

The big news of this build of the Toyota Tacoma sits atop the still-big news of the new-for-2024 generation-four Tacoma itself. That's right—just three generations spanned the prior 30 years of this mighty midsize, supporting both the idea that this is a timeless vehicle, while it had been due for a new version, all the moreso as the segment has grown far more populated.

All the new Tacoma builds have more power, via one of two powertrains (see sidebar). The standard 2.4-liter i-FORCE turbo brings 278 horsepower and 317 lb-ft of torque to the game, while the line-topping i-FORCE MAX turbo hybrid hits 327 hp

and a potent 465 lb-ft. While a few trims offer six-speed manuals, and a few offer rear-drive versions (only with the base engine, in either case), the majority are automatics, and all are either also available as 4x4, or (in most cases) they are 4x4-only.

Last year, we drove the new TRD Off-Road and TRD Pro relatively briefly off-road, as part of a regional comparo and a multi-vehicle introduction.

We looked forward to some town and highway time, where the prior gen had room for improvement in power and gearing. And here we are. This would be our first full week with any, and it's the newest version, Trailhunter, a 327-hp i-FORCE MAX,

with top power plus hybrid fuel mileage in the low-mid-20s. With prodigious off-road capabilities, this build also arguably leans a bit more toward dual duty in town than those TRDs, perfect for gauging that pavement performance.

Another dirt-specialist Tacoma? When you are as hot in the market as Tacoma, volume and demand can beget variety most can never achieve. And yes, the Trailhunter does turn out to have a flavor very much its own. The only hard part is that deciding may have just gotten tougher than ever.

Trailhunter's off-road engineering is both similar to and different from TRD Pro (its most irresistible comparison), featuring Old Man Emu 2.5-inch forged monotube shocks with rear external piggyback style remote reservoirs, a low-profile high-mount air intake (snorkel) and 33-inch Goodyear Rugged-Terrain tires with 18-in bronze-finish wheels, plus RIGID color-selectable LED fog lamps and a bronze grille with integrated LED light bar.

All Trailhunters are 4x4 i-FORCE MAX turbo hybrids. One distinction is that Trailhunter is available with either a 5-foot bed or a 6-footer, as on TRD Off-Road, but the latter is not offered with TRD Pro, where tight turning (and lower volume) generally

ruled product planning. Trailhunter's price with five-foot bed is \$1,000 lower than TRD Pro, but shaves the difference to \$500 with our six-footer.

Tacoma Trailhunter is a Double Cab with either bed, which, on top of its taller stance, makes an immediate impression of substantial size. We like that. Perfect as a midsize can be in a lot of cases, it's never fun to be the little guy on a freeway full of full-size, and this beefy build narrows the gap.

The flip side to this version's extra length may be its turning circle, running just north of 50 feet.

Features are plentiful, and most are well laid out and work as intended. Cool touches abound, such as marker lights on the bed rail that you'll notice as soon as you open your doors. The ARB Sport Bar is another personality touch with poten-

(cont'd)

NEW BAG OF TRICKS

MEET TRAILHUNTER

BY JOE SAGE



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Guanajuato, Mexico
ENGINE	.....i-FORCE MAX 2.4L 4-cyl turbo hybrid, DOHC 16v, D-4S fuel inj
HP/TORQUE	.....(Trailhunter) 323 hp / 465 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....11:1
TRANSMISSION	.....8-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	.....part-time 4WD
SUSPENSION	.....(Trailhunter) F: 2.5-in Old Man Emu shocks w unique End Zone Control Tech, standard stblz w disconnect; R: same specs as front
STEERING	.....EPS: pwr-asst rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 13.4 vented; R: 13.2 vented
WHEELS/TIRES	.....18-in Trailhunter alloys w 33-in Goodyear Territory R/T tires
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....226.2 / 145.1 in
INSIDE BED LENGTH	.....(6-ft bed) 73.5 in
WIDTH BTWN WHEEL WELLS	.....44.7 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....not stated by trim
APPR/DEP/BRKOVER	.....not stated by trim
TURNING CIRCLE	.....(6-ft bed) 50.6 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....39.7 / 38.4 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.8 / 33.7 in
WEIGHT	.....(i-FORCE MAX 4x4 double cab) 5030-5410 lb
GVWR	.....( " ) 6665-6835 lb
MAX PAYLOAD	.....( " ) 1420-1710 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....( " ) 5950-6000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....reg unl / 18.2 gal
MPG	.....22/24/23 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$63,235
TOWING TECH PKG: incl Toyota wireless camera system	.....850
BALL MOUNT	.....70
DOOR PANEL SCUFF PROTECTOR	.....135
SPRAY-ON BED LINER	.....575
MINI TIE-DOWN	.....45
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1495
TOTAL	.....\$66,405

2025 TOYOTA TACOMA LINEUP

	.....4x2	.....4x4
SR		
XtraCab LB (6-ft)	.....\$31,590	.....\$34,790
Double Cab SB (5-ft)	.....33,790	.....36,990
Double Cab SB 6MT	.....	.....36,990
SR5		
XtraCab LB	.....36,220	.....39,420
Double Cab SB	.....37,290	.....40,490
Double Cab LB	.....37,790	.....40,990
PreRunner		
XtraCab LB	.....38,120	
TRD Sport		
Double Cab SB	.....39,400	.....42,600
Double Cab SB 6MT	.....	.....41,800
Double Cab LB	.....39,900	.....43,100
i-FORCE MAX Dbl Cab	.....	.....46,320
TRD Off-Road		
Double Cab SB	.....42,900	
Double Cab SB 6MT	.....	.....41,800
Double Cab LB	.....	.....43,400
i-FORCE MAX Dbl Cab	.....	.....46,620
Limited		
Double Cab SB	.....52,555	
i-FORCE MAX Dbl Cab	.....	.....55,880
Trailhunter		
i-FORCE MAX Dbl Cab	.....62,735	
i-FORCE MAX Dbl Cab LB (6-ft)	.....	.....63,235
TRD Pro		
i-FORCE MAX Dbl Cab	.....	.....63,735

tial of more function (e.g. driving lights), though its corner bracing inside the bed can preclude fully accommodating some pickup loads up to or beyond bed height. The tailgate is electric (which we could live without), and there is no corner step (despite being tall, so we could have used one).

Not for deep fording, thus not a snorkel per se, the high air intake—to avoid ingesting dust and dirt on the trail—is a key identifier receiving varying degrees of love. Note that this is not deemed necessary on TRD Pro as outfitted, so consider it a style point—and it does add something to the look and feel. (If you never really need it, or use it only very occasionally, it may almost be the style-and-intent equivalent of a 4Runner's popular little ladder.) The key thing is not appearance, however. The distinctive faint metallic rattlesnake rattle of the high intake will fairly continually remind you of its presence during regular driving—as is typical, something some will love, others dislike, and some simply shrug off. But since you've seen it with, the visual will make you want to keep it. The paradox is that, of the topmost off-road Tacomas, this off-road feature comes on one that may have an equal edge in regular pavement driving.

We enjoyed the drive thoroughly—in town, on mountain highways and two-lanes, and off-road. Its generous horses and torque are more about power than instant acceleration or precision in town—just let the urban superspeedway drivers go. Lane-keeping tech could be overaggressive.

Our truck was new and particularly transmitted every detail of washboard and ruts on unpaved

roads at reasonable driving speed. Switching between 2HI and 4HI on the go could not be easier. We also found we could perform much dirt trail driving in 2HI, if for any reason you wanted to.

Switching back to 2HI back at the edge of civilization is just as easy, and Trailhunter's highway manners are tops—you would not know the off-road capability you have beneath your feet, cruising, keeping your lanes, maintaining your speed, carving your curves, all nice and smooth, and without much road or wind noise (just the snorkel).

You wouldn't even parse finer points for this new build on its own, but with TRD Pro differentiation in mind, Trailhunter may shape up as a good package for those who really, really want to be able to do some off-roading, but maybe not really that much—but when they do, to have no compromise to speak of. Some may focus on it as being much like the TRD Pro but offering a six-foot bed. Spec by spec, its off-roading is a little bit lighter-duty, but still with as much as many may need. And its style and manners may have an edge in town.

We had kind of expected it to be a hair-splitting fine line of difference, but one you get in and drive them both, you'll know exactly how they're different, exactly how that can work for you, and exactly whether Trailhunter is the one you need, or the most direct comparative, TRD Pro. It's remarkable.

Joining an already impressive stable of dirt-capable beasts—including TRD Sport, TRD Off-Road and TRD Pro—the new Tacoma Trailhunter finds its own powerful spot, with its own build, its own personality and its own taste for adventure. ■

