

PREMIUM HIGH-END TRUCK — WITH WORK BOOTS

BY JOE SAGE

GMC has upped its game in the increasingly competitive factory-ready off-road pickup category, adding the Sierra 1500 AT4X to the already highly capable AT4. The new build also moves the high end of the full Sierra 1500 lineup even higher, now priced above the latest top luxury truck, the Denali Ultimate (driven in our July-August 2022 issue).

The AT4 comes with a choice of 3.0L Duramax turbo diesel six or 6.2L EcoTec3 gasoline V8, while the new AT4X is V8-only. The smaller diesel and

big V8 both have 460 lb-ft of torque, but the V8's 420 horsepower is far above the diesel's 260.

That's a variable, but there are changes in the build. While the AT4 has automatic differentials, the AT4X has selectable electronic differentials front and rear; a one-pedal rock-crawling mode; and that hallmark of the best factory off-roaders, 33-inch Goodyear Wrangler Territory M/T tires. A number of tech features that are optional on AT4 become standard on AT4X, and the AT4X adds a

surprising but welcome creature comfort for a burly off-roader—advanced massaging seats.

The new AT4X enhances its suspension in several big ways. It adds two inches of factory lift (which, with tires, makes three inches of increased ground clearance), advanced dampers and different springs for improved handling control, offering a deeper dive into the wild, with a more comfortable ride even on the roughest roads.

The Sierra 1500 AT4 starts at \$66,700 with the diesel six or \$68,150 with the V8. When the Denali Ultimate and AT4X were simultaneously released last summer, the luxe truck ran slightly higher than the premium off-roader. As prices shift this year,

the AT4X has now moved to top place, \$81,800 vs \$81,045 for the Denali Ultimate. The AT4X AEV Edition, with more advanced skid plates and other details, adds \$6,895 (all as of late February).

It's a tall truck. Ours had dealer-installed rock rails, but two kinds of steps are available options.

While AT4X at core is about beefy build, there is also all that added tech running up its price—ironically to us, as we turned off what we could (especially its chirps and voiceovers). Another layer of irony is that this wild lands getaway truck is heavily layered with Google-enabled tracking. We largely disabled it. Every time. We think.

The drive and ride are magnificent. We headed off pavement in the high country in midafternoon, with snow forecast for the coming night, popping it into 4HI (via a button and knob group next to sim-

ilar headlight controls). There was a fair amount of UTV traffic making its way out of the backcountry at first, and the road is narrow, curvy, cliff-hanging and quite tight in spots. But the AT4X on its big Goodyear Wranglers was always precisely controllable and manageable—we could always squeeze into some little spot and let them get by.

We drove farther than expected, then farther than that, then farther still. We could have driven our AT4X forever. As the last peach-colored glow peeked through a rocky gap to the west, snow-laden clouds were quickly settling down the peaks and slopes just above us. We had neither a sleeping bag nor cell signal and finally turned around.

The drive back out brings another nod to the tires—this was a rocky trail that could send any

(cont'd)



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Silao, Guanajuato, Mexico
ENGINE / TRANSMISSION	USA / USA
PARTS CONTENT	33% US/Can / 38% Mexico
BUILD	crew cab / short box / 4WD
ENGINE	6.2L EcoTec3 V8 VVT DI with Dynamic Fuel Management, alum/alum, OHV 16v VVT, direct high-pressure fuel inj
HP/TORQUE	420 hp / 460 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO ..(per 2022 specs)	11.5:1
TRANSMISSION	Hydra-Matic 10-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	4x4
TRANSFER CASE	2-spd with e-locking front & rear differentials
AXLE RATIO	3.23
SUSPENSION	2-inch lift on AT4X.
	F: independent coil-over-shock w twin-tube shocks; R: solid axle w semi-elliptic, variable-rate, two-stage multileaf springs, splayed twin-tube shocks
STEERING	elec pwr-assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	vented: F: 13x1.18; R: 13.6x0.79
WHEELS	18x8.5 aluminum in black
TIRES	LT275/70R18 Goodyear Wrangler Territory M/T
LENGTH / WHEELBASE ..(cc/sb)	231.9 / 147.4 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	11.1 in
APPR / BRKVR / DEPART	25.6 / 22.7 / 23°
TURNING CIRCLE	47.3 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	43.0 / 40.1 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	44.5 / 43.4 in
BED LENGTH	(short box) 5'8"
BASE CURB WEIGHT	(AT4X) 5780 lb
MAX GVWR	(AT4X) 7100 lb
BASE PAYLOAD	(AT4X) 1290 lb
TOW CAPACITY	(AT4X) 8900 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	premium unl / 24 gal
MPG	14/17/15 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$77,500
ROCKER PROTECTION (dealer installed)	1195
PAINT: Desert Sand Metallic	495
-CREDIT: not equipped w steering col lock) ..(50)	
DESTINATION CHARGE	1795
TOTAL	\$80,935

NOTE: price has increased since our sticker; AT4X base now \$81,800 at time of publication.

2023 GMC SIERRA 1500 KEY BUILD VARIABLES

Trims Pro, SLE, Elevation, SLT, AT4, Denali, Denali Ultimate, AT4X, AT4X AEV Edition

Engines / Transmissions
 2.7L Turbo-4 High Output 8-spd auto
 5.3L EcoTec3 V8 10-spd auto
 6.2L EcoTec3 V8
 3.0L Duramax I-6 Turbo-Diesel

Cabs / Beds short standard long
 Regular 6'6" 8'0"
 Double 6'6"
 Crew 5'8" 6'6"

Wheels 17, 18, 20, 22-inch

Tires A/S, A/T, Goodyear Wrangler

Tow capacity 8,900 to 13,100 lb

Fuel capacity Reg cab 28.3 gal
 Double / Crew cabs 24.0 gal

Base price range \$37,200 to \$81,800

number of vehicles skittering toward a cliff, but like a horse headed back to the barn, we were making good time now, hammering along at 25-6-7 mph with full control (and maximum enjoyment).

We hadn't thought about fuel mileage—that's not the main purpose of such a truck. We had noted at delivery, though, a "best" fuel economy readout of 23.0 MPG—and we're still curious how this was achieved, in a truck rated 14 MPG city, 15 combined. Its ongoing readout of 13.4 average was more as expected. As we wrapped up our off-pavement drive and entered the highway, we noted 9.7 MPG average, not surprising after our tough drive, but from there it rose consistently. There's a third readout, too, a vertical bar graph, constantly dancing as circumstances changed. This became its own entertainment on the open road, rapidly displaying 32, then 31-29-24-17-33 MPG readouts, pegging at 99 when under no particular engine load. This was on an even-pedal cruise, but the big V8 has one more trick—Active Fuel Management (GM's cylinder deactivation system) to shut off cylinders and improve fuel mileage according to conditions. This is surely behind the variations that were displayed and suggests that an owner, over more time under more conditions, can probably achieve brag-worthy numbers on a regular basis. Without trying, we ended up at 11.3 MPG overall, including that whole dirt run.

Some luxury buyers of the Denali Ultimate may feel disappointed that it's not the most expensive version now, while off-roaders will revel in that thought, enjoying best of both. Prices could switch back again, anyway. It's best to figure they deliver the same glory, just with different strokes for different purposes. And it is just possible the AT4X may offer what it takes to satisfy either. ■

