

High and mighty

By Joe Sage



“TOYOTA understands that American truck buyers have different needs, so we offer a choice of a compact or full-size truck, even while most of our competitors have abandoned the compact market.

“Tundra and Tacoma sold nearly a quarter million trucks in 2012—claiming 18 percent of the combined retail compact and half-ton pickup truck market, which is about the same as our retail passenger-car share. And all of them are built in North America.

“In addition, no full-size truck has more North American parts content than Tundra.

“We’re optimistic about the future of the full-size pick-up truck market. The recession hit the segment hard—probably harder than any other—and there were only 1.1 million sold in 2009.

“But in 2012—with the economy growing in many areas—the segment exceeded 1.6 million units, and we see it hitting 1.8 million by 2015.

“The full-size truck segment has typically been one of the most loyal in the industry, with owners continually replacing their old trucks with new ones, and in today’s market some are taking the opportunity to change brands.

“We’ve also seen more segment switching as people move from SUVs and cars to the unique capabilities and increasing comfort of full-size pickups. With increased personal use, the mix of half-ton Crew Cabs has grown from 48 percent to almost 60 percent over the last five years.

“There is also a growing trend towards more premium grades with additional features and distinctive styling.”

These are the words of Bill Fay, VP of Toyota Division Group and GM of Toyota Motor Sales USA, at the Chicago Auto Show in February, when we witnessed the reveal of a very new 2014 Tundra. We quote him now because five months later, we are once more driving the 2013 model.



2013 Toyota Tundra CrewMax 4x4

As you can see by the photo insets at left, our Tundra was heavily branded: Toyota, of course, and Tundra, of course; 4x4, which we’re always happy to see; FlexFuel ready; Limited trim; powered by an iForce 5.7L V8; and certified by TRD, the Toyota Racing Development group. This truck should be ready for anything from trail to club, just as Toyota has set out to deliver, per the demographic and market developments VP Fay described above.

A base 2013 Tundra starts as low as \$25,455, with a regular cab, two-wheel drive and a 4.0L V6, still capable of towing over 10,000 pounds while achieving 16/20 MPG (city/highway).

A base 2013 Tundra CrewMax starts as low as \$30,635 with a 4.6L V8 and two-wheel drive (and delivering 13/17 MPG),

Bring your trim spec up to the Limited level—which falls between the base Tundra and a Platinum model—and add four-wheel drive, and you have a combination that includes the 381-hp 5.7-liter iForce V8 (with 401 lb-ft of torque). This is our test vehicle, which stickered at a base price of \$43,895. The truck is available with or without the FlexFuel feature, priced the same either way. TRD badging came with an off-road package.

Our tester was additionally outfitted with a 7-inch touchscreen interface that includes voice activation, DVD-based navigation, backup camera, 12-speaker JBL audio with 4-disc CD plus AM/FM/SXM/MP3 including USB iPod, hands-free phone and Bluetooth music streaming, all for an extremely reasonable \$1340. That TRD off-road package is even more reasonable, bringing five-spoke 18-inch alloy wheels, BFGoodrich Rugged Trail T/Ax, off-road-tuned suspension, Bilstein shocks, fuel tank skid plates and that TRD badging for only—and yes, we had to read the sticker more than once and pinch ourselves—\$70 (note: we have scrutinized the consumer build-your-own site and not been able to recreate this). Seat, mirror and steering wheel memory added \$465, a power moonroof \$180 and carpet mats plus sill protector \$195. Grand total for our truck (with \$995 destination): \$47,770.

The options included some real bargains. When you choose your trim level, though, you’ll want to pay better attention, as our \$43,895 base compares with just \$34,930 for a base-trim Tundra or \$48,170 for Platinum.

Fay seems to be on the mark about customers being willing to change brands. It has been years now since the Tundra graduated from what many called 7/8ths scale to a truly full-sized glorious beast. The days of wondering how a Japanese truck could hope to take on the usual Detroit triad are clearly in the rear-view mirror. (And, as Fay

pointed out, nobody beats the North American manufactured content of Toyota’s entry, anyway.) These are the same four brands, after all, that are represented in NASCAR (at least to the degree that RAM may equal Dodge).

In NASCAR, they have been working very hard this past year to bring about a little more (or any) brand differentiation among the four badges’ vehicle bodies. It is much improved, but the fundamental sizes and shapes are mostly still dictated to be the same. What’s surprising when you think about it, then, is how distinctly different the big four brands’ big pickup styling is. Cab styling also varies considerably among brands; unlike with some brands, we find the Toyota Tundra highly attractive whether in regular, extended (they call it “Double”) or crew cab (CrewMax) form.

Our time with this truck was relatively brief, but that may be appropriate, as its remaining time on your dealer’s lot will be, too. We did find some basically flat construction area dirt and gravel in which to give it a spin, but did no off-roading. Time around town was smooth and comfortable.

We gave the big CrewMax high marks in maneuverability. Even with its 19-foot-almost-one-inch length (and 145.7-inch wheelbase), this Tundra achieves a 44-foot turning circle. We don’t expect this to equal a Fiat, or even a midsize Tacoma, but whether getting in and out of our tight photo spot, or jockeying our way through parking lots, we noted its remarkably tight handling more than once.

We expect most of these comparatives to be very similar for the new 2014 model. If you’re interested in this 2013 Tundra, your time is growing short. Time to visit the dealer and check stock. Toyota appears to have done a great job updating this standard for 2014, but you will probably not regret buying what will soon be last year’s model, if you can get the right deal. ■

We can focus on the 2013 Tundra only just so much, when we had already flown to Chicago in February to see an all-new 2014 revealed. Toyota has introduced a run of new vehicles over the past year, including the Avalon (which we covered at launch in San Antonio in November) and the RAV4 (ditto at Cave Creek later in February).

Given the red-blooded nature of the US full-size truck market, Toyota emphasizes that the Tundra was again engineered by Toyota Technical Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan and styled at Caltly Design Research centers in Newport Beach and Ann Arbor. The truck will again be built exclusively at Toyota’s plant in San Antonio.

Models will include a work-oriented SR, volume-leading SR5, a Limited and two premium grades: Platinum and the all-new 1794 Edition—a tribute to the original ranch, founded in 1794, upon which the San Antonio Tundra plant is located. Toyota promises more distinct differences among model grades, both in exterior styling and interior style and appointments. Platinum and 1794 Edition interiors are especially impressive.

Cab styles, engine options, 4x2 or 4x4 drivetrains, and a maximum tow rating of 10,000 pounds are unchanged.

The truck’s revised styling is immediately recognizable as new, but also as a Tundra. The rear box, with angular humps and creases, is a quick way to spot the new model. The 2014 Toyota Tundra hits dealers in September. ■

