

Engineering is always interesting. But product planning is every bit as much so. Calculations and tooling, after all, do not start in earnest until they know what they want to build and why.

As with so many things, the Ford Tremor story is equal parts simple and complex. It largely spins off Ford Raptor, and the two together could fill a book. The state of the market is clear—once introduced, neither ever goes away, as they are so popular.

F-150 Raptor was the first—an extreme special duty pickup project, originally aimed at competitive dune-running. Our market is, of course, the perfect example of how people are going to buy them anyway, as a daily driver. And despite its very high end position, an F-150 Raptor has a quite reasonable base price of \$79,005. And now there are three Raptors, all built atop high-volume models already with significant core off-road chops—F-150, Ranger and Bronco—all in Ford's Performance Vehicles group, a stable combining these with Ford GT, the

raciest Mustangs, and Explorer ST.

Tremor splits differently—an F-150 and Ranger, yes, then also adding the lower-volume core-chops F-250, as well as the innovative unibody Maverick and—a different kind of echo to Raptor's Bronco inclusion—the larger Expedition SUV and now Explorer. These are not in the Performance Vehicles stable, rather just among the various trims available for each, like XLT or Lariat. (To stir it up a little more, there is also a Tremor package, not a full build, on Bronco Sport, not Bronco.) As direct comparison to Raptor, F-150 Tremor starts at \$58,321.

Among Ford pickups, there are more radical off-roaders, but in the Explorer this is the off-roadiest.

This kind of pattern—extreme iterations, begetting more moderate and accessible evolutions—has many precedents in many vehicle types. Maybe the product planners caught a clamoring for an

Explorer Raptor, but market numbers supported a Tremor. Or maybe the clamoring was for exactly this. Maybe it fills a spot that shifted in the current wax-and-wane of EV interest. Maybe it's a punch-list and timeline that existed all along.

Whatever the case, with Ford Explorer already a diversely capable vehicle, this a build providing inspiration and attitude, as much as actual physical and engineering edge. Its personality ensures it is more than the sum of its parts, which themselves already add up well—a mildly-modded off-roader with beefed-up suspension, an inch more ground clearance, a 400-hp 3.0-liter EcoBoost V6, 10-speed automatic, 4WD of course, and a range of additional details and features. And its well-established EcoBoost tech delivers 22 mpg highway in a substantial 4500-plus-pound three-row utility.

In line with its Tremor-adapted mission, we did a bit of off-pavement time, the weekend warrior kind, with default drivetrain, in normal mode, as these met all challenges, with more extreme systems never really demanded or coming into play.

We did play with drive modes a bit during the week. A console-based controller spins freely, as you keep an eye on the binnacle to see where to land (off-road, sport, tow-haul, eco, normal, slippery). These are all things we would expect to be solid straight out of the box, anyway. And whereas we could get a noticeable if slight bump in sport on ramps and freeways, we were generally fine in normal. It has 400 horsepower, after all (on premium fuel, which is user-optional at any time). We prefer this approach—modes for a little extra, but not essential, fine in default, not vital alternate realities, just icing on the cake if desired.

The 10-speed automatic could be very active at

times, but is mostly transparent. It did seem to be its smoothest when in normal mode.

Fuel mileage rating proved accurate—we had reset it at the start and averaged 18.6 mpg the entire time, as usual with no special care applied.

[One note: in an era of complex and often invasive user interfaces, this Google-based unit is especially so, requiring an unusual amount of personal and travel data. We recommend research.]

Ford Explorer as a model lineup sits right in a golden spot of power, size and expectations, probably bearing the most popularly calibrated dimensions and capacities. With the Explorer Tremor build, if you expect 400 horses to feel like a lot of power, you may find that you also feel its medium-large SUV heft. If you expect to feel its medium-large SUV heft, you will likely thrill to the V6 EcoBoost's impressive power. Either way, it's well balanced and more than the sum of its parts. ■

Attitude and intent

Explorer with an edge

BY JOE SAGE



SPECIFICATIONS

(Compiled from multiple sources.)

ASSEMBLY	Chicago Assembly Plant
ENGINE	Lima (OH) Engine Plant
CONSTRUCTION	unibody
ROWS / SEATS	three / six
ENGINE	(opt) 3.0L EcoBoost 60° 24v V6: DOHC, twin indep var cam timing, roller finger follower, compacted graphite iron alum block, alum head w integrated exh manifold, compos shell-welded intake manifold w runner pack, forged steel crank
HP/TORQUE	(w prem fuel) 400 hp / 415 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.5:1
TRANSMISSION	10-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	Intelligent 4WD
0-TO-60	approx 5.1-5.5 sec
TOP SPEED	approx 130-143 mph
SUSPENSION	(Tremor) off-road tuned w unique spring rates, upgraded dampers, one-inch factory lift
STEERING	speed-sensing elec power
BRAKES	upgraded from heavy-duty Ford Police Interceptor: F: 13.6 vented; R: 12.6 unclear whether solid or vented
WHEELS	18-in High Gloss Ebony Black painted alum w Electric Spice accents
TIRES	P265/65R18 All-Terrain (A/T)
GROUND CLEARANCE	8.7 in
APPRCH / DEPART / BRKVER	24.1 / 23.6 / 18.7°
TURNING CIRCLE	approx 40 ft
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	198.7 / 119.1 in
HEADROOM (F/2/3)	(mnrf) 38.9 / 38.2 / 38.9 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3)	42.9 / 38.3 / 32.2 in
CARGO CAPACITY	16.3 / 46.0 / 85.3 cu.ft
WEIGHT	approx 4523 lb
TOW CAPACITY	5000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unl / 20.2 gal
MPG	17/22/19 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$48,465
PAINT: Vapor Blue	495
ULTIMATE PKG: moonroof w fixed glass & power shade, ambient lighting, B&O 14-spkr audio, multicontour front seats, auto-dim rear mirror, driver's seat memory, powerfold third row seats	11,850
KEYLESS ENTRY KEYPAD	455
18-IN SPARE WHEEL & JACK KIT	400
CONNECTIVITY PKG: 1-time 7-yr	745
SIRIUSXM W 360L: 3-yr plan	300
DESTINATION CHARGE	1695

TOTAL \$64,405
Note: price has gone up since ours; see chart.

2026 FORD EXPLORER LINEUP

	RWD	4WD
Active 100A	\$38,465	\$40,465
Active	40,585	42,585
ST-Line	45,155	47,155
Tremor	—	48,965
Platinum	50,965	52,965
ST	54,905	56,905