

2010 Truck King Comparison Findings

The testing of these four pickups was as intense as any we have done in the past, but because of the small number we felt that to try and judge categories numerically wouldn't work – the sample was too small. So, with only three judges we agreed that it was best to report our observations rather than try and declare a winner.

Gravel roads are great for three things: evaluating cabin noise levels, getting steering feel and driving dirt into every possible crevice on the truck. With the rain we had we managed all three equally. Consensus was that the Chevy and Ford were the quietest of the trucks. Not just on overall road noise, but they also deadened the pinging in the wheel wells from the gravel hits. Meanwhile on pavement, tire noise was low and with both engines at idle it was almost impossible to tell they were running. (Well, with the hybrid that is a bit deceiving because at stops the engine does too.)

Steering feedback is good on all the trucks, but again Ford and Chevy seem to have it over the other two with a more controlled confident feel. Certainly with the Ford the new longer wheelbase adds to the overall ride quality – the trade-off is that it increases its turning radius. Inside though the Ford puts this added length to use as rear cabin space – adding almost six inches of floor space. For spaciousness Ford has it over the others.

It was interesting to see that on the 2010 Toyota Tundra we tested a fold-down cargo bed step has been added. An obvious add-on that mimics the Ford step, it's good to see that Toyota reacts quickly to the changing market – not necessarily waiting till the next generational update to make build changes.

That said it was noted on the off-road portion of our test that of all the trucks the Tundra has the most play between box and cab – it needs to be stiffened up. With the rain pelting (and mosquitoes attacking) we attempted the off-road in 2WD mode first with each of the trucks, but with the slick mud we were soon stuck. Still we noted that the mechanical locker that the Chevy has in its rear differential provided the most traction before we switched to 4WD. From here each truck preformed adequately with the Ford's turning radius once again causing us to have backup where the others didn't need to.

Also on our off-road we noted that the Tundra and the F150 persist in putting their trailer light connections below the rear bumper. We managed to bend both. These belong above or in the bumper – as the Dodge and Chevy have them placed.

Each of our test trucks was V8 powered with the Toyota sporting the smallest engine and the hybrid Chevy the largest at 6L. Interestingly, from a fuel perspective, the hybrid saved only about one litre/100km more than the new 4.6L Toyota engine. And while this spoke to the strides made by Toyota to put a fuel efficient motor in its Tundra – the real difference emerged when towing.

The new Ram came to us equipped with the 5.7L Hemi engine that has been doing duty in that truck for several years now. The F150 was equipped with the 5.4L V8 which has also been around as long as the Hemi, but which was updated with new valves and coupled to an all-new six-speed automatic transmission (the Dodge stayed with the previous generation's five-speed auto).

In fact, Dodge is now the only one that doesn't run a six-speed tranny, so it's obvious that multi-gear transmissions are playing much larger rolls in power and fuel management these days. (These are a far cry from the three-on-the-tree days.) But these gearboxes also show off advanced computer programming with tow/haul settings that electronically change the shift points for acceleration and also allow manual control for use with engine braking on long grades. Many of these changes are innovations that have migrated from the HD truck segment. Frankly with what half-tons will tow now, it's needed.

Our test trailer was a dual axle landscape-type trailer with a tare weight of 2,400 lb. On it we loaded two ATVs which I had on hand for testing. A new Yamaha Kodiak 450 and a '09 475cc Honda Foreman fit our trailer and these weighed in at 629 lb and 639 lb respectively. So with the trailer included we put together a modest tow test weight of 3,668 lb. Respectable for any of these half-tons to tow, but far from a real workout. The towing capacity on the new Ford, for instance, has increased to 11,300 lb – while payload has risen to 3030 lb as a direct result of a new frame designed with new high-strength steel (which despite its increased load bearing ability weighs 100 lb less than the last generation frame). This is typical of all the trucks now. Our trailer had what are known as “surge brakes” meaning it didn’t require an onboard brake controller – but it’s worth noting that while aftermarket units have been the norm for decades the Ford and Chevy now offer integrated controls installed at the factory.

While towing this trailer, once again the power and wheelbase of the Ford and Chevy proved to be the best combinations. The Dodge lacked only in its gearing, where a long second gear tended to bog a bit on hills while accelerating. The Toyota, while it handled the weight, used all its power and the transmission was worked hard to keep pace – this is an obvious trade-off for the improved fuel economy. Of course where neither was affected was on the Chevy hybrid. With its 6L Vortec engine it pulled with strength and confidence and the electric motors even have enough power on their own to move the truck and trailer from a standing stop on electric power only.

As for suspensions we concluded that our modest load wasn’t enough to highlight any major differences between leaf springs and coil suspensions – in fact the new setup on the Dodge felt pretty good. As for design – we try to be practical in our evaluations - but we are as swayed by a truck’s looks as any buyer. And while there isn’t a mutt in the bunch we have to admit that the current Ram is a very pretty truck – inside and out. With the market now recovering we expect to stage a full-blown Canadian Truck King Challenge once again in the fall of 2010.