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Chevrolet is at it again. It seems like just yesterday (actually, it has been four years), that the Silverado was updated. But, here we are in the midst of yet another makeover that involves visual updating, refinement, technological enhancements and more V8 horsepower than any other standard-duty pickup out there.

Millions of buyers will be watching as this distinctly styled beauty rolls into dealerships... and you can be assured that both Ford and Dodge will be paying astute attention, too.

Despite the onslaught of assorted SUVs, minivans, luxury cruisers and everyday mom-and-pop sedans over the past decade, the North American pickup truck remains steadfastly atop the automotive pinnacle. For General Motors, the Silverado is the corporation's best selling vehicle and a huge profit generator that rakes in the loot by the, um, truck full. With sales and marketshare on the upswing, Chevy is banking on its new pickup to continue doing what it does best - keep current Bowtie-buyers happy, bring new converts to the fold and maintain its hard-won category leadership.

To accomplish these goals, the division is counting on a combination of high style and leading-edge technology, backed up with a familiar (and impressive) array of brute-force engines.

The new-look Silverado closely copies the chiseled front-end of Chevy's Avalanche truck-ute that arrived part-way into 2001. It also bears a more than passing similarity to both the Trailblazer SUV and full-size '03 Express van. It's a shape that transmits a sense of ruggedness, purpose and power, all completely appropriate sentiments considering the various tasks it is asked to tackle.

But the Silverado is more than just a tough-looking customer. It also offers better handling and greater maneuverability when equipped with QuadraSteer. This optional four-wheel steering system, which was introduced last year, is more widely available for 2003. You can get it on any 1500-series extended-cab short-box as well as on the 1500-heavy-duty four-door Crew Cab models. At high speeds, the rear wheels on QuadraSteer-equipped Silverados turn in the same direction as the front wheels, adding

stability for manoeuvres such as changing lanes on a busy freeway. At low speeds, the rear wheels steer opposite the front, thereby shortening turning radius. According to Chevrolet, parking is not only easier, but anyone using one of its rigs as a tow vehicle will find backing up much easier.

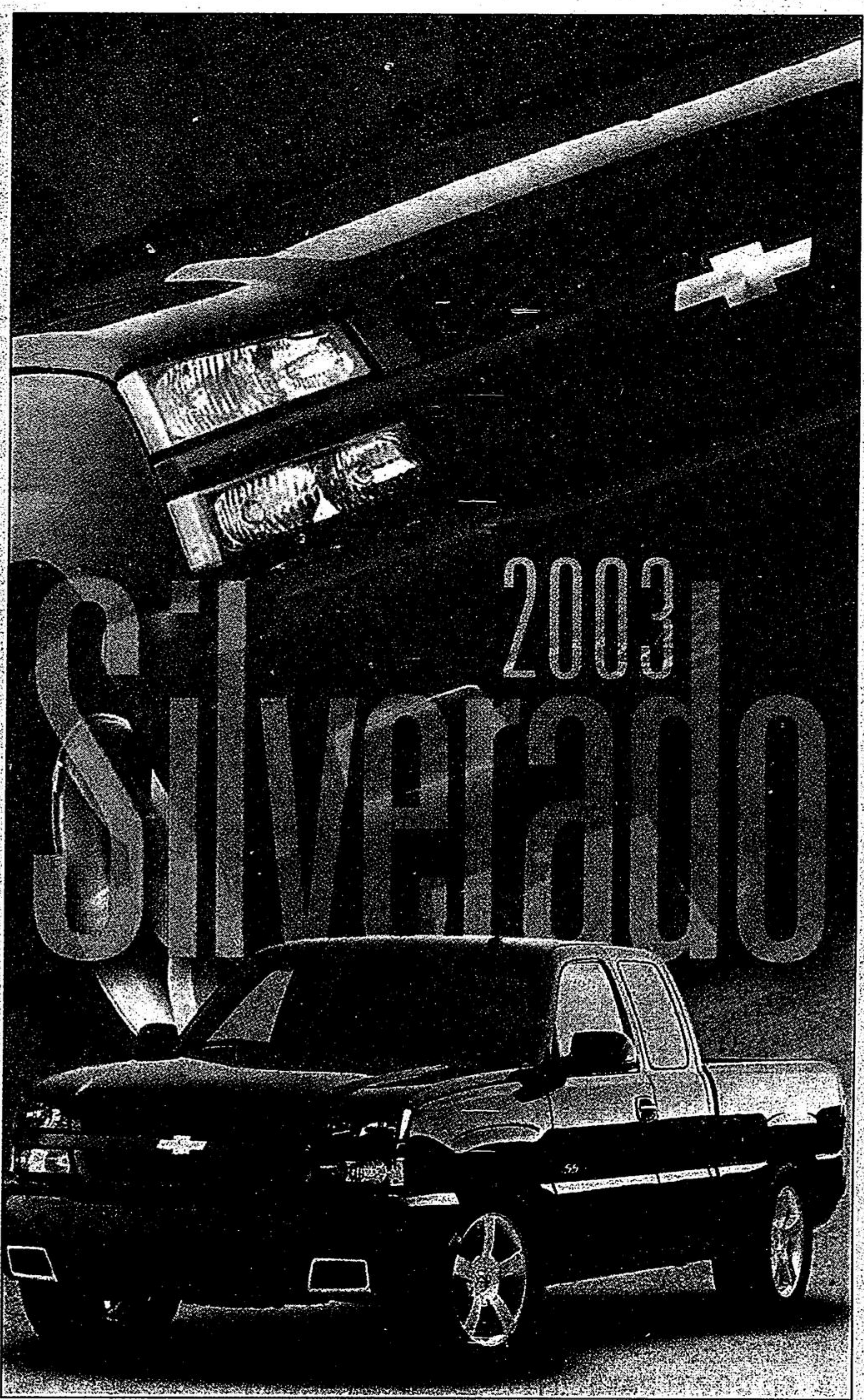
Silverado's interior accoutrements have also been attended to with new seats, instrument panel and dual-zone climate control. For the first time on a pickup, a range of Bose audio systems are available as is a Panasonic DVD player for Crew Cab models. Mindful of the hazard associated with airbags and children, a passenger-sensing system automatically disables the airbag if someone smaller than an adult is riding in front.

Keeping the all-purpose Silverado on the move is a choice of six powerplants, all carryovers from 2002, that range from a 200-horsepower 4.3-litre V6 all the way up to a King Kong-sized 340-horsepower 8.1-litre V8. Included in the mix is GM's 6.6-litre Duramax turbodiesel V8 worth 300 horsepower and an equally impressive 520 lb.-ft. of torque at just 1,800 RPM.

However, there's more in store on the performance front. Early in calendar 2003, Chevrolet will unleash the Silverado SS, complete with all-wheel drive, 20-inch wheels and Goodyear Eagle tires, custom interior and a high-output 340-horse 6.0-litre V8 matched to a four-speed automatic transmission. The SS will be a throwback to the El Camino trucksters of the late 1960s and early '70s, only the Silverado version will be more comfortable, more capable (with all-wheel drive) and, obviously, offer a bigger payload.

Of course, being a truck, the new Silverado comes in a mind-numbing variety of permutations, including half- and three-quarter-ton capacities, short- or long-box beds, Fleetside or Sportside styling, two- or four-wheel drive and regular, extended-cab and crew cab sizes. Combine this with the available engine/transmission and colour variations and you'll probably need more than a few hours of careful study before deciding how you want Chevrolet to build the pickup of your dreams.

Whatever the final result, your personal Silverado will contain more style and features than ever before, plus the power to take care of just about virtually task you demand of it.



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