

# Penultimate Ford By Joe Sage

For at least a couple of decades, Ford loyalists would eye GM and ask why there was no Ford "Suburban." For the first few years of this millennium, there was, of sorts—the sizable Ford Excursion. (While coexisting, we had thought this and the Expedition should have had each other's names.) The Excursion unfortunately arrived just as big SUVs were becoming unfashionable (the market worked past this mood).

But as sizes and functions have juggled around, the Ford Expedition is now a perfect competitor for the Suburban. An eighteen-and-a-half-foot Expedition EL is closest, although the just-over-seventeen-foot Expedition we have here competes just fine. (If Ford would bring back a Bronco to tackle the Tahoe, the faceoff would be complete.)

We haven't spent time with the Expedition since 2007, which seems long ago. However, this beautiful new 2015 model is actually the same generation. Refreshes have been minimal, though the latest front end styling is by far the most attractive and delivers a very contemporary look.

The 2015 Expedition has received another key piece of contemporary Ford engineering—the 3.5-liter EcoBoost V6, putting this almost-three-

ton eight-seater on the road with 365 horsepower and a whopping 420 lb-ft of torque, useful for its 9200-pound towing capacity, all while delivering up to 22 MPG highway fuel mileage.

Compare this with the 2016 Ford Explorer, already announced largely because its new option of the same EcoBoost V6 will help it keep balance with the Expedition. The Explorer's EcoBoost six is tuned to lower torque, the whole rig weighs about 1000 pounds less, it retains its lighter 5000-lb tow capacity, it seats six or seven, and its fuel economy has not yet been released. The Expedition thus gives the heavier user an edge, in many ways (to steal a word from elsewhere in Ford's stable).

Included with our sample's 22-inch wheels is a Continuously Controlled Damping (CCD) suspension with three selectable drive modes: Comfort, Normal and Sport (wheels, tires and variable suspension *all* for just \$2180). This gives you plenty to work with, and there's not a bad setting in the bunch—all firm and smooth. Ground clearance is considerable (8.3" in this 4x2, 8" in a 4x4).

Electronic power rack-and-pinion steering delivered well. It sometimes felt nonlinear or situational, but almost achieved an improbable U-turn in a

residential semi-cul-de-sac and easily pulled one off on a familiar four-lane boulevard. Ford does not seem to publish a spec for the turning circle (which surely varies for the EL wheelbase, 4x4 version and even among various wheel options), nor did we find it elsewhere. We are curious—whatever the spec, the reality surprised and pleased us.

Our logbook noted that power running boards were an annoyance, but we ultimately learned how to dig into the system and turn them off—something not covered in the manual (nor the main screen). We also had beefs with the locks and the rear liftgate, including no apparent button for closing the hatch.

We call this a "penultimate" Ford because there are still 4x4s and/or the longer Expedition EL. And even with the Platinum edition we're driving here, you can spend a few thousand more on interior upgrades—from Brunello leather in front, to leather in back, to second-row entertainment systems, racks, covers, cargo enhancements and more—although option prices are all reasonable throughout. We anticipate big change within the next year or two. (We, along with the rest of the industry, are waiting to see when and how the new aluminum-bodied F-150 may pass its DNA along to this lineup.) But if this hits the points on your checklist today, consider it the ultimate. ■

## SPECIFICATIONS (4X2)

ENGINE .....3.5L twin-turbo EcoBoost V6  
 TRANSMISSION .....6-speed SelectShift automatic  
 DRIVETRAIN.....RWD  
 POWER/TORQUE.....365 hp / 420 lb-ft  
 OCCUPANT CAPACITY.....8-passenger  
 FUEL CAPACITY.....28.0 gal (87-octane regular)  
 MPG.....16/22/18 (city/hwy/comb)  
 TOWING: HD trailer tow package incl class IV hitch receiver, 4- and 7-pin connector, HD aux trans oil cooler, HD radiator, electronic brake wiring, integrated brake controller. Tow capacity:.....9200 lb  
 INCLUDED: EQUIPMENT GROUP 600A: pwr locks, pwr pedals, leather heated/cooled buckets, driver's seat memory, heated fold-flat split 2nd row, PowerFold 3rd row, dual-zone auto + rear aux climate, Ford SYNC w MyFord Touch voice nav/comm/ent, front console, overhead console, 9 cupholders, pwr windows (driver one-touch), carpet, carpeted mats, entry lighting, rear camera, reverse + forward sensing, leather-wrap wheel w controls, cruise, garage door opener, remote start, blind spot info system (BLIS) w cross-traffic alert, keyless entry/start, fog lamps, halogen project-beam headlamps, body cladding and molding, rear privacy glass, rain-sensing wipers, rear wiper, pwr liftgate, chrome door handles, mirrors, exhaust tips and rack rails, pwr running boards, pwr moonroof and much, much more,

BASE PRICE .....\$58,075  
 PAINT: Ruby red metallic tinted clear .....395  
 WHEELS AND SUSPENSION: 22" polished aluminum wheels and Continuous Control Suspension with comfort, normal, sport drive modes.....2180  
 DESTINATION CHARGE:.....1195  
 TOTAL.....\$61,845

*If you're in the market for a Ford passenger vehicle with top capabilities for passenger seating, cargo volume, tow capacity and general on/off-road handling, as well as style, features, power and fuel economy, the Ford Expedition should fill the bill for you.*



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