

Baseline shift

Midsize pickup segment approaches critical mass

BY JOE SAGE

We got our hands on the new Ford Ranger midsize pickup just as it was starting to work its way into the marketplace and consciousness, and it caused quite a stir wherever we went.

Earlier Rangers (evolved from the Ford Courier, a small Mazda-derived pickup in the era of Datsun, Toyota and Chevy Luv small pickups) were notably downscaled—in dimension and function—compared to the full-size F-Series (itself smaller then). But the whole industry has turned a page since then, and Ranger now starts a whole new chapter.

Ranger is available in 4x2 or 4x4 drivetrains, with two cabs (and two bed lengths, either on the same wheelbase), as well as three trim levels, all with the same 2.3L EcoBoost engine and 10-speed automatic. (See price walk at lower right.) Our sample is a top-trim SuperCrew 4x4 Lariat.

We noticed the truck's height right away. On the freeway, we'd get in the mix with both full-size and prior-gen midsize trucks like Nissan Frontier. Between a full-size F-150 and a heavy-duty 3500 dually, our hood and bed heights were about the same, at least with our Ranger's FX4 off-road package (\$1295 we'd spend without hesitation). This gave us a feeling of stature that wasn't really delivered in earlier midsize trucks. Next to a Tacoma or earlier Ranger, we were noticeably taller. Ranger feels ready to run with the big boys.

Inside the cab, you have a really high percentage of full-size truck experience—much the same comfort, stature, height, features and, at least if running solo, elbow room—delivering perhaps 85 percent of a full-size truck experience. Whatever is lacking becomes negligible, at least depending upon your height (we could have used a bit more seat travel and/or height, which are interdependent). From the outside, psychologically and in terms of practicality, the rate of comparison is lower. You can't help but notice it's smaller in hood length, notably in width, and obviously in bed length. Compared with F-Series trucks, it could stand a bit stronger character in its grille and front sheet metal. But overall, the truck has dramatic poise, presence and sense of purpose for its size.

We took delivery of the truck late at night, a good way to experience setup of features and controls, which went smoothly. Sync3 remains a huge improvement over MyFord Touch, and the system benefits tremendously from redundant knobs for some functions (great for the pickup user wearing gloves, or really great for anyone).

In our evaluation rotation, this truck followed a low-slung performance car with wide low-profile tires, and any change of vehicle requires a little getting used to. And we are long-time accustomed to driving full-size 4x4 pickups. Mostly attributable to its narrow width, commanding height and reasonably snow- or off-road-ready tires, the Ranger revealed every side-to-side motion to us pretty strongly, which if nothing else made us aware of its relatively smaller size.

In some situations, the powertrain gave us more growl than go from a standstill, and we might wish the 10-speed was spaced a little differently. (We also wish for an available manual.) Driver assist features could also be touchy, e.g. flashing, beeping and cutting off the radio when someone simply turned right quite a distance ahead of us.

We're definitely at a watershed moment, or at least a transitional era, in which this size pickup is likely to finally come into its own. Toyota Tacoma and Nissan Frontier have soldiered on quite successfully but sort of as niche vehicles for years. Ranger has come and gone, but with the new GM offerings, a new Ranger from Ford, the new Jeep Gladiator coming right up (and we wouldn't be surprised by at least one more), midsize pickups are a more mainstream choice than ever.

We had the new Ranger during auction week, such a crazy busy time we sadly didn't have time to take it off-road and play with the FX4 goodies, but the week did give us exposure to car people and truck people of every stripe, all highly aware of the truck and extremely interested to see it.

The pickup market is growing so strongly right now, it remains to be seen whether the new midsize pickups will divert many 150/1500 sales, versus bringing in all-new truck buyers. The new midsize pickup is nipping at the heels of these full-size pickup's personality just enough that we can imagine some 1500 buyers moving to 2500/3500 heavy duty pickups that are more clearly bigger and tougher. There are still people who long for a smaller pickup, as in an earlier era (before airbags, side impact

and rollover protection). Maybe this will ultimately lead to those, too. However that may unfold, the segment is booming, so rejoice—you own best answer is out there, with more options than ever. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

CONSTRUCTIONbody-on-frame / Wayne, Michigan
ENGINE2.3L EcoBoost I-4 turbo, alum block/head
HP/TORQUE270 hp / 310 lb-ft
TRANSMISSIONelectronic 10-speed SelectShift auto
DRIVETRAIN4x4: front open diff, rear elec lock diff
TRANSFER CASE4x4 high 1:1 / 4x4 low 2.717:1
SUSPENSIONF: short- and long-arm indep, tubular
 stblzr bar: R: Hotchkiss-type nonindependent live,
 leaf springs, onboard shocks.
STEERINGelec power-assist rack & pinion
BRAKESpower discs, 4-sensor 4-channel ABA:
 F: 12.24x1.33", 2.0" twin piston caliper, non-asbestos
 organic pads / R: 12.12x0.94", 2.12" single piston
 caliper, non-asbestos organic pads
WHEELS17x8.0 "magnetic" (color) painted aluminum
TIRESLT 265/65R17 A/T OWL
LENGTH / WHEELBASE210.8 / 126.8 in
TURNING CIRCLE41.99 ft
GROUND CLEARANCEmin running 8.9 in
APPROACH / BREAKOVER / DEPART28.7 / 21.5 / 25.4°
SEATING CAPACITYfive
HEADROOM (F/R)39.8 / 38.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)43.1 / 34.5 in
WEIGHT4441 lb
PAYLOAD / TOW CAPACITY(4x4 crew) 1560 / 7500 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY87 regular / 18 gal
MPG21/26/--- (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE\$38,385

RANGER LARIAT SUPERCREW 4X4 INCLUDES: pushbutton start, leather-trimmed seats, dual-zone climate, SYNC3 w 8" LCD touchscreen, Ford Co-Pilot 360 tech, manual slide rear window w privacy glass & defrost, perimeter alarm, LED headlights/taillights, chrome bar/surround grille.

EQUIPMENT GROUP 501A: incl Technology Package (adaptive cruise, navigation), remote start, Bang & Olufsen 10-spk-plus-subwoofer audio w HD radio, rain-sensing wipers, wiper de-icer.....1795

FX4 OFF-ROAD PKG: off-road tuned suspension, 17" or 18" off-road OWL tires, electronic locking rear differential, exposed front tow hooks & steel bash plate, cluster screen off-road pitch-roll-steering angle, front air dam delete, skid plates (front differential, fuel tank, transfer case), Terrain Mgmt System, Trail Control, FX4 bodyside decals.....1295

SPORT APPEARANCE PKG: black grille w "magnetic" (color) bars & surround, 17" magnetic-paint alum wheels (18" opt), magnetic front & rear bumpers, magnetic wheel lip moldings, Sport bodyside decal (delete w/ FX4 pkg).....895

SPRAY-IN BEDLINER495

FLOOR LINERS - TRAY STYLE135

DESTINATION CHARGE1195

TOTAL\$44,195

PRICE WALK: RANGER LINEUP

SUPERCAB (6' BOX)4X2	XL	\$24,300
"	XLT	27,940
"	LARIAT	32,210
+ADD TO ANY FOR 4X4 DRIVETRAIN+4000		
"	4X4 XL	\$28,300
"	XLT	31,940
"	LARIAT	36,210
+ADD TO ANY FOR SUPERCREW+2175		
SUPERCREW (5' BOX)4X2	XL	\$26,475
"	XLT	30,115
"	LARIAT	34,385
+ADD TO ANY FOR 4X4 DRIVETRAIN+4000		
"	4X4 XL	\$30,475
"	XLT	34,115
"	LARIAT	38,385

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

Welcome to a world where the roads are dry, the cars are slick and the destinations are limitless...



We drive customers to your business.

Print, social media and web promo bundles

Sponsored content and special sections

Custom publications, brochures, direct mail

sales@arizonadrivermagazine.com

main office: 480-948-0200

www.arizonadrivermagazine.com