

A Commanding Presence

SPECIFICATIONS

Make **Dodge**
Model **WC56**
Nationality **American**
Year **1942**
Production Number **21,156**
Production Run **1942-1944**
Engine **Dodge**
Type **T214 six-cylinder, in-line, L-head**
Fuel **Petrol**
Displacement **230.2cu ins**
Power **92bhp**
Torque **176lbs @1000rpm**
Transmission **Manual**
Gears **Four forward and one reverse**
Transfer Gear Ratio **1:1**
Suspension **Live beam axles on leaf springs**
Brakes **Hydraulic**
Wheels **Steel Disc**
Tyres **7.50x16**
Crew/seats **Six**

Dimensions(overall)
Length **450cm (177in)**
Width **210cm (83in)**
Height **210cm (83in)**
Weight **5375lb**
Wheelbase **295cm (116in)**



The Dodge WC is popular with World War Two collectors all over the world, Vicky Turner looks at its history.

Dodge was the US Army's go-to manufacturer for half to one-ton trucks during the World War Two era: they had been the military's primary supplier of light tactical wheeled vehicles since World War One. Dodge, from 1939-1945, supplied half the army's half-ton trucks and all its three-quarter ton. Initially they began supplying the army with toughened civilian trucks in four-wheel drive - the VC series. As modified civilian trucks, these were only ever seen really as an interim solution. The WC series came online in 1941 designed specifically with military service in mind.

Early half-ton WCs dispensed with all of the sheet metal associated with Dodge's civilian trucks, except the cowl or cab, for open or closed-top models. The military trucks had arched and wide open, almost flat fenders to prevent mud build up, with plain front end metal with a curved and slatted steel grille. Later WCs are characterised by combat-style wheels with rims that can be bolted on and off to enable in the field tyre changes and contributing further to the wider track of the heavier truck.

The WC56 came about in 1942 when the half-ton 4x4 vehicles first introduced to the

WC56s were usually issued to higher ranking officials, generally colonels and above





The Dodge WC series models had a side-mounted spare wheel, open sides and folding hood



The three-quarter ton truck had a shorter cowl, a squared off and functional front end including the new design slatted but flat steel grilles



Lovely period detail on this regularly used example - not a museum piece but beautifully maintained



Parked near the Spanhoe airfield memorial to Airborne troops

army in 1936 were to be superseded by heavier, newer three-quarter ton trucks. Both Dodge and Ford built prototypes but in the end it was Dodge who went on to be the primary manufacturer of this type of military workhorse. The three-quarter ton truck, to fulfil army demand for a lower and more stable profile, had a shorter cowl, a squared off and functional front end including the new design slatted but flat steel grilles.

These new trucks became known as 'Beeps' - theory has it that this is a slang term derived by the shortening of either 'beefed up Jeep' or 'Big Jeep' as they were wider, lower and altogether more sturdy than their predecessors and the Jeep equivalent - Jeep's Big Brother. They were not as popular among the drivers though, the Jeeps were more manoeuvrable and less likely to be shot at.

The staff car, with its distinctive silhouette, was an obvious target for the enemy wanting to knock out big cheeses who were the likely occupants. They were usually issued to higher ranking officials, generally colonels and above; General Paton is known to have used the command car and there are photographs to prove it. As the war progressed many higher ranks preferred to travel in the more discreet regular Jeep with its less distinctive profile.

This 4x4, three-quarter ton, command and reconnaissance truck was designed for the transportation of officers in the field and a touch of luxury shows - there are small details like

Pedigree Dodge

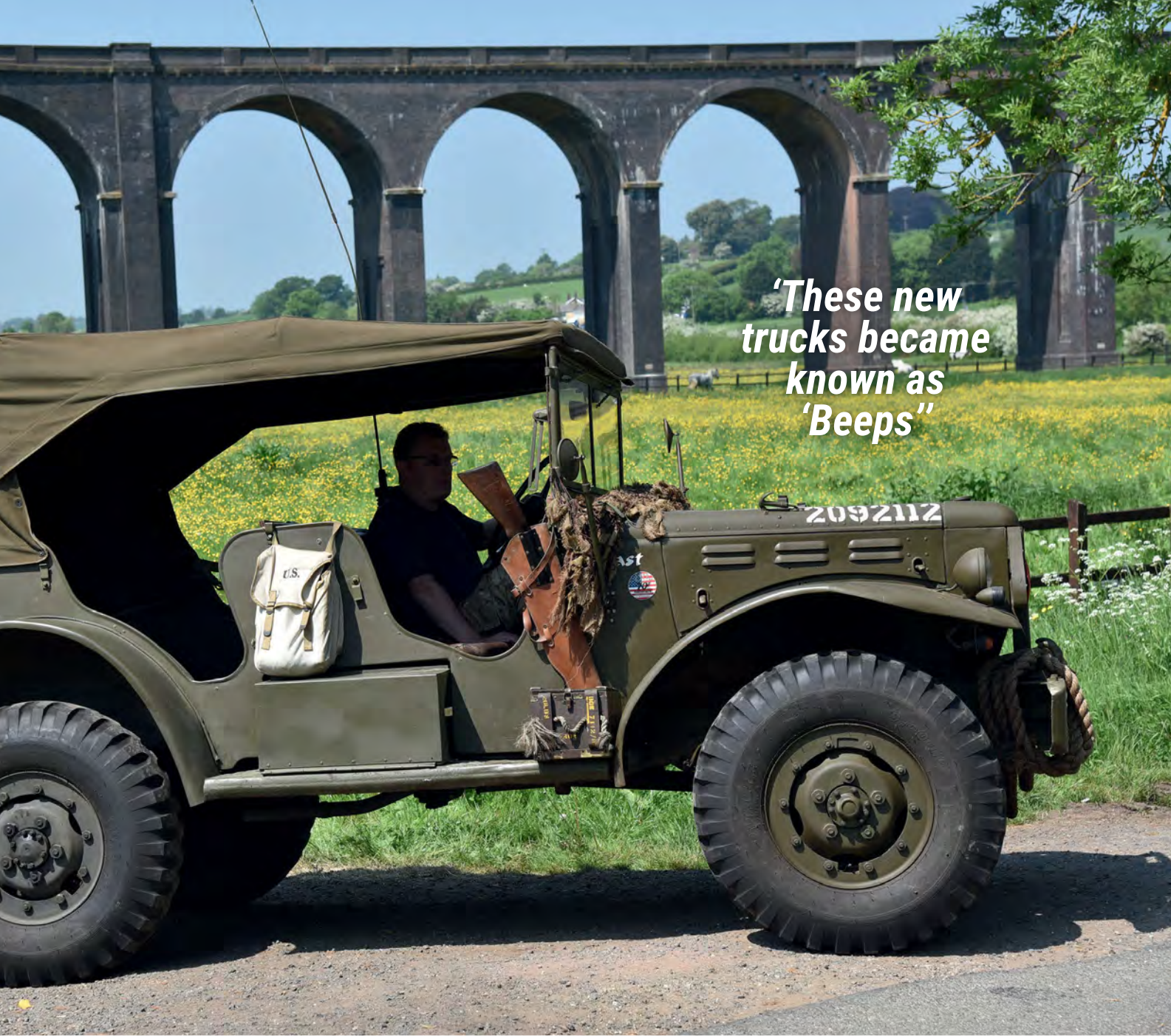
Dodge had a certain pedigree when it came to Command Cars; during the Mexico/US Border Wars, General Pershing had used a Dodge touring car to keep ahead of the marching column and control their movement and in 1916 George Patton, who led America's first motorised military raid against Pancho Villa's paramilitary forces, had 15 men and three Dodge Model 30 touring cars with him



Dodge, from 1939-1945, supplied half the army's half-ton trucks and all its three-quarter ton

WC is not an abbreviation of Weapons Carrier, but Dodge's manufacturing code. W for 1941 and C for half-ton rated. But to confuse, the WC code was retained for the three-quarter ton and one-and-a-half ton 6x6 Dodges and for subsequent years





'These new trucks became known as 'Beeps''



The 315th Troop Carrier Group occupied Spanhoe airbase in 1944; on D-Day they carried troops of the 82nd Airborne into action



Contemporary caption reads: *Duxford Aerodrome - 78th Fighter Group Personnel With Truck (By United States Army Air Forces, www.americanairmuseum.com/media/4835)*



The Dodge weapons carrier - many of the WC Series shared mechanical parts and components making parts availability and repair simpler (JOHN CARROLL'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE)



George Patton and French General Auguste Nogues reviewing American and French troops during a combined parade in Morocco (MYRON DAVIS, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



Lord Mountbatten in a Dodge command car looking at the hills of Mandalay away in the distance during a tour of inspection of the front line, January 13-18, 1945 (CROWN COPYRIGHT, PUBLIC DOMAIN)

'General Patton is known to have used the Command Car and there are photographs to prove it'



Standard army extras and cleverly designed stowage are a feature of this vehicle. Pioneer tools, two five-gallon liquid containers and a fire extinguisher were issued with each truck



Many of the fixings and catches are often seen in polished brass but here they are correctly in Olive Drab - they were done this way so that they didn't catch the light



The drop-down windscreen allowed for more efficient shipping as well as making it an exhilarating drive on a sunny day



The simply designed instrument panel and brass plates are not unfamiliar - like any army vehicle from that era

Under the Lend Lease programme the British Army commonly used the WC51 and 52, 53, 54, 56 and 57 and the 58 variants

US Army Standard Phaeton

The term 'phaeton' conjures up images of Dick Turpin and carriage turns around the Royal Crescent in Bath, but what is a phaeton and why did the US Army have a standard type? A phaeton was a sporty type of open carriage popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Large-wheeled, it was drawn by one or two horses and comprised a minimal, sprung open body. Fast and dangerous, it took its name from Greek mythology in which Phaëton, son of the deity Helios, reportedly almost set the earth on fire while attempting to drive the sun chariot. Following the advent of the automobile, the term was adopted to describe open touring cars.

These open vehicles were without glass side windows but some had removable panels of fabric or other material for the protection from the elements of the passengers. The term stuck and continued into the 20th century; the US Army Ordnance used it to describe vehicles with removable or foldable canvas hoods, open sides and a windshield that would fold flat

a fold-away wooden map table, a roomy boot and luxuriously padded seats. Like the more common Jeep from various manufacturers, the Dodge WC56 followed the US Army standard phaeton-type with an open back and drop-down windscreen allowing more efficient shipping.

There were several purpose-built variants of the WC which came direct from the factory; some were provided with a winch - the WC57. This could be adapted for radio as it came with a 12v electrical system and an antenna could then be readily mounted to make it the WC58.

The WC51 was the weapons carriers and the WC54 had an ambulance body (the only one to have a longer 123in wheel base); all of these shared many mechanical elements and actually the three-quarter truck, despite design changes, retained around 80 per cent interchangeable components and service parts with its lighter



These command cars are not an uncommon sight at military shows and classic car club meets

sibling, the half-ton models.

With total production of more than 250,000 of all the variants and millions of spare parts produced during and after the war, these trucks continue to be popular with World War Two collectors all over the world. Thousands were left in Europe after the war and many were still in service until very recently. Parts availability remains excellent, including both new old stock and quality reproductions. Under the Lend Lease programme the British Army commonly used the WC51 and 52, 53, 54, 56 and 57 and the 58 variants and consequently these command cars are not an uncommon sight at shows and club meets.

After the war, Dodge went on to develop the three-quarter WC series into their 4x4 Power Wagons for the civilian market. The design was proven and it took a while for it to be bettered, even as late as 1951, Dodge's M-series trucks were recognisably similar. The Power Wagons got a reputation for being as tough as old boots and the Military M37, which had doors, was a direct descendent of the WC series; these went into service in Korea and beyond. ▀

Dodge WC56 followed the US Army standard phaeton-type with an open back and removable canvas hood mounted on three bows



Behind the driver and passenger front seats sits a fold-away wooden map table, one of the design features to make this a useful vehicle from which to command the action

A roomy boot and a chain held tailgate are some of the luxury details on this vehicle which sets it apart from the more ubiquitous Jeep



Later WCs are characterised by combat style wheels with rims that can be bolted on and off to enable in the field tyre changes

'There were several purpose built variants of the WC which came direct from the factory'

A top speed of 54mph can be achieved. It had an operational range of 240 miles

