

RAM 3500 can take you to the top of the hill

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enough to be occasionally awkward, costs a pretty penny and probably won't fit in your garage. That's unless you use your new sledgehammer.

The 3500 series includes varying trim levels priced from around \$40K to nearly \$90K after a near-endless list of options, paints and packages.

Our Ram 3500 Laramie Crew Cab 4X4 (\$65,995) is big and black, with a gargantuan stretch to 6,586 mm or almost 22 feet and, with its optional dual-axle fat flanks will send you searching parking lot perimeters for vacant multi-space spots.

The long length comes courtesy of a very roomy Crew Cab and an eight-foot cargo box. Or you can change those proportions with an even bigger Mega Cab that makes a cargo compromise with a smaller six-foot-four-inch box.

The truck also rides high, an easy bum slide into the seat for some of us but lesser, vertically challenged humans will be pining for a running-board step up.

A wide range of engines includes two gasoline-powered engines - a 5.7-litre Hemi V8 (383 hp, 400 lb/ft), a 6.4-litre Hemi V8 (410 hp, 429 lb/ft).

The third choice is a 6.7-litre Cummins diesels mated to either a six-speed manual (350 hp, 660 lb/ft), a six-speed 68RFE automatic (370 hp, 800 lb/ft) or, as tested here, a heavy-duty six-speed Aisin AS69RC automatic (385 hp, 900 lb/ft).

Those final power numbers translate into claimed class-lead-



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ing ratings that include a 14,157 kg (31,210 lb) tow rating, a 3,352 kg (7,390 lb) payload capacity and a 17,736 kg (39,100 lb) gross combined weight rating (GCWR).

Our tester maximized its payload and pulling potential with its dually setup (\$1,200), spray-in bedliner (\$550), 4.10 rear axle ratio (\$125), rear auto-level air suspension (\$1,595), a CHMSL camera (\$395) to monitor your load and trailer, and a 25K direct-mount fifth wheel hitch (\$1,775), straddling the centre of the cargo box like some weird bionic spider.

The fifth wheel hitch may screw up any plans for shuttling loads of manure but it does allow you to harness your horsepower to haul, hmm, actual horses, maybe a big camper trailer, or the family yacht.

I stopped to take pictures of the 3500 in front of a container yard and a manager came out to chat and check out the truck, telling me that they used a similarly rigged Ram 3500 to shuttle those big boxes around.

The power to do all that does come with a gas price. Heavy-duty pickups don't have to show a fuel

economy rating on their window sticker price sheets.

It's understood that these trucks are built for pulling, not pinching pennies. My fuel averages, hauling only light loads and occasional passengers, came in about where I expected, at 15.8L/100km (comb), with the cost of diesel usually bobbing up and down within a dime of regular gas prices.

And, while towing may be hard work for a truck like this, it's certainly not hard on passengers who, in this mid-level Laramie trim, are ensconced in heated/ventilated

leather luxury, with a full suite of mod cons including all the expected amenities, a Parkview rear backup camera, Park-Sense front & rear park assist, FCAs 8.4-inch Uconnect system and a nine-speaker Alpine audio setup.

The 2017 Ram 3500 is a lot of truck; maybe too much truck for some. But it is definitely the biggest and most capable tool in the pickup toolbox, providing class-leading power, maximizing towing and hauling potential, and doing it well in Ram's unique style.

What's Best: Handsome macho design, available best-in-class power, payload and tow ratings and a wide range of powertrains and trim levels.

What's Worst? Pricey, thirsty, noisy, brash and bouncy when unladen but who cares? It's a perfect workhorse. Does need running boards or tubular steps, along with bigger wheels to fit the wheel wells.

What's Interesting: With the fifth wheel hitch, and outfitted with a top end diesel powertrain, this pickup aspires to haul like a heavyweight.

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(Ram 3500 Laramie Crew Cab 4X4 at a glance)

BODY STYLE: Full-size, two-row, five-passenger heavy-duty pickup.

DRIVE METHOD: front-engine, four-wheel drive with 2WD, 4WD Lock and 4WD Low settings.

ENGINE: As tested 6.7-litre Cummins inline-six turbodiesel (385 hp, 900 lb/ft)

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