

Taking the country by storm, Chrysler's 300 continues to march into more and more garages, with good reason. Its dramatic styling elicits strong comments pro and con, but those who like it really love it. It's as if Chrysler took the grille from the 1958 300 and built a new car around it. And while it's the bold styling that gets attention first, there's a lot more to love about this car.

Tall door sills with shorter side windows accentuate a look that often has the word "gangster" attached to it, but this feature adds somewhat to the safety equation. Steel is stronger than window glass. Crisp lines are a departure from the more rounded LH series it replaced, also bringing a change from front wheel drive to rear wheel drive.

300s are available with four engines. Two V6s, with 190 or 250 horsepower, and two V8s, with 340 and 425 hp. The 300 Touring with 250 hp has plenty of punch for most needs, plus it sounds great when you nail the throttle. It is my personal favorite when power, price, features and fuel economy are all weighed.

Inside, you'll find styling touches uncommon in this price class. Everywhere you look, accoutrements that appear generic and bland in other cars have seen a designer's skilled hand. The leather seats were comfortable for two-hour stretches and with tilt-tele wheel plus optional adjustable floor pedals, nearly everyone should fit perfectly.

Benefiting from the marriage with Mercedes Benz, this Chrysler model has a solid feel, is quiet, rides smoothly and handles quite well for a car with its heft. Its suspension borrows much from the Mercedes E-Class, and it pays off nicely. Standard transmission for the 300 Touring is a Mercedes 5-speed AutoStick.



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL COONEY

Chrysler 300 Touring

Chrysler 300 Touring and Crossfire SRT6 Pace-setter styling in two dramatically different packages

Switching gears, the Chrysler Crossfire is worlds away from the 300. A short, nimble two-seater sports car, Crossfire also comes with horsepower choices. Both are Mercedes engines—a 215 hp V6 or the SRT6 model's 330 hp supercharged V6. A 5-speed auto is the only choice for the SRT6.

Available in coupe or convertible with power top, the styling is sharp and distinctive except for the nose, which is a bit too Chrysler-generic. Still, it's pleasing from every angle and beautifully sculpted.

Inside, the Crossfire felt a bit roomier than the Mercedes SLK on which is it based. My 5-10 frame fit comfortably but with little room to spare. Interior styling is attractive. High quality fabric seat coverings provided relief from the usual hot leather

on sunny days, and excellent bolstering holds you well in place.

The Crossfire SRT6 is a blast to drive. Zero to 60 passes in 5 seconds flat. And on winding roads, it's fun fun fun! Purists may lament the lack of a stick, but the AutoStick up- and downshifts quickly to keep the engine's revs where you want. With surprisingly good torque, it's quick off the line and its extra-sticky tire option (\$185) adds to the sharp steering response and high cornering limits. Go-cart comparisons become inevitable.

The 300 Touring is EPA-rated at 19-city, 27-highway mileage, and I averaged 22.5 mpg. Including a bunch of options plus destination charge, its price totaled \$30,705—a great value. EPA ratings for the Crossfire SRT6 come in at 17-city and 24-highway, and in my usual mix of city, freeway and mountain driving, I averaged 22 mpg. Good for such a fast car. Including options and destination, its price totaled \$51,480.

Obviously, these two models suit different needs. One common denominator is that both have been blessed with the work of fine design teams and are highly distinctive, attractive cars. ⚡



Chrysler Crossfire SRT6

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