

Details are everything on 2013 Ram pickups

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When it comes to pickups, details are everything— something not lost on engineers when it comes to the 2013 Ram 1500.

Forgetting trim levels, there are literally hundreds of ways to fit out light pickups due to the myriad of needs and uses.

A new wrinkle these days are ever-rising fuel/operating costs and that means combining expected brawn with new levels of weight saving and fuel economy.

It starts with the use of an eight-speed automatic transmission, the first I know of in a pickup truck.

The TorqueFlite 8 also does away with column or floor shifters supplanted by a rotary knob mounted to the left of the centre stack. This “e-shift” dial is simple to see and use even with work gloves on.

Appreciated by those who know trucks is the ability to shift from Reverse to Drive quickly when towing or navigating in snow, mud, loading ramps, work sites and parking lots.

The eight-speed is part of a new thermal management system that quickly raises the temperatures of the transmission and engine. Ram engineers found that

heating fluids as soon as possible improved fuel efficiency by 1.7 per cent purely by cutting parasitic losses.

The eight-speed will be standard on the new 3.6-litre V6 and will be optionally available on the 5.7-litre Hemi V8 later this year.

The quad cam V6 is used widely across the Chrysler model lineup and, in the Ram, it produces 305 hp and 269 lb/ft of torque. More importantly, it offers 42 per cent more horses, 11 per cent more torque and an expected 22 per cent better fuel economy than the 3.7-litre V6 it replaces.

Official fuel ratings were still being calculated at this writing but Ram executives expect the 3.6-litre with eight-speed will be the segment leader in light trucks beating out current leader, Ford F-150 with its 3.7-litre V6.

Ram is offered in 4X2 and 4X4 versions in short and long boxes, three cabs sizes (Regular, Quad and Crew) and no less than seven trim levels (SXT, SLT, Outdoorsman, Big Horn, Sport, Laramie and Laramie Longhorn).

Starting price for the base SLT 4.7-litre is \$26,995; but because of the hundreds of ways to mix and match, overall pricing is too complicated to detail here.

This is what Chrysler Canada told me officially.

At the press launch in Nash-



ville I spent the whole day in the 3.6-litre in the SLT trim model which is one step up from the base SXT and what I thought will prove the most popular choice especially in the Crew Cab version I drove.

With just my co-driver and I aboard, it certainly felt very strong on the combination of most secondary roads south of Nashville.

The ride, not the power, was the best part. Even without the optional air suspension, the Ram tracked the narrow roads in that part of the state tenaciously.

Later towing a big trailer with a large ATV strapped to it, the Ram pulled up and down gentle grades with no discernable sense

of the transmission hunting the rev range for more power.

Even though our SLT was basically entry level, the seats were big and supportive with dozens of cubbies and storage areas scattered throughout which is what those who will gravitate to the SXT or SLT are looking for.

But if you want premium luxury like fittings, the Longhorn has without doubt the most opulently equipped interior offered by any vehicles under the Chrysler Corporation banner.

With 16 per cent of Canadian vehicle sales being pickups, obviously a lot is riding on the 2013 Ram and officials in Nashville were buoyed by the fact their sales are up 28 per cent so far this year,

which they see as encouraging.

Could this be the Year of the Ram?

(Dodge Ram 1500 pickup 2013 at a glance)

BODY STYLE: Full-size pickup truck.

DRIVE METHOD: front-engine, rear-/four-wheel-drive.

ENGINE: 3.6-litre, DOHC V6 (306 hp, 269 lb/ft); 4.7-litre SOHC V8 (310 hp, 330 lb/ft); 5.7-litre OHV V8 (395 hp, 407 lb/ft)

FUEL ECONOMY: NA

TOW RATING: V6 up to 6,500 lb; V8 up to 10,450 lb

PRICE: Base 4.7-litre, \$26,995; 3.6-litre/eight-speed adds \$1,200; 5.7-litre/six-speed adds \$1,400 over 4.7-litre

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