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## Dodge Dakota Quad Cab redefines image of compact pickup truck

By Rob Beintema  
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

I don't know what to make of pickup trucks anymore. Every time I think I've got a handle on them, somebody ups and changes the rules on me.

It used to be so simple. Pickup trucks had two doors and steel floors. A bench seat, a bucket in back and enough horses under the hood to haul butt and booty from Point "A" to Point "B" with no fuss, no muss, no extras.

Fast forward to the present and the 2000 Dodge Dakota Quad Cab, a compact pickup truck with 4 doors and seating for up to 6 passengers. The new Quad Cab first debuted at the Detroit Auto Show in early '99, promising the perfect combination of power, passenger room and payload potential. To satisfy all those competing criteria, you'd expect some sort of cobbled-together, in-between vehicle making more compromises than a showgirl at a casting call, wouldn't you?

But the Dakota Quad Cab has stayed true to its Ram-inspired image, maintaining the utility, cargo-carrying capability, truck-like toughness and even the spirit of a pickup while delivering the seating, space and modern amenities and comforts of a family sedan.

"We've maximized the utility of a compact pickup," said Jim Julow, VP of Dodge Car & Truck Division. "By combining the power and capability of a Dodge Dakota with six-passenger seating in a full four-door configuration, we've developed a pickup that can fit any need - whether it's power, passengers or payload."

The Dodge Dakota Quad Cab Comes in two trim levels - the base Sport and the upscale SLT. Both versions come with a choice of three Magnum engines.

The base motor for all Dakota models is a 3.9 L V6 that makes 175 hp @ 4800 rpm and 225 lb-ft of torque @ 3200. You can't help but notice the large percentage of pickups that spend most of their time running around empty. This is a good engine for all those commuter pickups that are posing as trucks rather than working as trucks. The V6 comes mated to an improved, standard 5-speed manual transmission. Optional automatics are available for all engine choices.

For a little more punch



2000 Dodge Dakota Quad Cab

under the hood, consider a step up the power ladder to Chrysler's new 4.7 L V8. This engine recently replaced the 5.2 L and 5.9 L motors in the Grand Cherokee. As tested in my SLT, the 16-valve SOHC engine harnesses 235 horses @ 4800 rpm and 295 lb-ft of torque @ 3200 rpm. Even though the Quad Cab is hampered by 500 lb more mass than the Grand Cherokee, the motor moves the Dakota smartly and quietly with a just a muted hum and discreet intake whistle from under the hood. But consider your power needs carefully. V8 power means V8 fuel consumption. And much as I love that instant-on acceleration, I rue the pump penalty that almost doubles my weekly fuel bill.

"There's no replacement for displacement," the trailer-hauling crowd will tell you. If you're regularly hauling the family yacht or summer home over hill and dale, the top of the Magnum engine lineup peaks the power with a 5.9 L overhead-valve V8 making 245 hp @ 4400 and a stump-pulling torque rating of 335 lb-ft @ 3200 rpm.

Inside, the Dakota Quad Cab feels roomy. Chrysler may call this a compact truck but the Dodge Dakota really became more of a mid-size offering when they increased the dimensions for the '97 model year. With the additional space added to the 4-door version, Quad Cab interior volumes match up well against those of many mid-size cars.

Access is aided by grab handles in front and rear. All four doors are front hinged. The rear doors are smaller than the front doors but they swing open almost 90 degrees for easy entry and exit. Seating is

fine for four, squeezable for six.

In front, a large console with storage space, cassette, coin and pen slots, flips up to provide a short seat back for a middle passenger. There's also room for a third person in the back row. Uh, better make that a skinny third person.

The Dakota's interior is a very comfortable place to spend time. Everything

from ergonomics to instrumentation to ride and handling shows a level of refinement unheard of in pickups of the past.

The payload story of the Dakota Quad Cab actually begins inside the truck. Flip up either or both of the 60/40 rear seats and the increased passenger room converts into 736 L (26 cu.ft) of secure, stay-dry, in-cab storage space. Out back, the

shortened 1602 mm (63") box keeps the Quad Cab a garage-able length (about the same length as the extended cab version) while still offering tie-down hooks, load-divider slots and 658 kg (1450 lb) of payload capacity. The shorter box length doesn't seem to bother most customers but you can gain back the lost fifteen inches with the tailgate down and an optional bed extender. The Dodge Dakota Quad Cab can be tow-rated up to 2880 kg (6350 lb).

The Dodge Dakota Quad Cab is one of the few options available right now for customers looking for greater versatility in their vehicles. Nissan offers a smaller 4-door pickup and other manufacturers are approaching the same solution from different angles - with the Nissan concept SUT and the future Lincoln Blackwood

and Ford Explorer Sport Trac. But trust Chrysler to be an early innovator. After all, weren't they first with the 4-door minivan and 4-door full-size Ram pickup?

The Dodge Dakota Quad Cab offers a new option for customers looking for multi-purpose value in a single vehicle. And it does so with a unique mixture of both utility and civility.

You can Bubba-thump this bruiser through the back forty and then hose it off and elegantly purr your party to Fifi's for champagne and scampi. Or load a passel of kids enroute to a little league game.

The Dakota seems equally at home in any setting, the exterior character and strength well matched with enough interior space and civility to equal the offerings of any well-appointed midsize sedan.

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