

PURPOSE...

ALL SHAPES, SIZES AND USES

BY JOE SAGE

LIKE ITS COUSIN the Jeep Grand Cherokee, the Ram pickup lineup racks up one award after another, as they both did in their prior generations, as well. We flew to Los Angeles and shuttled to the mountains north of Malibu, where we could drive the full range, in conditions from open two-lane highway to off-road trail. We climbed, we snaked, we hurtled, we crawled, we towed.

OUR FIRST DRIVE was in a 2500 Mega Cab—bigger behind its rear seats than a Crew Cab, but otherwise the same for occupants. Ours was a 4x4, which turns in about a 4-foot-tighter circle (46.86 feet) than the 4x2, in fact only a foot and a half more than a 4x2 Regular Cab. Impressive. Also impressive was its 6.7L Cummins turbo diesel with 800-lb-ft of torque.

Even on highways, farm roads and twisting paved mountain roads, with just two occupants, no bed load and no tow load, we appreciated the

torque. Yet this powerhouse truck handled nimbly, not betraying its size. Its hydraulic steering was effective—and welcome in a growing era of electrics.

It is a big truck, of course, and we were just lucky not to encounter many cyclists on the narrowest and twistiest sections—though, as you can see below, they were friendly and seemed to like our truck in the valleys as we left them unscathed.

FROM THAT, we hopped into the award-winning Ram 1500—which is the volume leader and thus gets the most exposure. Our 4x2 at lower right came in Lone Star trim—which is available with Crew or Mega Cabs (ours was Crew) and the Crew with either an 8-foot or 6.4-foot bed (Mega Cab with 6.4 only). Ours had the shorter bed. The Lone Star package includes special 18-inch wheels, quad halogen headlamps, chrome grille, foglamps, interior upgrades, anti-spin rear differential, remote start and of course various Texas badging.

Ours included the 3-liter V6 turbo EcoDiesel that is at the heart of many of the Ram 1500's awards. At 420 lb-ft, its torque is little more than half that of the 6.7-liter Cummins TD in the big boy we had driven just prior. Then again, this one weighed

about 2400 pounds less. That in itself can explain why it felt so sporty, by comparison, while flicking it through the Santa Monica Mountains.

The twisty mountain roads were a great place to test the power, agility, comfort, features and handling of even the largest Ram pickups. And we're happy to report that a small army of cyclists on this stretch survived a small army of journalists.

OUR NEXT STRETCH put no cyclists at risk—this was our off-road course. For this, we had the red Ram 2500 Crew Cab shown at upper right, a 4x4 with the big 6.4-liter gasoline V8 HEMI. Purposeful as this truck clearly is, it was outfitted with an Outdoorsman package—part functional and part cosmetic, delivering everything from painted bumpers and grille, fender flares and black door handles, to tow hooks, rubber floor-mats and skid plates. We started from flat farmland, but immediately found ourselves scaling the heights, negotiating deeply rutted track. This truck was a good match to the off-road course, but would also be a fine machine on pavement. It even included Uconnect with 8.4-inch touchscreen, yet was still in the \$40s—barely—our second-lowest-priced Ram pickup of the day.

WHEN WE HAD DRIVEN a new Ram 3500 Crew Cab diesel dually at home in Arizona a few months back, we were sorry we hadn't had a chance to tow a 30,000-pound front end loader up the grade to Flagstaff, or to haul a full herd of cattle from Mexico to maybe Montana. This launch drive in the mountains of Southern California pretty much gave us our chance. Our big Ram 2500 Crew Cab had the same 6.7L Cummins turbo diesel as our first truck this day, and as our 3500 in Arizona, though a lower towing capacity—about 17,000 pounds. We hooked it up to a max-weight load and hit the road. We chose what seemed a good point to pull off and double back—to “go around the block” on an agricultural scale—that gave us an unscheduled test, when it turned out to be a dead end. We were fortunate not to have to back the whole rig out, but did turn a few heads as we maneuvered through the dirt parking area of one local ranch, around a few trees and back out, with a 17,000-pound power yacht in tow. Our big Ram 2500 Crew Cab and trailer handled it all just fine—the tight maneuvers, as well as the grunt.

THERE IS SURELY no vehicle category with buyers as fiercely brand-loyal as pickup trucks. But whatever your current brand loyalty, you absolutely owe it to yourself to drive the Ram lineup in the course of your next purchase decision. ■



AS TESTED #3

Ram 2500 Outdoorsman Crew Cab 4x4
6.4L V8 HEMI MDS (410 hp / 429 lb-ft)
Deep Cherry Red Crystalbase \$40,815
.....as tested \$49,845



AS TESTED #1

Ram 2500 Laramie Mega Cab 4x4
6.7L Cummins Turbo Diesel (370 hp / 800 lb-ft)
Black Gold Pearlbase \$47,855
.....as tested \$63,255

AS TESTED #4 (not shown)

Ram 2500 Laramie Limited Crew Cab 4x4
6.7L Cummins Turbo Diesel (370 hp / 800 lb-ft)
Black Clear Coat.....base \$52,200
.....as tested \$67,175



AS TESTED #2

Ram 1500 Lone Star Crew Cab 4x2
3.0L V6 Turbo EcoDiesel (240 hp / 420 lb-ft)
Black Clear Coat.....base \$34,845
.....as tested \$46,455