



POWER IS ITS MIDDLE NAME

STORY AND PHOTOS:
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What's in a name? The Power Wagon name comes from decades of Dodge 4-wheel-drive trucks made from the early 1940s through the '80s, the earliest of which were extremely rugged and military in nature. In 2005, Dodge introduced a modern Power Wagon, an off-road-focused version of the Dodge Ram 2500 pickup. Back for 2010, it joins the other Dodge, er, Ram pickups in dropping Dodge from its name. Mostly, the Dodge name persists in the manufacturer's media materials and on the truck itself. We'd say just as well, considering we have trouble visualizing classic feed store favorite-truck debates changing their lingo because corporate did.

The Ram 2500/3500 Heavy Duty lineup includes five distinct trim models—ST, SLT, TRX, Power Wagon and Laramie. Our test 2010 Ram Power Wagon Crew Cab 4x4 came equipped with a 5.7-liter (345 cu.in.) HEMI® engine, as well as production off-road readiness including electric-locking front and rear differentials, electronic disconnecting sway bar, Bilstein shocks, 32-inch off-road tires, underbody skid plate protection, a 4.56 axle ratio for hill climbing, and a custom-built Warn 12,000 pound winch. The Power Wagon is rated to tow 10,300 lbs. and comes standard with a class 4 trailer hitch. The truck features a new award-winning interior and exterior Power Wagon and 4x4 Off-Road graphics, plus a lower two-tone paint scheme.

Built to master the most rigorous off-road trails, the Ram Power Wagon is based on the all-new Ram 2500 Heavy Duty 4x4 Crew Cab. The Power Wagon has a 14.5-inch ground clearance, compared to 12 inches on the Ram 2500 Heavy Duty. The vehicle's approach angle is boosted to 35 degrees, departure angle is increased to 26.5 degrees and breakover angle to 25.5 degrees. This gives the Ram Power Wagon significant clearance for navigating a variety of off-road trails, with special skill at tackling severe inclines and declines.

And how do they achieve these numbers, when based on a normal 2500 truck? Mostly with the Power Wagon's BFGoodrich All-Terrain T/A 32-inch tires, which in one move increase ground clearance and all angles. Aren't there a great many trucks on the road that have upped their tire size and suspension for the same reason? Indeed there are, but of course the Ram engineers optimized this vehicle to accommodate all the changes. We did find some characteristics of braking and handling to be less than optimized (see sidebar), but it's good to know the engineering has been fully integrated from the get-go.

The Ram folks are mighty proud of their Power Wagon, calling it "the most off-road capable pickup truck on the market." Fred Diaz, President and CEO of Ram Truck Brand, Chrysler Group LLC, goes on to say, "No off-road truck on the market can touch the Ram Power Wagon. It dominates the competition. It's a vehicle born from the minds of off-road enthusiasts and goes way beyond anything ever created by an automaker." But what about the Ford SVT Raptor? Off-road specialization is its game, too (particularly desert off-road), and it boasts 29.8-degree approach, 22.85-degree departure and 11.3-degree breakover angles, with 24.2" door sill depth and 12" breakover height, riding on 35"

tires, as well as having an amazing 15" front and 18" rear wheel travel. The Ford is lower on power and torque (310 hp and 365 lb-ft versus 383/400 for the Ram), but offers controlled descent between 2 and 20 mph. The Raptor holds less fuel (26 gallons versus 34) but achieves 14/18 mpg EPA, while the Ram is not rated. The Super Cab Raptor has a turning circle of 44.6 feet, while the Crew Cab Ram turns in 47.55 feet. The Ford is built in Dearborn and the Ram in Mexico.

The Power Wagon is big, and its cab is spacious, moreso in both cases than you might even expect. You correspondent is about 6'2" but could park his chin on the hood. We've never been big fans of step-ups into the cab, figuring they just get in the way and that a slip on ice or mud could tangle an ankle or bark a shin. But this truck could almost use one. We got our first big surprise, though, stepping out. You are up there.

The crew cab is of course large, but even from the driver's seat, alone, you are welcomed by a wide and deep expanse, sizable instruments and control stack that still have plenty of their own elbow room, and storage capacity galore. Our test Power Wagon included a Luxury Group—a bargain at just \$345—with leather-wrapped steering wheel, wheel-mounted audio controls, overhead console with garage door opener (just in case the truck fits in your garage), and various additional lamps and mirrors. We also had a Technology Group, \$495 for rear park-assist and upgraded audio, a backup camera (\$200), and a \$1265 Media Center with nav and much more. But the core add-on is Customer Preferred Package 26P, which adds 24 mostly Power Wagon-specific elements, from a 180-amp alternator, to skid plates, tow hooks, those big tires, and much, much more—at \$8350. Put it all together, and a base Ram 2500 SLT Crew Cab 4x4 with a base price of \$38,480 becomes the Power Wagon, now \$51,140 including destination charge of \$950. The key package may sound pricey, but itemized it is very reasonable, and the transformation achieved for about 12 grand is surely worth more than the sum of its parts.

The feature and performance details of this truck could fill a book; we encourage you to investigate further at www.ramtrucks.com. We drove the truck on surface streets and freeway, and though we didn't do serious off-roading, we did some miles on barely-roads. No question the Power Wagon is up to the job. And when encountering your fellow truckers, you'll find it is fun to share the road, because every other truck looks like a lesser truck, and we mean just about every other one.

Ram pickups, including the Power Wagon, have earned many accolades for the 2010 model year. The full Ram 2500/3500 Heavy Duty pickup lineup was named *Motor Trend's* 2010 "Truck of the Year," after beating the competition in a series of rigorous tests. The Rocky Mountain Automotive Press association (RMAP) named the Ram 3500 Heavy Duty pickup its "2010 Outstanding Truck," the second consecutive RMAP truck-of-the-year title for Ram following a 2009 win for the Ram 1500. And *Four Wheeler* magazine named the 2010 Ram 2500 Power Wagon "2010 Pickup Truck of the Year," after a series of in-depth on- and off-road tests.

In short, it's a great truck. If you actually need it, all the greater. We do with its paved-street handling and braking were stronger. And we know we'd appreciate the cab even more if we were Randy Johnson. ■



2010 Ram 2500 Laramie Crew Cab



POWER WAGON LOGBOOK

- This thing is a beast, but we mean that in a good way. The hood is expansive, almost seeming to run uphill. The mirrors are BIG.
- We stash our gear in the middle console, which is very spacious. Then we rotate that up because we prefer elbow room to elbow rest (and all spills inside). This is the first vehicle we've driven in a long time with a window at good elbow height. The truck offers a very commanding view of the road.
- It's very powerful, accelerates well and cruises very comfortably right at 65. Basic daily handling is good. Pulled out of a parking lot space with a darn tight left turn to clear a curb and exit with no trouble.
- The automatic column shifter's long arm feels flimsy, traveling somewhat to front and rear as well as up and down.
- There are 12v power ports all over this thing, in the console, the center stack, surely more in the back. There's a 115v 150w outlet. You can definitely do your work in here. We like the idea of bringing your own gear and plugging it in, rather than a fully integrated manufacturer interface. 12v ports are identified with either a key or battery icon, so you know where you can get a charge while parked and off.
- We had several negative notes on suspension, from the first driveway curb seeming soft and floaty for a big, tough truck, same in the first two blocks, to "bounce bounce bounce" on a freeway ramp. Coming to a stop from 5 mph, it sways fore and aft like a big '60s sedan. Soft in some ways, it's stiff enough that we can hardly change the radio on the touchscreen.
- We also had numerous negatives on the brakes. At our first local turn, going 25 mph if that, brakes felt notably insufficient. Ditto in a small traffic circle. We called them scary. As we got used to them they weren't AS bad, but after just about anything else they felt inadequate. Noted as "the mushiest brakes we've felt in a long time, like three stages of mush to try to stop."
- Axle settings: front-rear-lock, rear lock, axle unlock. It arrived in front-rear lock, normally for ice or off-road where there is drivetrain slippage. Unlock gave us considerable axle hop. So we put it back in front-rear lock. Turning, it skittered like mad. Transfer case shifter on the floor does not match the manual. Tough to budge, we finally ensure it's in 2-HI. Seems primitive.
- We heard this was a long-term test vehicle, so perhaps it's seen heavy action, although it has lower than 8000 miles on it.
- We wonder if there is a combination of settings for suspension, 4wd and axles just the way we want things, but wish there were a better ride right out of the box.