

On target: Toyota aims high, hits the mark with half-ton Tundra

by Mark Maynard

I was talking with the owner of a Ford F-150 pickup who said, "You know what's wrong with this truck? Nothing."

Another owner told me that his F-150 has more than 133,000 miles on it and every now and then he thinks of trading it in, but why? "There's nothing wrong with it," he says.

That was the benchmark Toyota had to hit with its Tundra half-ton pickup. Not just reliability, but user satisfaction. And it did, mostly.

NEW TUNDRA - The redesigned 2007 Tundra, which goes on sale in January, will be the "biggest, boldest and baddest truck in Toyota history," the company claims. CNS Photo courtesy of Toyota.

I've also talked with a few Tundra owners, and none regrets buying his truck. They might gripe about the tires wearing out too quickly, but not the Toyota factor.

Ford sells about 50,000 F-150s a month (including Super Duty). Toyota is closer to 10,000, but just wait till next year. The redesigned 2007 Tundra, which goes on sale in January, will be the "biggest, boldest and baddest truck in Toyota history," the company says.

Until then, you might be able to get some deals on the '06 model.

I've just spent a week in a 2006 Toyota Tundra Double Cab with the 4.7-liter V-8. Like many an effort by the import truck makers to re-create an American-class pickup, the Tundra might obsess about too many details, but what a fine piece of truck flesh it is.

And Toyota's not giving it away.

The base sticker is \$34,140. The as-tested price: \$38,781. Options included such carlike features as a DVD entertainment system (\$1,780), a leather package (\$1,095) that included a power driver seat and woodlike trim, and a power tilt-slide sunroof (\$1,000).

There's a certain shaggy manliness that is part of the American pickup's standard equipment list, but the imports tend to button that up and comb it out for a fresh-scrubbed appearance.

The test truck was just as clean and neat inside as a Camry sedan. It's also as quiet-riding as a luxury car, with citified thoughtfulness.

There are seven grab handles for four doors, and all in ideal positions for leverage. The visors have dual shades with an extender and lighted vanity mirrors. There are height-adjustable seatbelts at all window seats and even rear side air vents that can be closed.

The rear pull-down center armrest has cup holders, and there are seatback pockets and even ashtrays in the door-side armrests. The back bench also flips and folds for variable cargo capacity.

The power rear sliding window, standard on the Limited model, is a welcome convenience. The side windows go all the way down, and the small dashboard doesn't get in the way of sightlines over the fenders. The audio (an eight-speaker JBL 3-in-1 radio-cassette-CD) as well as heat and air conditioning controls are Toyota-simple in operation.

The Limited adds many comfort features, but much of Tundra's ease of use and likability is built in. Clearly, Toyota gave it a budget to succeed.

Also available as a no-cost option is the TRD package, which adds stiffer suspension, Bilstein shocks and 16-inch tires. The tires have taller sidewalls for off-road protection and are about the same height as the 17-inch tires.

But it seems odd to put an off-road package on the luxury-grade Limited. And either tire looks too small for the body.

The '06 Tundra has no changes from the 2005, except for a different testing procedure for engine power. The 4.7-liter V-8 is rated 271 horsepower and 313 foot-pounds of torque, compared to 282 hp and 325 foot-pounds of torque last year.

This engine is certified as an Ultra Low Emissions Vehicle (cleaner than the V-6) and uses 87-octane fuel. And while that almost makes it appear conscientious, fuel mileage is just 15 mpg around town and 18 on the highway.

Trouble is, everything is so well done about this truck that \$65 fill-ups might be tolerable.

SPECS: 2006 Toyota Tundra 4WD Double Cab Limited V-8 Body style: Full-size 5-passenger, 4-door pickup with 6-foot bed Engine: 4.7 liter, DOHC, 32-valve V-8 with variable valve timing; ULEV emissions rating Horsepower: 271 at 5,400 rpm Torque: 313 foot-pounds at 3,400 rpm Transmission: 5-speed automatic with Touch Select 4WD system Acceleration: 0 to 60 mph, 7.4 seconds EPA fuel economy estimates: 15 mpg city, 18 highway Fuel capacity: 26.4 gallons; 87 octane recommended

DIMENSIONS Payload: 1,580 pounds Towing capacity: 6,500 pounds Front head/leg/shoulder room: 41.2/41.6/62.1 inches Rear head/leg/shoulder room: 40.2/37.5/62.2 inches Length: 230.1 inches Height: 74.6 inches Wheelbase: 140.5 inches Curb weight: 5,020 pounds **FEATURES** Standard equipment: Remote locking, air conditioning, front captain's chairs, center console with cup holders and armrest-storage, 60/40 split folding rear bench with adjustable headrests, power rear sliding window, power windows-locks-mirrors, cruise control, tilt steering, fog lights, full tank of gas on delivery Safety equipment: Dual front advanced air bags, front belt pretensioners and force limiters, anti-lock brakes **CHASSIS** Brakes: Power-assisted front ventilated discs (12.6 inches) with four-piston calipers; rear drums Steering: Power-assisted rack-and-pinion. Suspension: Front, independent coil spring double wishbone with low-pressure nitrogen gas shocks and stabilizer bar; rear, leaf springs with staggered low-pressure nitrogen gas shocks Tires and wheels: P265/65 R17-inch on alloy wheels; full-size spare

PRICING Base: \$34,140, including \$565 destination charge; price as tested, \$38,781 Options on test car: DVD entertainment system (\$1,780) includes two wireless headphones, 115-volt outlet and auxiliary audio jacks; leather package (\$1,095) adds leather-trimmed seats, steering wheel, power driver seat and woodlike trim; limited-slip differential (\$275); daytime running lights (\$40); power tilt-slide sunroof (\$1,000); carpeted floor mats with door-sill protector (\$152); and bedliner (\$299) The competition: The usual pickup suspects Where assembled: Princeton, Ind.

PLUSES Finesse, carlike quiet. **MINUSES** Too much like a Camry on the inside; 17-inch tires seem too small for the body.

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