

TRUCKS 2014



Options for Bedliners

Bedliners have come a long way over the years. Once an afterthought for many drivers, using bedliners to protect both the vehicle and the items being hauled is becoming a vital part of owning a truck. And there are more aftermarket choices available than ever before.

The amount of money you are willing to shell out for truck bed protection should depend on how much you are planning to load up your vehicle – and with what kind of cargo.

Bedliner makers have created options for use ranging from occasional to daily, ensuring that everyone who needs one has an option that can work for them.

DROP-IN LINERS

Usually thick and created from durable plastic, drop-in liners are most often a one-size-fits-all option. Their rigidity makes them a perfect choice for heavy-duty hauling, as they can withstand substantial weight and scraping.

That dependability translates into confidence for many truck owners in knowing that their truck beds are well protected.

SPRAY-ON LINERS

Spray liners are made of a high-quality paint coating that can be customized to fit any size of truck bed. They are a good choice for older trucks that can sometimes be difficult to find matching liners for their beds.

Though some spray-on formulations are not as durable as a drop-in liner, spray-on options are popular because of the sleek look they give when new and their ability to stop moisture damage that can creep in



underneath the drop-in liners.

Damage to your liner can usually be repaired by re-spraying, but be prepared. Spray-on liners are not the cheapest way to protect a bed.

CARPET LINERS

Carpet rugs work as great bedliners if you are hauling damageable goods that need a soft surface during transport. They are also an ideal option in tandem with a cover or bed cap.

This will help protect your carpeting from rain or other weather elements that can damage both your liner and your items. Carpet liners are generally less expensive than both a spray or drop-in liner, too.

Why Go Diesel?

Dependability. Performance. Fuel efficiency. Take your pick. Diesels have become a viable choice for many buyers looking for a long-lasting, more powerful option than gasoline-run trucks.



And not just the big boys. Ram recently introduced a half-ton model that runs on diesel. From small to large and everywhere in between, diesel is on the rise.

DEPENDABILITY AND POWER

Diesel fuel is full of rich natural lubricants that help sustain and strengthen your engine at the same time. This is why diesel engines have three times the life of comparable gas engines.

According to consumerreports.org, the average gas engine logs about 125,000 miles before it needs a rebuild. The same site estimates that the average diesel engine will travel 375,000 miles before it needs to be rebuilt.

And once a rebuild is required, diesel engines are easier to repair than a gas engine because they are comprised of fewer moving parts.

DIESEL IS TRENDING: EVEN IN HALF-TON TRUCKS

No, you shouldn't base your purchase decision on market popularity, but truck manufacturers have started introducing diesel engines in even their half-ton models. Following Ram's launch of a 3.0-liter, V6 turbo-diesel for the

1500, other brands have said they may follow suit if the market demands it.

The popularity of smaller trucks touting diesel engines probably won't be fully realized until the impact of gas prices and customer demand are measured, but early reviews have been kind to the trend.

Diesel engines generally create a great deal more torque than gasoline engines, which leads to better acceleration under heavy loads.

FUEL CONSUMPTION

On conventional diesels, incoming air travels through a cleaner. Where diesel engines differentiate themselves from gas-powered vehicles are the modern turbochargers that can push greater volumes of air into the cylinders. This may provide more power and much better fuel economy under optimum conditions.

The Society of Automotive Engineers estimates that a turbocharger can increase the power on a diesel by 50 percent while reducing its fuel consumption by 20 to 25 percent.

A Look at Luxury Trucks

Luxurious interior finishes and the latest technology aren't just for cars anymore. The luxury truck market is exploding and only figures to swell in popularity.

Upscale equipment, flashy exteriors and high-end features are all the rage for buyers who are willing to spend \$50,000 or more for an upmarket pickup.

And these trucks are still workhorses. They just get the job done in style.

INDUSTRY-WIDE PRODUCTION

Chevrolet Silverado High Country. Ford F-150 Limited. Ram 1500 Laramie Limited. GMC Sierra Denali. Manufacturers across the board have entered the luxury truck market with a splash.

And buyers are scooping them up. According to data gathered and crunched by Edmunds.com, the industry-average transaction price for large pickups has risen 29 percent over the past few years, from \$31,000 to \$39,000. On the upper echelon of that market are the buyers who are opting for luxury.

EXTERIOR AND ENGINES

Luxury trucks are sure easy to spot. With chrome exterior accents and sleek body styles, these trucks convey a high-end look and feel.

Many new models also come equipped with large chrome alloy wheels, helping complete the attractive exterior design. And what's under the hood sets luxury trucks apart, as well, offering the most powerful engine options available, sometimes making more than 400 horsepower.

'STANDARD' EQUIPMENT

It's what is on the inside that counts, right? That life lesson applies to luxury trucks, as makers have attempted to revolutionize the driving experience.

Here are some of the interior options that are coming standard on many luxury trucks:

- Heated and cooled front seats
- High-end leather seats and trim
- Heated Steering Wheel
- Extra sound insulation
- Front and rear park assist
- Name-brand sound systems
- Infotainment systems
- Touchscreens
- Bluetooth phone connections
- Rear-view cameras



Going Off-Road?

If you spend your weekends rock-crawling, trail-blazing or mountain-scrambling, then you already know. Going off-road can be a blast.

The market for products available for upgrading your vehicle to an off-road machine is broad, but you can make the right decisions with a little research and general understanding of how your truck works in the elements.

UPGRADED SUSPENSION

For off-roading, a standard suspension just won't cut it. The way a suspension system is designed can literally make or break your off-roading experience, so choose your products wisely when upgrading your vehicle.

The suspension modifications you make to a vehicle used only for off-roading will be different than ones you make to a vehicle you still need to use for common commuting. In general, the stronger and tougher your spring and shock setup will be off-road, the bumpier and rougher it will ride on-road.

In addition, suspension lifts are available in various heights, purposes and configurations, and all should be guided by the amount and type of off-roading you plan on doing.

OFF-ROAD TIRES

Tires are vital to the

off-roading experience. The point of transfer from your truck's power to the dirt, tires need to be the right fit for you to truly enjoy your ground-pounding experience.

Size, tread design, fit and aspect ratio are all factors to consider when equipping your vehicle with tires. And if tires are your first purchase for upgrading your truck to off-road ready, consider having a plan for the rest of your modifications.

Tires have a big impact on getting the most out of that specialized suspension system or engine upgrade.

SKID PLATES

There are many obstacles out on the trail – some more dangerous than others. Safe off-roading takes common sense and knowledge of the area you're exploring. It also requires a protected vehicle.

Skid plates are a great way to prevent damage to your truck's most vital components, including your gas tank, transmission, under carriage and U-bolts. Most adhere directly to the frame for easy installation.

Stainless skid plate kits can provide optimum protection without adding a lot of extra weight to your vehicle.



Toolbox Buying Tips

STRENGTH, STORAGE AND STYLE ALL MATTER

Truck toolboxes provide security and storage for your most vital, valuable possessions. And with a great variety of colors, sizes and mounting styles on the market, you have more choices than ever when it comes to finding the right fit for your truck. Before shopping around, take inventory of what you'll be storing.

SECURITY IS KEY

Ever have a tool swiped from the bed of your truck? Then you understand the importance of security when choosing your toolbox.

Most boxes feature adjustable or self-adjusting lid strikers for tight seals, as well as heavy-duty locking mechanisms for ultimate protection. Truck bed locks are often built flush with the side of the lid or with a cap to reduce the chance of moisture entering and freezing the lock.

STORAGE

The days of searching for a tool in your cab and truck bed, only to remember you left it in your garage, are over.

Once you add a toolbox to your truck, you can rest assured that all of your tools and toys are well-protected and well-organized. A deep well and numerous storage trays make finding your items a

breeze.

And toolboxes aren't just for hammers, screwdrivers and wrenches. Your box can act as a car trunk of sorts, with plenty of room for groceries, emergency supplies and jumper cables.

STYLES

From stainless steel to powder black, your toolbox can be equal parts functional and great looking.

Visualize what will look best with your color of truck and choose a color to complement it. If your truck is laced with exterior chrome finishes, stainless steel or a buffed aluminum may help accentuate your best features.

And besides finishes, you can have your pick from where your toolbox will sit. There are options made to attach to the front, sides, rear and even underside of your truck bed.

Tow Rating Controversy

By Derek Price and Joe Szykowski

GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Truck manufacturers are proud of the weight that their products can tow — so much so that these tow ratings have become the centerpiece of their marketing and advertising in many cases.

There's just one problem: the numbers they boast about in TV commercials and magazine ads can't completely be trusted because every manufacturer uses a different method to come up with their ratings.

That means it's not an apples-to-apples comparison. When each company uses their own testing method, it's likely for them to pick one that presents their own truck in the best possible light.

If buyers want a consistent, reliable way to compare the actual towing capability of different trucks, though, there's no way to do that unless every truck is tested using the same criteria, under the exact same rules and conditions.

That's not happening right now.

A SOLUTION: J2807

To fix this problem and give buyers a reliable way to compare truck capability, the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) has developed a standardized towing test called J2807.

Getting the manufacturers to agree to use it hasn't been so easy, though. While the manufacturers say they're all on board, only one brand — Toyota — has actually started using this standardized testing method to report towing numbers to potential buyers. All the other brands are still using their own, differing systems.



The Society of Automotive Engineers has developed a method of consistently rating the towing capability of pickups, but not all the manufacturers are using it yet.

WHAT IS J2807?

The SAE standard, "Performance Requirements for Determining Tow-Vehicle Gross Combination Weight Rating and Trailer Weight Rating," is known as J2807.

A large component of J2807 is how a laden truck climbs a grade such as the Colorado River's Davis Dam. Tow vehicles need to climb the grade, a 3,000-foot run over an 11.4-mile stretch of Arizona State Route 68 southeast of Las Vegas. Vehicles can also undergo testing at an equivalent simulation.

THE LAUNCH

On an incline that rises 12 feet for every 100 feet of horizontal distance, the tow vehicle must also be able to move 16 feet from a standstill five times within five minutes. The SAE states that the launch must be in the uphill direction, both forward and reverse.

THE WEIGHT

J2807 requires that vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating of less than 8,500 pounds must carry a 150-pound driver and a 150-pound passenger. Vehicles above 8,500, states SAE,

should add an extra 100 pounds of equipment, while if the driver is heavier than 150 pounds or carries more gear, you should deduct that extra weight from the maximum towing figure.

There are more specific and detailed rules, but the bottom line is this: If all truck brands followed the J2807 procedures, buyers would have more consistent information with which to make their decisions.

WILL IT TAKE HOLD?

While many truck-market watchers were optimistic that J2807 would help to standardize these towing figures after it was introduced, so far it hasn't reached its goal. Until all the manufacturers start abiding by this consistent set of measurements, their reported towing numbers should still be viewed with some degree of skepticism.

The reasons it hasn't been adopted industry-wide yet are varied. Some people speculate that the reported tow ratings for some trucks are going to drop precipitously under the J2807 rules.

If you ask the manufacturers about it, their response is usually simpler: "We'll start using it when everybody else does." They don't want to adopt the stringent J2807 standards if their competitors are going to continue using test methods that are presumably more favorable to their particular offerings.



Time to Get Hitched?

Choosing the right trailer hitch is a big decision. Maybe not like rest-of-your-life big, but still. You're pulling a lot on that hitch.

Safety and durability are paramount, and the first step to selecting the perfect hitch is determining your truck's towing capacity and total trailer weight. Check your manuals for this information and let it guide your decision.

EXTRA IS OK

As long as it still fits within your truck's towing capacity, excess pulling power is rec-

ommended.

Even if you plan on only pulling a small trailer for now, you may want to opt for a more capable hitch for any additional weight you may tow later on in life, such as a boat or camper.

Purchasing a heavier hitch option now can save you the money and time spent purchasing an additional one later.

HITCH DESIGN

Hitches come in many colors, designs and placement options, all factors that you should consider when making your final purchase decision.

Once you determine how much weight you will be pulling, you can reach out to your dealer about choosing the right design for your hitch. He or she may have specific recommendations for your particular make and model.

Some hitches are designed to be placed prominently above the bumper, while others are made to hide underneath it. No matter what color, design and placement you choose, make sure it meets your job requirements.

INSTALLATION

Hitch and truck manufacturers have simplified the installation process over the years. In

fact, with just a few tools and a set of instructions, most truck owners can put in a new hitch with no professional help.

Obviously, for hitches that require specialized installation techniques, you may choose to consult with your dealer or local mechanic.

And if your truck came with a hitch already installed, you should check it against the owner's manual to ensure that it is the right fit for your truck.

TEST DRIVE: 2014 RAM 1500 ECODIESEL

Ram Breaks New Ground

By Derek Price
GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Diesel engines and pickup trucks go together like peanut butter and jelly, but manufacturers have been surprisingly reluctant to put diesels in their light-duty trucks.

And it's not because there's no demand.

Truck buyers love diesels under the hood because they're reliable, long-lasting, fuel efficient and make more trailer-pulling torque than their gasoline counterparts. Until now, though, you could only get diesel power by upgrading to a heavy-duty truck.

If you ask the manufacturers about that, they'll tell you how traditional diesel designs are too heavy to work well in a light-duty chassis and how the government emissions requirements are stricter for the smaller, mass-market, half-ton trucks.

I'm a bit of a conspiracy theorist about it, though. Call me crazy, but I think a bigger reason is that car companies don't want to lose any sales of their pricey, heavy-duty trucks by offering a cheaper diesel model.

In any case, that's all about to change now that Ram is offering a small, fuel-efficient diesel engine in its Ram 1500 line. It's not the giant Cummins diesel from the Ram Heavy Duty, but a compact, 3.0-liter design that's engineered for fuel efficiency.



Ram is offering the first diesel engine in a light-duty truck for 2014. Called the EcoDiesel, it is designed to get impressive gas mileage and is rated to tow 9,200 pounds.

Ram calls it the EcoDiesel. After driving several versions of the EcoDiesel, I think Ram could have a huge hit on its hands. Not only is it great for towing — I pulled a big boat up a steep grade without the Ram breaking a sweat — but it's also a lot more refined than you usually expect from a diesel engine.

Everybody is familiar with the loud clackety-clack of diesels that pull up beside you in traffic. With this one, though, those characteristic

metallic clangs are almost imperceptible thanks to lots of sound insulation under the hood.

Ram also brought some gasoline trucks to compare it to, and more than once I had to double-check to be sure I was in the diesel version. I just couldn't tell from the sound.

One of the biggest question marks about this truck — and one of the best reasons to buy it, too — is the gas mileage it's going to get. The official gov-

ernment ratings haven't been announced yet, but the folks at Ram swear it's going to be "class-leading" whenever the numbers come out.

That means it should get better fuel economy than the V6 gasoline trucks that are on the market right now, with the added benefit of greater towing capacity. It's rated to tow up to 9,200 pounds, which is approaching the figure you would expect from a big, thirsty, V8 gas engine.

The price premium for the

EcoDiesel is also reasonable. It's just \$2,850 more than a similarly equipped Ram with a HEMI V8 engine, a price that's low enough to pay for itself in fuel cost savings over time. And given the historically higher resale value of diesel trucks, it could turn out to be an even smarter decision down the road.

Aside from the coolness of the new diesel, I like what this move says about the Ram brand as a whole. This is a company that's been breaking new ground in the pickup market and rolling out innovations before other trucks, like their diesel engine brakes in heavy-duty models and their big-rig styling in the 1990s.

Being the first to put a diesel engine in a light-duty chassis is just another step in that process. It's a smart move on Ram's part because I suspect there's a large, untapped market of people who want to drive a diesel truck but don't want to deal with the drawbacks and expense of a heavy-duty model.

It's been a long wait, but those people finally have their truck.

TEST DRIVE: 2014 FORD F-150

F-150 Still the Sales Leader

By Derek Price
GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

After taking a luxed-up version of the 2014 Ford F-150, called the Limited, out for a spin, I was struck by two simple facts about it.

The first is that it has the most comfortable seats I've ever experienced in a vehicle. The soft, plush seats in the Limited let you sink down into the cushions like they're made of cotton candy — the closest I've ever felt to putting a La-Z-Boy recliner in a car.

The second is that, despite not being the newest truck on the block, the F-Series continues to sell like crazy.

The F-150 is due for an overhaul soon after the Ram was redesigned for 2013 and General Motors' trucks — the GMC Sierra and Chevrolet Silverado — were both made fresh for 2014. Its toughest competition from a Japanese brand, the Toyota Tundra, was also given a thorough overhaul for the 2014 model year.

What's remarkable about the F-150 is that it's still a strong contender at the end of the current platform's lifespan. As 2013 wound to a close, the Ford F-Series continued to lead the sales race among full-size pickups.

A big reason for that is Ford's forward-thinking decision to put a four-cylinder turbocharged engine called the EcoBoost into its half-ton truck a couple of years ago. It's been a huge sales hit thanks to its combination of great gas mileage and impressive towing capability.

Other truck brands are following Ford's efficiency-minded lead this year. The new Ram EcoDiesel aims to save gas money, but it doesn't match



The Ford F-Series gets minor updates for 2014, but it remains the best-selling pickup in America.

the towing performance of the EcoBoost in this Ford.

In fact, when I drove the efficient Ram back-to-back with the efficient Ford in a towing comparison, the Ford had noticeably better acceleration under heavy loads.

Granted, the Ram is likely to get better gas mileage than the Ford and has the benefits of a diesel engine — like resale value and longevity — but from a strictly performance-based perspective, the F-150 looks great.

Changes for 2014 are relatively minor while we wait for the new design that's lurking on the horizon.

Ford's bold, head-turning front end with high-intensity discharge headlights is now standard on XLT trim and higher levels. And for people who

do a lot of towing, there's a nice new feature available: a power-telescoping and power-folding trailering mirror.

In addition, the FX appearance package gets a new grille, and 17-inch aluminum wheels with painted accents are now standard on XLT and STX models. And a new color called Marina Blue is available on the Limited models' leather seats, giving it a more custom, exclusive look.

Even bigger news is the addition of a new sport-truck model this year called the Tremor. With a short wheelbase and regular-cab layout, it has a more aggressive look than most trucks on the market and is designed more for performance and fun than work alone.

The FX appearance package on the Tremor makes use of one of today's hottest looks — flat black wheels and trim — along with graphics and special badges on the body. It's one of the most head-turning trucks on the road today.

In addition, the F-150 Raptor is still available for drivers who want the ultimate off-road performance from the factory. I drove a 2014 Raptor on an off-road course recently near San Antonio, Texas, and it's still in a class by itself. No other truck took the course with as much confidence or raw power as the Raptor, making steep hills, rough terrain and high-speed blasts through pasture land feel easy to tackle.

TEST DRIVE: 2014 CHEVROLET SILVERADO

Silverado Stronger, Quieter

By Derek Price
GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

You would think the novelty of driving a new truck would wear off eventually, but that doesn't happen for me. Every time I drive a pickup, I'm blown away by just how far these machines have evolved.

When I was a young child, my idea of pickups was molded by my grandpa's old, white, rickety truck that was barely one step removed from a bulldozer on the automotive ladder. No A/C. No power windows. No automatic transmission. No nothin'.

It did its job beautifully, though, surviving a brutal life as a logging-industry workhorse in the thick pine forests of East Texas and eventually outlasting my grandpa. It took him on hunting trips and got his grandkids to the zoo faithfully to the end.

Fast-forward to today, and pickups have become so refined, comfortable and quiet that it's hard to believe they're related to pickups of the past.

The all-new Chevrolet Silverado is the perfect example. Not only is it more truck-like than ever before — with the requisite boost in towing and payload capacity that comes with each new generation of pickups — but it's also the quietest truck I've ever driven.

In fact, a few weeks ago I had the chance to drive the new Silverado back-to-back with its competitors from Ram, Ford and Toyota, and it was the Chevy that had the quietest, most refined driving feel of them all.

That should come as no surprise, since the Chevy has the newest design. It's been completely re-engineered from hood to hitch, as the Chevy reps like to say, and a big focus of the redesign was on making it as



The Chevrolet Silverado is more capable and refined than ever before, with a quieter cabin than its competitors after a complete redesign for 2014.

comfortable on the highway as a car.

Road and wind noise are both drastically reduced thanks to extra sound insulation, triple-sealed doors and aerodynamic refinements that make the Silverado more slippery through the air.

A lot of improvements were aimed at making it a better work truck, too, like movable cargo tie-downs, LED lighting in the cargo area and steps carved into the rear bumper corners

that make it easier to climb up into the bed.

Still, what makes the Silverado stand out is its carefully refined driving feel, something even noticeable on my task-oriented test truck.

The Silverado that Chevy brought me wasn't the fancy-pants High Country edition with embroidered seats and Cadillac-like gadgets, but instead it was more of a working man's truck with the Z71 off-road sus-

pension package, four-wheel drive and rubber floor mats.

Even with that setup, it's still the quietest pickup I've ever driven. I like the fact that Chevy quieted down all the versions of this new truck, not just the high-end, super-expensive ones.

It can drive as comfortably as a car, but it can still work in the pine forests if need be. And that, to me, is remarkable.

TEST DRIVE: 2014 GMC SIERRA

New GMC Refined for Work

By Derek Price
GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

It should come as no surprise that when redesigning the GMC Sierra for 2014, General Motors made it a tougher, stronger truck than before.

Cue the gravel-voiced announcers and pictures of the Sierra climbing mountains and pulling oceanliners.

What's weird about it, though, is just how refined GMC managed to make it at the same time.

This is a truck that's now capable of towing up to 12,000 pounds — while still technically being classified as a “light duty” pickup, if you can believe it — yet it rides with the quiet serenity of a family car when you're cruising down the highway.

To be clear, the fresh Sierra is designed first and foremost to do more work. I love the rugged simplicity of steps that are carved into the rear bumper and the cargo tie-down system that's standard equipment. I also love the fact that you can get it with a 420-horsepower, 450-foot-pound V8 engine.

But what strikes me the most about this new truck is how it can be so hard-edged and tough in some ways while being so soft and supple in others.

It's like wearing silk work gloves.

Consider the rear tailgate, for example. For decades, anyone who has dropped the tailgate has heard a loud, clunky “thud” as it slams down under its own weight.

But the Sierra's mechanism has a soft, slow closing motion that sets the tailgate down gently if you drop it. I've only seen that kind of tailgate on one other truck — an extremely expensive Lexus luxury SUV — so it puts the



The GMC Sierra is all-new for 2014, making it more refined and powerful than ever before.

new GM trucks in rarefied air.

It's a little thing, yes. But a long list of those little things makes the Sierra stand out.

The doors are set lower in the frame, like a car, and triple-sealed to keep out wind noise. The side mirrors and tailgate are designed to reduce turbulence. And the suspension is designed to be more smooth and comfortable than ever, something noticeable even on my test truck that was equipped with the

Z71 off-road package.

It has all the obligatory tech upgrades of new cars, including GM's latest IntelliLink system with a big digital touchscreen and iPhone-style icon layout. And the cabin sets a new standard for full-size trucks, with lots of soft materials and the kind of tight construction and classy finishes that used to be the exclusive domain of passenger cars.

It's hard to find much to complain

about in a brilliantly re-engineered pickup, but I do think it could benefit from a more envelope-pushing body style. The squared-off shape just doesn't look as progressive as the rest of the truck feels.

Overall, though, GMC has done something magical with the new Sierra. It's a truck that brings a soft, comfortable touch to big, tough jobs, and that's a fun thing to experience from the driver's seat.

TEST DRIVE: 2014 TOYOTA TUNDRA

Tundra Emphasizes Roots

By Derek Price
GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

People associate Toyota with Japan, since that's where the company is based. It's interesting, though, to see that Toyota's Tundra pickup truck is one of the most all-American vehicles on the road.

The Tundra is built in the heart of truck country — San Antonio, Texas — where Toyota's factory recently cranked out its millionth pickup truck. But it's also Toyota's most American vehicle to date, with styling from California, engineering from Michigan, engines from Alabama and transmissions from North Carolina.

It's also one of the most refined, handsome trucks on the road after a thorough refresh for the 2014 model year.

Other than its powertrain, which was carried over from last year, the Tundra looks and feels like a new truck design. The front end is now bolder and more aggressive with acres of chrome, but it also has what Toyota calls an "industrial" look that links the hood and grille together. It's a combination that looks both classier and more worksite-ready than before.

Its interior is an even bigger change than the body styling, though.

Toyota's designers wanted to draw a clearer distinction between each of the Tundra trim levels, so there's a noticeable difference now between the cabins of the more basic, affordable models and the high-end luxury versions.

And if you're interested in buying one of those luxury trucks — a popular move as pickup prices climb higher — the Tundra gives you two vastly different looks to choose from.



A fresh look and more upscale luxury models help the San Antonio-built 2014 Toyota Tundra stand out.

One is the 1794 Edition, a Western-themed truck that has embossed saddle brown leather and ultra-suede accents. Toyota's truck factory is located on the same location as a ranch that was founded in 1794, hence the numeric name.

The other is a more straightforward luxury truck, the Platinum grade, which gives you an upscale feeling without all the Western ranch decor. It's the flavor I prefer.

Both of the high-end trucks come with plenty of standard features, as you'd expect, including a 12-speaker JBL sound system with a touch screen interface, navigation system and front seats that are both heated and ventilated.

DRIVING IMPRESSIONS

The Tundra has long been a refined truck to drive. Even as competition in the truck world heats up for 2014, it still feels like a sophisticated, modern truck from the driver's seat.

Its powertrain isn't new, and while you can't tell that from the driving feel — it's still buttery smooth and quick to respond — you can tell its age from the fuel economy numbers.

Its V6, for example, makes plenty of power with 270 horses and 278 pound-feet of torque, but it's rated for 16 mpg in the city and 20 mpg on the highway. While other brands are experimenting with innovative ways to save fuel in their half-ton trucks, such as turbochargers and diesel

engines, it makes me wish Toyota had a more efficient choice.

Its V8 tells a similar story. It's a spectacular engine from a refinement and performance perspective, producing 381 horsepower and 401 pound-feet, making it one of the most advanced and powerful engines on the market. But with fuel economy ratings of 13 in town and 18 on the highway, it just doesn't impress at the gas pump.

Still, if you're looking for one of the best-driving trucks on the market — with ample power, silky smoothness and a solid, well-designed cabin — it remains a great choice. Toyota's reputation for quality and a thoroughly made-in-America design just add to the appeal.