

Deciding on a new pickup is notoriously complex, and Bronco is close behind. Our most simplified document outlining all the model and trim differences runs 39 pages (and this is setting aside the Bronco Sport, a very different vehicle on a smaller platform). There are now nine trim levels (or models, as Raptor is treated distinctly), times two for 2-Door and 4-Door models, minus three that are 4-Door only, times transformative packages like Sasquatch that are available on certain trims, and there are hard- and soft-tops. Three engines include 2.3L and 2.7L EcoBoosts at 300 and 330 hp on premium fuel (275/315 on regular), plus a third for Raptor, and there are (in some cases) manual or

automatic transmissions. One 154-cell chart explains the differences just among axles. And so on. Other variables fall largely to degrees—of luxury trim and features, and of off-roadiness. Raptor version aside, they run about \$40 to \$70 grand.

By any measure—casual glance or deep dive—Raptor (based on Badlands) is the top Bronco, with its own 418-horsepower twin-turbo 3.0-liter V6 (regular fuel) and the most extreme suspension. The Bronco Raptor starts at about \$90,000.

The new Bronco Wildtrak we're driving here (based on Outer Banks) will thus be a clear choice for many. At about \$60,000, this rugged build approaches the off-road capability of Rap-

tor—notably also sitting atop 35-inch tires, with a HOSS 3.0 off-road suspension system on Wildtrak versus 4.0 on Raptor, for largely the same degree of stance and function. High and Lux Packages are available to build upon the basic Wildtrak.

As dirt-worthy as the Bronco Wildtrak clearly is, we started our week with several days of freeway running to an event, 100 miles or so round-trip each time. This seems inappropriate to its core mission, but turned out to be an opportunity to confirm that this build is superb on freeways and local roads—powerful and, even with its massive wheels and tires, highly manageable, tracking true, with very solid control and no drift. Bronco's form factor can

produce a bit of wind noise, and lightweight removable doors can amplify the sound of a highway pebble, but these just confirm the special nature of the beast. In fact, you can have a ball with this big off-roader in town—power into a corner with quick acceleration when the light turns green, glide over rain troughs, park in the tightest spots and easily choose your path on a busy freeway.

We first got the Wildtrak out into the serious dirt on our fourth day, starting as the sun came up, popping it into 4HI as we left the pavement. The 4WD system is on-demand, via the simple push of a button, which in turn is surrounded by a dial for GOAT modes. These include the familiar normal, eco, sport, slippery, mud/ruts and sand (as most do, from Big Bend up), but as with Raptor and Badlands, Wildtrak adds a Baja mode, conceived for

Raptor's high-speed dune-running, but on Wildtrak ensuring 4HI is engaged. On typical Arizona trails—dirt and ruts with some loose surfaces, but less commonly pure sand and not often mud—modes as named can be a stumper. Of the choices here, mud/ruts, sand or Baja are all solid contenders. As there was no mud, and ruts are always a given, we went with sand, as dirt or gravel can be loose. And once again, as we later departed the dirt, we realized we'd had no compulsion to try any others—confirming that while any mode is an assist, it's the core 4WD system that has to earn an A-plus, and this most certainly does.

Fuel mileage (rated 17 mpg across the board) is not a major bragging point, yet casual reference to its readout showed we stayed within one point of this no matter what we threw at it. Even our off-highway session brought it down just a little, to 16.1 mpg. We didn't get into eco mode or anything remotely like hypermiling, plus turned off fuel-conserving auto start-stop—so just imagine what you could achieve if you really try. Most significantly, fuel mileage was the same wherever we drove it, again confirming this is equally well suited to duty as a daily driver or a weekend adventurer.

It's a given that the Bronco Wildtrak does extremely well in extreme terrain. It was a special delight to find it does just as well everywhere. If you want a Bronco that looks dang near as cool as any version in the lineup and is dang near as capable, while all at a lower-midrange price—and also available as a 2-Door, which the Raptor is not—the new Wildtrak is a winner. ■

WILD THANG

Mission-built, yet remarkably all-purpose

BY JOE SAGE



2024 BRONCO LINEUP

	2-DOOR	4-DOOR
Big Bend	\$39,130	\$39,870
Black Diamond	42,630	43,370
Heritage Edition	47,855	48,775
Outer Banks	---	47,940
Badlands	49,395	50,685
Everglades	---	55,520
Wildtrak	60,025	60,565
Heritage Limited Edition	69,685	71,105
Raptor	---	89,835

SPECIFICATIONS (2023)

ASSEMBLY	Michigan
ENGINE BUILD	Lima Engine Plant, Ohio
ENGINE	2.7L EcoBoost V6, Ti-VCT GTDI, port fuel, dir inject, lightweight high-strength cast alum pistons w low-friction skirt coating & steel ring, forged steel rods & crank, roller finger follower lifters w hydraulic compensating lash adjusters, composite intake, dual mono-scroll turbo w electrically actuated wastegate, integrated cylinder head exhaust casting
HP/TORQUE	reg (rec) 315 hp / 410 lb-ft prem (opt) 330 hp / 415 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.0:1
ALTERNATOR	single 240A
BATTERY GROUP	H7 AGM 80 AH 800 CCA
TRANSMISSION	10-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	4x4
TRANSFER CASE	advanced 4x4 w 4A mode, auto on-demand engage, 3.06:1 low ratio
MAX CRAWL RATIO	67.80:1
AXLES	F: indep; R: solid
CHASSIS	body-on-frame, fully boxed high-strength steel w seven cross members, HOSS (High Performance Off-Road Stability Suspension) System w low-mass indep front susp, five-link solid rear axle w Panhard rod and outboard coilover springs
SUSPENSION	F: twin forged alloy A-arms w long-travel coil-over springs, HOSS-tuned heavy-duty dampers; R: 220mm solid rear axle w long-travel, variable rate coil-over springs, HOSS-tuned heavy-duty dampers; (optional: Bilstein position-sensitive dampers w end-stop control valves)
STEERING	three-mode rack & pinion w 3 drive modes, Terrain Mgmt System w G.O.A.T. Modes (Goes Over Any Terrain)
BRAKES	F: 311x34mm vented, 52mm twin-piston floating; R: 308x24mm, single 54mm floating
WHEELS	17-in black high-gloss painted alum w warm alloy black beauty ring, beadlock capable
TIRES	Goodyear Territory LT 315/70R17 M/T 35-in
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	189.5 / 116.1 in
WIDTH / TRACK	79.3 / 66.9 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	(35-in tires) 11.5 in
APPR / BRKVR / DEPART	(°) 43.2 / 26.3 / 37.0°
MAX WATER FORDING	33.5 in
TURNING CIRCLE	39.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	(hard top) 40.8 / 40.1 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	(°) 43.1 / 36.3 in
CARGO CAPACITY	35.6 / 77.6 cu.ft
WEIGHT / PAYLOAD	4757 / 1322 lb
ROOF PANEL WEIGHT	front left 13.6, front right 14.5, mid panel 28.1 lb
DOOR WEIGHT	front 55, rear 44 lb
TOW CAPACITY	3460 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg, prem opt / 20.8 gal
MPG	17/17/17 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$54,320
EQUIP GROUP 354A: Wildtrak Series, High Pkg, 12-in LCD center touchscreen, 360° camera, Lux Pkg, adaptive cruise, heated steering wheel, wireless charging pad	3195
SEATS: leather-trim/vinyl sandstone/black	2195
FRONT BUMPER: HD modular	575
STEEL BASH PLATES: full vehicle	395
HARD TOP: gray molded-in color	695
HEADLINER: sound deadening	595
KEYLESS ENTRY KEYPAD	110
FLOOR MATS: upgraded carpet	160
DESTINATION CHARGE	1595
TOTAL	\$63,835

Prices have increased for 2024; see chart.