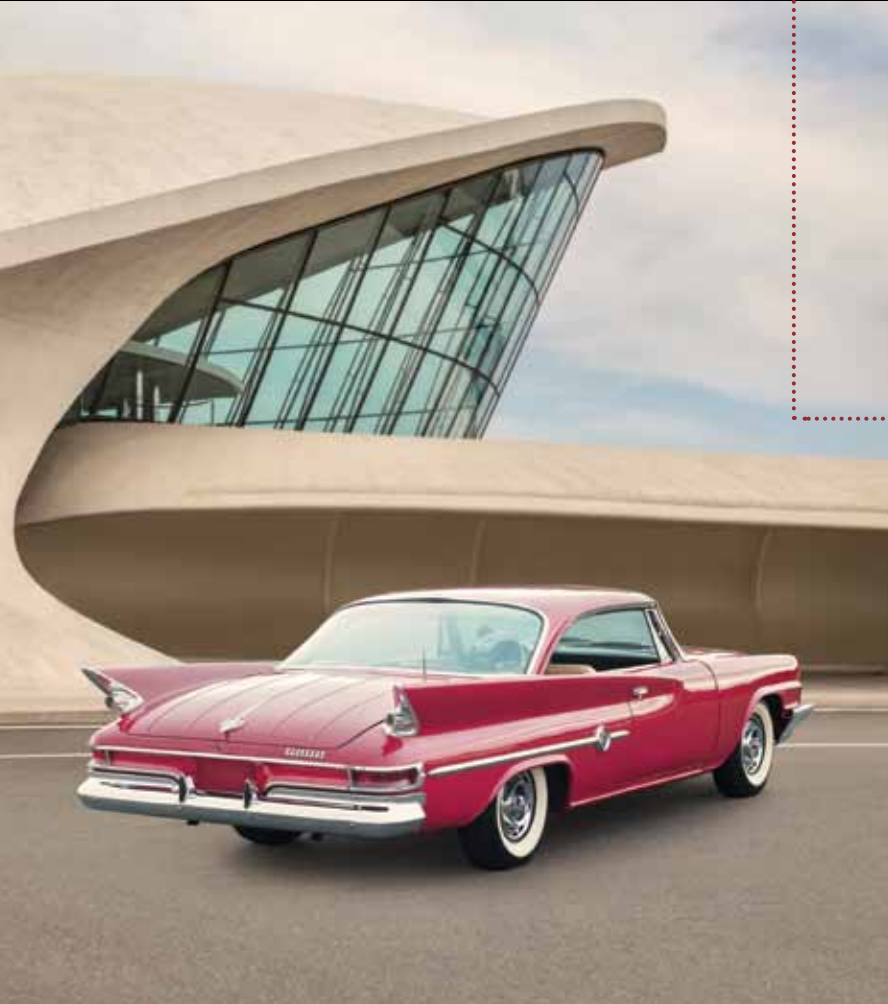
1961 Chrysler 300G / America's Car Museum, Collection Car

**W**hen, exactly, did non-residents first set foot in the Americas? Was it you-know-who sailing the ocean blue in 1492 or some blue-eyed guy wearing a horned helmet 500 years prior? For all we know it might have been Admiral Zheng He shouting orders in Mandarin. Like many a debate over precise historical demarcation points, fixing the exact birth date of the “muscle car” is an open question. The 1964 Pontiac GTO is the easy bet but not everyone agrees. A strong argument can be made that the first muscle car was actually the 1955 Chrysler 300. Let’s examine the facts supporting that view.

*First— if stuffing a beastly engine in an otherwise prosaic sedan is part of the muscle car formula, the 1955 300 certainly qualifies with its 300hp, 400cu mill. Second— performance... 0 to 60 in 9.8 seconds and 130 mph at the top end. Third— track cred... 300s dominated NASCAR during a time when the “S” actually stood for “stock.” At Daytona, these “Beautiful Brutes” (auto scribe Tom McCabill’s phrase) pretty much owned their class until domestic car makers agreed to pull out of all forms of motorsport. Case rested!*

# A “G” Whizzz!

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# “The Letter” Cars

Starting with that first “A” model in 1955, Chrysler 300s progressed through the alphabet in a systematic sequence of subtle styling and mechanical refinements. By 1961—and our “G” model—the 300 had firmly established certain easily recognized visual cues. The color palette of both hardtop and convertible consisted of just four hues; Alaskan White, Formal Black, Mardi-Gras Red and the rarest of all, Cinnamon. Prominent Virgil Exner fins had sprouted aft of the car’s two doors only. One of the most recognizable aspects of the 300’s design is the the assertive, some might say pugnacious, snout...an air gulping orriface super sized to feed the oxygen needs of the 413 cubic inch “Wedge” V-8 topped by cross-ram inducted, dual 4-barrel carbs. A circular “300” badge completed the visual package.

When the third generation “F” debuted in 1960, the 300 ditched its ladder frame for the new corporate uni-body that by then underpinned all Chryslers with the exception of the Imperial line. The car’s pointed tail fins were canted outward and two thin chrome strips bisected the grill before meeting at the center mounted circular red, white and blue medallion.

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## 1961 would see the most radical exterior styling revisions.

Virgil Exner's fins would spend their final year canted outward while tail lights dropped to a point just above the rear bumper. Up front, the iconic grill was inverted and flanked by dual headlamps canted to mimic the angle of the rear fins. The '300-ness' of the "G" was further reinforced in the cabin where a full-length center console bisected four individual, ventilated leather swathed bucket seats. The view from the driver's seat now featured instrumentation--a 150 mph speedometer and ancillary gauges--housed under a clear plastic "Astradome."

Along with the revised exterior and upgraded interior, performance remained a key element of the car's persona of exclusivity. In what by then had pretty much become standard operating procedure, a 1961 GT 300G easily won the Daytona Flying Mile while a stock "G" took the mile-long acceleration run. Customers were able to select from two engine options (see the "specifications" section). To enhance top speed the rear axle ratio was changed from 3.31:1 to 3.23:1. The expensive and fragile French-built, 4-speed stick was replaced with a heavy-duty, Chrysler floor-mounted 3-speed. Stiffer springs and torsion bars and 8.00 x 15 Goodyear Blue Streak "racing type" whitewalls served to bolster the 300s reputation as an up-market road rocket.



**1961 Chrysler 300G**



### SPECIFICATIONS

Base Price (V8): \$5,411 (hardtop) + \$95 destination

No. Produced: 1,280 hardtops / 337 convertibles

Engines: 413 cu in (6.8 L) 375 hp Wedge V8

Brakes: 2 x 2.5" power assisted drums

Transmissions: 3-speed manual  
3-speed TorqueFlite automatic

Dimensions Length - 219.8" / wheelbase - 126" / curb weight - 4,430 lbs.

*\*Specification data can, and often does, vary from source to source. When in doubt, we use those most often cited.*



# AUTO TRIVIA

■ At the time of the 1961 Chrysler 300's release, published road tests tended to prefer the TorqueFlight automatic transmission over the non-synchro 3-speed manual citing the long second-to-third gate.


■ In terms of rarity, and thus collector car value, the five factory build code 281 300Gs feature a racing manual transmission intended for use at the Daytona Flying Mile.

■ To boost power at low and mid-range rpms, a cross-ram intake manifold was fitted consisting of two criss-crossed tuned pipes each feeding separate carburetors mounted on opposite sides of the engine block. **The French built manual was dropped and replaced with a less expensive, more reliable Chrysler unit.**

■ Due to their unique at the time, combination of speed and luxury, Chrysler 300s foreshadowed today's high performance luxury cars and were often referred to as the "bankers hotrod."

■ Like most cars of that period, the difference between the 300's base price and price as delivered could be substantial. Popular options included: power seats (\$101.90), outside mirror remote control (\$18), Golden Touch radio with rear speaker (\$141.40) and tinted glass (\$43.10)

■ With a top speed of 131 mph, 300G performance was stunning especially when you consider the car's over two-ton weight. That performance came at a price at the fuel pump—10 to 11.5 mpg.

■ It's only fitting our master photographer Michael Craft chose to pose (through the wizardry of PhotoShop) the 300G in front of an image of Eero Saarinen's iconic TWA Flight Center at New York City's John F. Kennedy International Airport. Not only do they share a common time frame—early 1960s—but remarkably similar design elements. Saarinen's "neofuturistic" sweeping structural curves bear a strong resemblance to Virgil Exner's equally dramatic "jet age" fins. Special thanks to Max Touhey for our backplate images of the beautiful TWA Flight Center 



*Michael Craft, an official Provider of ACM, created these striking photographs. To see more of his work visit [www.michaelcraftphotography.com](http://www.michaelcraftphotography.com).*

The G model continued use of the 413 cu in, 375 hp Wedge V8.

Front bucket seats swivel to allow easier ingress/egress.

The 1961 300G was the last to employ Virgil Exner's "FlightSweep" fins.

Faux spare tire deck lid was eliminated on the "G" model.

