

On top of its game

By Joe Sage

Ram Trucks chose that finest of driving locales, Arizona, to launch its all-new 2019 Ram 1500 pickups, a chance for all to experience our unbeatable combination of smooth highways, aggressive freeways, rugged trails and impeccable weather. We met near Carefree, drove down toward Mesa, back up along Bush Highway and Saguaro Lake, settling in on the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation for an afternoon of serious off-roading.

Ram sales have grown every year, from 260,000 to almost 700,000 by 2017, and for two years in a row, Ram 1500 has won the top overall brand loyalty spot for half-ton pickups. Ram chief Jim Morrison expects this to continue through 2018, noting that sales are already up year-over-year, and with the new 2019 Ram 1500 now on sale, he anticipates another good boost.

WHAT'S NEW? Everything: body, frame, engines, transmissions, suspension, interiors, electrical systems, entertainment, safety features, even wheels (fifteen styles and sizes from 18" to 22").

And styling. The new 2019 Ram pickup line is that most successful of redesigns—noticeably different, yet immediately recognizable. Headlights and fenders have been raised, only about an inch

and a half, which some thought moves away a bit from their “big rig” look of the past quarter century. But then again, big rigs have also evolved.

Committed to steel, Ram has 98 percent high-strength steel in the frame, over 50 percent light-weight steel for cab and box, and aluminum just for the hood and tailgate. It saves weight, while also promising “the strongest 1500 ever.”

Shaving weight benefits fuel economy, but has also enabled a boost of load capability by over 20 percent, to as high as 2320 pounds of payload and 12,750 pounds towing.

New eTorque engines (more on this below) match power to those higher loads



while also increasing MPG—they expect a 10 percent boost overall when EPA numbers are final.

All the new trucks are four-door crew or quad cabs (crew only in higher trims, while Rebel adds a quad). For a two-door single cab, you can still buy the old style truck for at least the rest of this year.

The model range is familiar, from the work-oriented Tradesman up to luxury Limited, but with more inclusions or availabilities lineup-wide than ever. Options available on any trim include air suspension for \$1795, an off-road package for just \$795, and popular RamBox storage for \$995.

The centerpiece of the new Ram 1500's interior is its top tech touchpoint—a new 12-inch Uconnect screen on top models (with familiar 8.4-inch or 5-inch screens down the line). The 12-incher can run huge full-screen navigation or split between that and, say, audio, both still with prodigious real estate. Top audio is a 19-speaker 1900-watt Harman Kardon unit, and new SiriusXM 360L on-demand makes any drive more entertaining.

Interiors have been comprehensively reworked with attention to authentic, rugged and stylish materials, durability and luxury—from base Tradesman up to the premium trims. “The amount of real wood, real leather and real metal in our trucks is second to none,” says Morrison.

Frame and suspension have been completely reengineered for ride, handling, comfort, safety and heavier loads. The frame is about four inches

longer, to accommodate cabs extended by four inches over the prior model—an inch added in front and three in the rear—for a whopping 45 inches of rear legroom (just one of the benefits that make the rear more enticing than ever). The enlarged cab also contributes to increases in storage space throughout—twice that of any competition, they say—with more power outlets and lighting.

Prices run from \$31,695 for a 4x2 Tradesman Quad Cab (see sidebar) to \$57,690 for a 4x4 Limited Crew Cab with 6'4" bed (just a few hundred dollars more than the prior trucks, but with huge upgrades). Some trucks are even more affordable this year, such as a new Rebel Quad Cab 4x4.

EXTERIOR: Exterior design chief Joe Dehmer calculates that since the company has been building trucks since 1914, this could be considered the 15th generation. “That’s lots of heritage,” he says, noting they “established the ‘big rig’ DNA in 1994, and it still sets us apart from any other, so we wanted to carry that forward.”

The grille loses its forward slant, now vertical and integrated with the bumper. Gone are the long dominant cross-hairs, with “R-A-M” now the bold signature element (on tailgates it’s now the Ram’s head, except on Rebel). There are three headlight configurations, and subtle body sculpting creates an hourglass shape to lighten visual heft.



SPECIFICATIONS

FORMATS Quad cab, crew cab, 4x2, 4x4
SEATING (Quad or crew) six
CONSTRUCTION Ladder-type frame, steel cab, double-wall pickup box
ASSEMBLY Sterling Heights, Michigan

ENGINES:

3.6L PENTASTAR V6 W eTORQUE
HP/TORQUE 305 hp / 269 lb-ft
 —plus up to 90 lb-ft from motor-generator
FUEL unleaded regular 87 octane

5.7L HEMI® V8
HP/TORQUE 395 hp / 410 lb-ft
FUEL 89 octane recm / 87 okay

5.7L HEMI V8 W eTORQUE
HP/TORQUE 395 hp / 410 lb-ft
 —plus up to 139 lb-ft from motor-generator
FUEL 89 octane recm / 87 okay
TRANSMISSION 8-speed automatic

TRANSFER CASES:

BW 48-12 PART-TIME
 2HI, 4HI locked, 4LO locked, neutral
BW 48-11 ON-DEMAND
 2HI, 4 auto, 4HI locked, 4LO locked, neutral

AXLES FRONT: 215mm
 REAR: 235mm w avail open, limited slip or electronic lock diff, opt thermal mgmt axle

RATIOS 3.21, 3.55, 3.92
ALTERNATOR ..160A, 180A, 220A (special pkg)
BATTERY ...Group 94R low-mntce H7 730 CCA

SUSPENSION F: upper/lower A-arms, coils, twin-tube shocks, stblzr bar.
 R: five-link w track bar, progressive coils, stblzr bar, twin-tube shocks, solid axle.
OPTIONAL F/R: air suspension.

BRAKES F: 14.9x1.2 vented w 2.2" twin-piston pin-slider caliper, ABS.
 R: 14.8x0.87 solid w 2.2" single-piston pin-slider, ABS.

QUAD CAB bed length 6'4"
LENGTH / WHEELBASE 228.9 in / 140.5 in
TIRES 275/55R20

GROUND CLEARANCE 2WD: F 7.8", R 8.7"
 4WD: F 8.2", R 8.7"
APPR/BKVR/DEPART* 2WD: 18.1 / 19.5 / 25.2°
 4WD: 18.9 / 19.9 / 25.0°
 *(stats vary slightly w air suspension)

CREW CAB bed length 5'7" or 6'4" LWB
LENGTH / WB 5'7" bed: 232.9 in / 144.6 in
 LWB 6'4" bed: 241.8 in / 153.5 in

GROUND CLEARANCE 2WD: F 7.8", R 8.7"
 4WD: F 8.2", R 8.7"
APPR/BKVR/DEPART* 2WD: 18.1 / 18.4 / 25.0°
 4WD: 18.9 / 18.7 / 24.9°
 *(6'4": stats vary w 5'7" bed &/or air susp)

TURNING CIRCLE 45.1 to 48.7 ft
FUEL TANK 23 / 26 / 33 gal
MPG 3.6L V6 4x2 / 4x4 TBA
 5.7L V8 4x2 15/22/17 (city/hwy/comb)
 4x4 15/21/17 (city/hwy/comb)

TOW CAPACITY:

QUAD CAB 6'4" BOX
 3.6L Pentastar V6 4x2 6,640-7,750 lb
 4x4 6,460-7,290 lb
 5.7L HEMI® V8 4x2 8,540-12,750 lb
 4x4 8,270-11,460 lb

CREW CAB 5'7" BOX
 3.6L Pentastar V6 4x2 6,590-7,390 lb
 4x4 6,280-7,280 lb
 5.7L HEMI® V8 4x2 8,340-11,530 lb
 4x4 8,090-11,290 lb

CREW CAB 6'4" BOX
 3.6L Pentastar V6 4x2 6,550-8,420 lb
 4x4 6,320-8,220 lb
 5.7L HEMI® V8 4x2 8,330-11,520 lb
 4x4 8,080-11,320 lb

Cameras and parking sensors are fully integrated into mirrors and bodywork, and rather than a mast, the antenna is now integrated into the roof-mounted dorsal satellite receiver.

INTERIOR: Interior design chief Ryan Nagode had the task of implementing rich soft-touch materials that also can take "a bit of abuse." Ergonomics are improved, with the center screen moved up to better fit the user's "reach zone." The screen interface has been redesigned with swipe-left-right "cards" that keep you from having to dig deep into the system. The additional interior dimensions allow a new dual-pane sunroof. A wireless charger is available on most trims, and a new media center lets you charge and display your phone at the same time. A big new console with almost 40 liters of storage houses five USB ports (four are faster Type C and three can be fully functional in the screen simultaneously). The rear includes cupholders plus a spot for rear passengers to set up their tablet, and rear storage areas can handle anything from a 15-inch laptop to long items like builder's levels or fishing rods. Some 151 liters of total vehi-

cle storage are said to be double that of the closest competitor. Climate control is all new, partly driven by the bigger cab. The drivetrain hump is eliminated in the rear for flat-floor comfort. Drive controls—rotary shifter, four-wheel-drive, hill control and such—are grouped together handily.

Seats also lost weight, enabling new features. Front seats can be set 20mm lower and combine with a new tilt/telescope wheel for a wider range of fit. There are four-way power lumbar and four-way adjustable headrests, and the passenger seat gets the same range as the driver. Seats front and rear have three levels of heating, three of venting, and rear seats in higher trims can recline, with a fold-down center area creating individual spaces.

The binnacle cluster is also new, a seven-inch screen with 3D color graphics and functions, and seven reconfigurable zones (or the option of wiping all that info clean, leaving just a speedo).

Six different interior styling themes reflect different models, including instrument fonts and colors that relate to the spirit of each. There are four interior color schemes, and bench seats are avail-

able throughout all trim levels (except Rebel).

ENGINEERING: Ram engineering head Rob Wichman points to a nine percent improvement in aerodynamics (and a Cd of .357), along with 225 pounds of weight reduction, as key not only to efficiency, durability and payload, but to improved ride, handling, steering and braking. Forty percent of the aero improvement was achieved simply by raising the box 35mm (less than 1.5").

An active front air dam shaved an equal amount. This deploys at 35 mph, retracts at 15 mph, and is clutched, so if you encounter an obstacle, it retracts, then redeploys. (This is on standard suspension trucks, while air suspension lowers itself at speed to achieve similar aero improvement and also lower by two inches for access and egress.)

The safety and security features list now tops 100, from familiar items such as blind spot and rear cross traffic alerts, to tech tailored to a big pickup, from 360-degree surround cameras to trailering ("you don't need a PhD in trailer-hookup-ology to make it work with our trucks," says Morrison).

Additional efforts have improved both active



and passive (avoidance and post-event) crashworthiness. High-strength and advanced high-strength steels, also benefiting from new hydroform processes, not only shave weight but create more continuous protective zones. A splayed rail frame design up front mitigates both front and offset impact, while additional blocking protects the cab.

Adaptive cruise and lane keep assist with haptic feedback are joined by two-stage forward crash mitigation. A new fully automatic trailer detect feature learns the length of your trailer as you turn, adding to lane change warnings while towing.

Vehicle dynamics are improved for 20 percent better roll stiffness by a stabilizer bar mounted aft of the front wheels. Five-link rear coil suspension increases payload while, combined with variable-rate rear springs, also improving ride. Stopping distance is best in class, with brake pad area up by 18 percent and rotors an inch bigger front and rear.

When the heavy HEMI engine goes into four-cylinder mode, it can cause vibration. New active tune mass modules (ATMM) counteract this by 180 degrees, so occupants feel nothing. And a clever system works like noise-cancelling headphones, using the speakers of the audio system to create a peaceful cabin at all times on all trims.

POWERTRAIN: The new Ram 1500's engines feature eTorque, which pairs a heavy duty motor-generator unit with a 48-volt power pack unit to achieve four goals—improved fuel economy, per-

formance and drivability, while supporting the increased payload and towing.

Ram powertrain engineer Gay Kent says the system has four functions: [a] replacing the role of the alternator; [b] providing quicker engine start-stop than a starter-based system, spinning up smoothly in less than half a second; [c] becoming part of the power curve, adding up to 90 lb-ft of torque on the V6 and 139 lb-ft on the V8 from the motor-generator, also blending torque strategically during shifts and deceleration; and [d] creating regenerative hybrid power during acceleration and braking, feeding the 48-volt lithium-ion battery back. The power pack—a 12-cell nickel-manganese-cobalt unit—plus 3kW DC-DC converter and battery pack control module together are about the size of a small briefcase and are tucked behind the rear seat.

The 8-speed transmissions have also been developed to work tightly with the engine control module and now have over 40 shift maps, assuring seamless selection of the right gear at all times.

EVOLUTION: The new eTorque engines—3.6L Pentastar V6 and 5.7L HEMI V8—are deep into development. For our launch drive, all models were outfitted with the traditional HEMI V8. As production of the 2019 models gets fully underway, upper trims will have this HEMI at first, while V6 models will only have the new eTorque V6. The eTorque HEMI V8 will join the lineup next.

And—expect an EcoDiesel next year. ■



MODELS AND PRICING

TRADESMAN	
4x2.....Quad.....	\$ 31,695
CREW	34,495
CREW 6'4" box	+300
4x4.....Quad.....	35,195
CREW	37,995
CREW 6'4" box	+300

BIG HORN	
4x2.....Quad.....	35,695
CREW	38,395
CREW 6'4" box	+300
4x4.....Quad.....	39,195
CREW	41,895
CREW 6'4" box	+300

REBEL	
4x2.....CREW	43,995
4x4.....Quad.....	44,695
CREW	47,495

LARAMIE	
4x2....V8.....Quad.....	40,690
V8.....CREW	43,390
V8.....CREW 6'4" box	+300
4x4....V8.....Quad.....	44,190
V8.....CREW	48,890
V8.....CREW 6'4" box	+300

LONGHORN	
4x2....V8.....CREW	51,390
V8.....CREW 6'4" box	+300
4x4....V8.....CREW	54,890
V8.....CREW 6'4" box	+300

LIMITED	
4x2....V8.....CREW	53,890
V8.....CREW 6'4" box	+300
4x4....V8.....CREW	57,390
V8.....CREW 6'4" box	+300

- Models are priced with 3.6L Pentastar V6 eTorque unless noted as V8 (5.7L HEMI), with eTorque HEMI to follow on all later.
- Tradesman, Big Horn and Rebel trims are all eTorque V6 at this time; Laramie, Longhorn and Limited are all HEMI V8.
- Quad cab models have a 6'4" bed. Crew Cab models have a 5'7" Bed standard or are available with Long Wheelbase 6'4" Bed (except Rebel). The price difference for LWB is \$300 for any when available. There are no quad cab versions of Longhorn or Limited trims.
- An Off-Road Package is \$795 on any trim.
- Air suspension is \$1795 on any trim.
- Special limited editions and appearance packages are also available, including Lone Star Edition, Kentucky Derby Edition, Big Horn Sport, Big Horn Black, Laramie Sport, Laramie Black and others, ongoing or at various points in time.

