

## Dodge Delivers with Ram Heavy Duty Trucks

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Pickup trucks are a constant of the American auto industry. While the passenger car world may trend towards economy today and opulence tomorrow, and the size of the popular cars goes up and down, the world of pickup trucks stays more or less the same.

Pickup trucks stay the same because they're the vehicle of choice for hundreds of thousands of small businesses, farmers, and anyone with some dirty stuff to haul. All of those folks need their truck to make a living and they put a lot of miles on them, so the market for these vehicles is perennial.

A full-size ¾-ton or 1-ton pickup today is pretty much the same size and shape as it was 30 or 40 years ago. It's still powered by a V8 engine in almost every case, and it's still got a bed sized to fit a 4x8 sheet of plywood.

But that's about where the similarity ends. A modern truck is not the Spartan work vehicle that our fathers drove. Climb into a 2010 model from any manufacturer and you'll find every feature you expect in the top of the line luxury cars. And the automakers have enhanced the features that work trucks need to fulfill their function.

The case in point today is the 2010 Dodge Ram heavy duty truck series. These ¾ and 1-ton trucks not only tow and haul more weight than their predecessors, they've got desirable features such as integrated trailer brake control, a backup camera for easy trailer hookup, and in the case of Dodge's famous Cummins Turbo Diesel models, they now come with an exhaust (also known as "Jake") brake to slow the truck on downhill stretches without overloading the brakes. You can also get such conveniences as a swing-out step for climbing into the bed, and a preinstalled fifth wheel or gooseneck tow hitch in the bed.

That's the tough stuff, but when you get into the cab you'll find a field office as comfortable and well-appointed as any top of the line sedan. Beyond simple air conditioning and cruise control, you'll get a fancy stereo, Bluetooth phone support, navigation and backup camera, 110V and 12V power outlets, heated leather seats, and even wood trim.

To introduce the media to these new trucks, Dodge took us to San Antonio, Texas, and we spent a day mud-bogging and off-roading the 4WD versions, and using the big diesel 1-ton duallies to tow up to 16,000 pounds on a gooseneck trailer.

As someone who regularly tows a heavy trailer, I can tell you with confidence that these trucks are a joy when towing. They're stable, have enough brakes, and the integrated brake controller eliminates the need to dig around under the dash to install your own. The latest generation Cummins turbo-diesel makes 360 horsepower and a whopping 600 pound-feet of torque, so you should have no trouble towing a whole city block at highway speeds.

The majority of trucks sold in the United States come with 4WD. Most don't really need it, but it's a very masculine feature and guys love it. We took advantage of that to put the new Dodges through a torture test in the Texas hill country. The trucks ate up every challenge we could throw at them. Visualize a Super Bowl commercial with some country & western beefcake singer yodeling about toughness and work and you'll get the idea. If you want tough 4WD, Dodge has got it.

One of the best pieces of news that Dodge had for us is that the new line of trucks will actually be cheaper than their predecessors. Not a lot cheaper – just a few hundred bucks, on average – but not more expensive, either. Dodge is banking on selling a lot of these trucks as part of Chrysler's rehabilitation to profitability. The mood of the Chrysler employees at this launch was upbeat, and they plan to stick around to experience the good times ahead.

The big 3 continually compete to have the hot new truck, and they leapfrog each other every year or two. With this new heavy duty line, Dodge has once again sprinted out in front of the competition. So if you're in the market for a serious truck this year, you should definitely check out Dodge.