By Steve Schaefer

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In the early 1960s, American car companies decided to take on a rising tide of imports. The Big 3 introduced the Corvair (GM), the Falcon (Ford) and the Valiant (Chrysler). In 1963, Dodge got the Dart, based on the Valiant.

The Dart became Dodge's first successful compact, and was sold through 1975, when it was replaced by the less successful Dodge Aspen. This began a long string of disappointing and uncompetitive small Dodge vehicles.

With this new car, however, Dodge finally has a credible compact sedan. Why use the old name? Apparently it tested well in consumer research with both folks old enough to remember the old Dart fondly and with young millennials — fresh buyers.

The Dart is the first Chrysler product based on a Fiat platform, in this case the well-regarded Alfa Romeo Guilietta. This means it has something of a European driving feel, but the styling, inside and out, is all today's Chrysler Corporation. That is a good thing.

The look is smooth and flowing — something that's sometimes hard to pull off on a compact car. The floating cross-hair grille gives the car brand identity. This is Dodge's first use of an active grille shutter system, which opens the lower louvers when required for ventilation and closes them when not needed, improving aerodynamics for better fuel economy.

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