

Dodge scores a bull's-eye with the 2009 Ram pickup

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We were not surprised when Dodge offered to give us a sneak preview of their new 2009 Ram pickup. Phoenix is the fourth largest pickup truck market in America. However, we were very pleasantly surprised at the lengths to which Dodge has gone to insure that the new Ram will be the most advanced, versatile and innovative full-sized pickup in the market. And best of all, we received a detailed presentation from the mastermind of the vehicle, Ralph Gilles, Vice President—Jeep®/Truck, Advance Interior and Component Design for Chrysler LLC.

From its Charger-inspired front grille to the built-in spoiler on its tailgate, the new Dodge Ram is the most sleek and aerodynamic pickup on the road. The tight tolerances between the fascia and front bumper are reminiscent of the miniscule slits you find on a NASCAR racing machine. Gilles was shooting for a crisp, aerodynamic design, and he scored a bull's-eye with the new Ram pickup.

Evolution Of The Dodge Ram Pickup

When Dodge unveiled their previous all-new Ram pickup in 2005, they stunned the competition. Along with its powerful 345 horsepower Hemi V-8, the Ram also featured the industry's first fully-boxed frame. Dodge's box frame was stronger and more torsionally rigid than conventional "C" channel frames. Consequently, the Ram pickup could haul and tow more than its competitors. For the first time, Dodge became a major player in the pickup market.

However, Ford, Chevrolet and Toyota have all introduced new full-sized pickups since then. Each surpassed the Ram in various areas. The Ford F-150 featured a fully-boxed frame and outboard rear shocks, which offered a more comfortable ride. The Toyota Tundra's new V-8 engine power bested the aging Ram Hemi V-8 by some 35 horses. Chevrolet improved the Silverado's aerodynamics and offered a multi-displacement V-8 engine which beat the old Hemi V-8's fuel economy.

Fortunately for Dodge, they have done their homework. The new Ram has raised the bar with its new multi-displacement Hemi VVT (Variable Valve Timing) V-8 engine. The new Hemi not only possesses 35 more horses, but it also delivers an estimated 4% better MPG. The Hemi Ram's performance? How about 0-60 in 6.1 seconds!

Dodge has also trumped the competition with their "first-in-class" multilink rear coil suspension system. While other half-ton pickups still use leaf springs at the rear, the new Ram 1500 features all-coil springs which provides better ride and handling.

"Won't the rear coil springs restrict the Ram 1500's towing capability?" you ask. Evidently not: the new Ram half-ton can tow up to 9,100 pounds. In fact, with its standard four-wheel ABS brakes, Electronic Stability Program and Trailer Sway Control, the new Ram 1500 will tow your trailer more surely and safely than its leaf-spring predecessor.

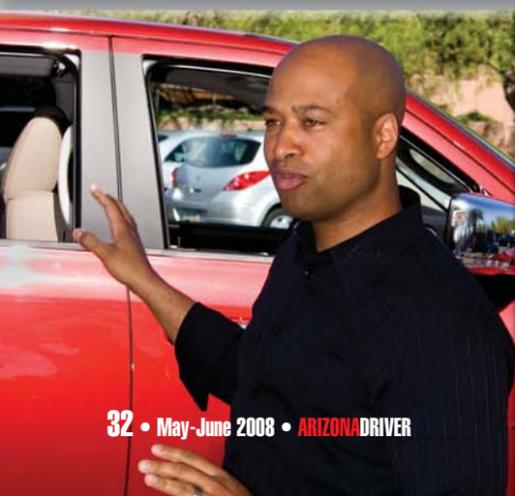
The new Ram also boasts best-in-class aerodynamics. The benefits of the Ram's low .419 Cd (drag coefficient) translates to better gas mileage and a quieter cabin. With a highly upgraded interior and a large crew cab option, the Ram also offers creature comforts which are second to none. Want examples? Heated and cooled seats, a floor-mounted ice box which holds ten 12-ounce drinks, a first-in-class live Sirius backseat TV and a first-in-class surround sound system are just a few of the Ram's new goodies.

Will 2009 Be "The Year of the Ram"?

Yes, the improvements to the new Ram pickup are ample to move the Ram to the head of the class in 2009, but are they sufficient to keep the Ram on top in the future? Dodge's product planners and designers must have asked themselves this question, because their answer was to raise the bar even higher for the competition. Dodge has added some innovative and useful features which should keep

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the Ram in front for years to come.

Dodge's new Ram Box system, easy-lift tail gate, standard dual exhaust system and quad-seal doors are some examples that Dodge seriously intends to move ahead and stay ahead of the competition for a long time to come.

Innovative Dodge Ram Features

The new Ram Box is our personal favorite. Years ago, automotive designer Mark Steher-berger and his design partner shared renderings of this design concept with us. Here is the basic idea: The area above the rear fender and between the interior pickup bed wall is totally unused. Why not utilize this space by installing lockable storage boxes?

The new Ram is the first pickup to use this storage system in a production vehicle. On each side of the pickup box, there is a lockable bin with 4.3 cubic feet of storage space. Each Ram Box can hold power tools, valuable components, a set of golf clubs or even ten cases of 12-ounce drinks on ice! For work and recreational usage, this option alone will put the new Ram one giant step ahead of the competition.

The easy-lift tailgate is something which Ford, Chevrolet, Nissan and Toyota have had for several years. While not unique, it allows owners to raise and lower the tailgate with just one hand. The old Ram tailgate was only easy-lift for professional athletes on steroids.

Part of the aerodynamic package of the new Ram is the use of quad-sealed doors. Quietness is a synergistic process. Tight body tolerances plus redundant door seals both contribute to the interior quietness of the vehicle, as does a rigid frame. The new Ram has four door seals, which isolate passengers from exterior wind and road noises. A nice touch.

Designer Ralph Gilles is responsible for the Ram's forward tilting, Charger-styled grille and the tidy packaging of the Ram's new dual exhaust system. Minor styling details? Not really. Styling attracts car buyers to the showrooms. Without cutting edge styling, consumers would not even give the new Ram pickup a second look. Incidentally, Gilles is also the man who designed the Chrysler 300, the automobile which put Chrysler back into the luxury car game with Lincoln and Cadillac.

Pickup load-locking systems are also not new. However, the previous Ram pickup did not have them. The new Ram allows owners to add an infinite number of accessories to suit their individual needs—bike racks, motorcycle tie-downs and more. The new Ram pickup can accommodate each consumer's special needs far better than the previous Ram truck.

"Garageability" is a huge issue for consumers. You might be surprised at how many consumers have purchased new pickups only to find that their new truck did not fit into their garage. The new Dodge Ram pickup will fit into virtually any standard-sized garage. Kudos to Dodge's product development team for making a line of pickup trucks which actually fits into the average garage. And yes, the new Ram 1500 does have a bed extender system for those rare times when you do actually need a longer box.

2010 Will Be "The Year Of The Ram Diesel"

If you need the best possible fuel economy from your next half-ton pickup, you may wish to wait until 2010 when the Ram 1500 will be available with the new, compact Cummins turbo diesel engine. While diesel fuel is currently a little more expensive than gasoline, this should change as American oil refineries complete their transition to low-sulfur diesel production by 2010. Even if diesel prices remain a bit higher than gasoline, the superb mileage of the diesel will more than offset the extra few cents per gallon.

As a side note, if you have not driven a new-generation turbo diesel vehicle, then you are in for a big surprise. Today's turbo diesel engines are smooth, quiet, powerful and environmentally clean. The new turbo-diesel-powered pickups from the Detroit Three are on par with their gasoline counterparts in terms of performance and quietness. However, turbo diesels are vastly superior to gasoline engines when it comes to towing capabilities.

In Europe, over 50% of all vehicles on the road are diesel powered. At seven or eight dollars per gallon over there, diesels are viewed as a necessity rather than a luxury option as in Audi, BMW or Mercedes-Benz automobiles. At the rate at which fuel prices are escalating in America, can we be that far behind the Europeans in making the switch to clean diesels?

Conclusion

In the near term, it is difficult to envision any pickup truck which will incorporate all of the useful standard and optional features which the 2009 Ram pickup offers. By 2010, it is even more difficult to imagine another pickup which will offer all of the Ram's advanced features plus the benefits of a new compact, clean turbo diesel engine.

The choice is yours. You can acquire a new 2009 Ram pickup this fall or wait for the new Cummins turbo diesel Ram in 2010. Either way, you will have the most advanced half-ton pickup on the road. Besides, isn't it better to be ahead of the curve than behind it? ■

