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Crew cab diesel dually
(not so much a daily driver,
but man, it can carry.)

By Joe Sage

When we are delivered a vehicle for evaluation, we don't always have a tailor-made mission on the schedule. It would be nice, for example, to have a 1000-mile road rally scheduled when a new Porsche is delivered. Or for this RAM 3500 dually, we might have wished we had a herd of cattle that we needed to move from Mexico to the high plains.

But we didn't. This hugely capable truck was largely relegated to typical around-town duty, which may be a waste of its full potential, but is still not a bad way to get a feel for things. Rest assured, most people who do buy this truck will indeed have something fairly specific—and fairly challenging—on their agenda.

Which brings up an interesting point. When posted on social media, this truck drew a response from a few people who seemed to think someone would only buy such a rig to overcompensate for some kind of personal shortcoming. We're not going to say this never, ever happens with big, fast, showy or powerful vehicles. But it would be a weak reason to drive this handful around all day, every day, if you didn't have a solid purpose for it. Purpose is this truck's whole reason for being.



If you check your mirrors, you'll find this ranch- or construction jobsite-ready truck just fits between urban lane stripes. • The spacious interior includes a huge console—big enough for a small briefcase and more—plus two generous dashboard glove boxes. • The operator's manual is refreshingly slim (there is also a more extensive version on DVD).

Some people posting on Facebook understood the truck and some did not. Many were restating the obvious (it's big). One didn't like the idea of a diesel powerplant. Some loved it. Some posts are entertaining, some annoying, some enlightening:

- *Big as a house.*
- *Has its own zipcode.*
- *Wow, the official upscale Bubba mobile!*
- *Beaucoup tires.*
- *I know it's cool, but I'd be embarrassed.*
- *More show than purpose? A form over function thing, I guess.*
- *For show... over-compensation...*
- *If I lived within a mile of you, I'd be ticked off every time you started that thing...*
- *I'm stumped. What's the purpose of the dual rear wheels for any farmer/rancher (if it's 4WD)?*
- *Stumped? A dually will pull a stump.*
- *You might have to let air out of the tires if you ever wanted to get it in your garage!*
- *I think I need one of these.*

Well, it's not 4WD. But on the ranch, on the jobsite or on the open road, a dually rig can carry more weight—in its bed or while towing. Fifth-wheel hookups for heavy farm and ranch stock trailers benefit from duallys. More wheels, with more contact area, spread the load.

It's definitely about function. Lots of people buy more routine full-size pickups, even if they don't truly need them, but fewer in-town folks would deal with a dually all day long just on a whim.

Our RAM 3500 Laramie Crew Cab 4x2 dually had a base price of \$44,500 and was out the door for \$62,520. The single biggest add-on was the 6.7-liter Cummins turbo diesel (\$7795). The entire dually package cost just \$1200—pretty amazing when you consider what you could spend for just two tires on some vehicles. Our truck came with remote start for \$200 (perfect for those subzero mornings). Our truck was lacking only one thing—four-wheel drive—so subzero mornings aren't as likely for this one, but remote start could also be handy on 122-degree Valley afternoons.

The RAM 3500 has a GCWR of 25,000 pounds and tow capacity of 30,000. That's more than you really need to run to the corner for a sandwich, yet sometimes that's exactly what we used it for.

We did not set out to formally test fuel econo-

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The big dually dominates a local street without even trying. • A trailer brake power control and DEF urea fluid gauge are typical of the truck's clear and effective instruments. • The satellite antenna staggers the cab clearance lights—a combination of space age tech and conventional trucking that may sum up the whole feel of this modern workhorse.

my, but after about 90 miles of general daily errands, we had used just over 1/4 tank of fuel. Specifications were ambiguous: this either has a 28- or 32-gallon tank. This would indicate either 12.85 or 11.25 MPG and a 360-mile range, but this had been based on guesstimated mileage (we hadn't noted our precise starting mileage). We managed to find out that starting mileage, then eyeballed the gauge again at about a half tank, which was an accurate 135 miles. This time, our fuel mileage was either 9.64 or 8.44 MPG, and range would be about 270 miles. Obviously, we were not hypermiling (nor were we trying).

This truck has a distinct personality. It's long, it's wide, it's capable. You feel the torque immediately. You know from its diesel growl that it would be happiest towing a 12-horse trailer or a front end loader up I-17. There is zero doubt that this truck can handle those jobs.

The big RAM 3500 dually looks like a handful, but it handles beautifully. This is not our first rodeo—we've driven many a big pickup—but we had no trouble adjusting to the extra girth of the dually setup, or to the maximum length of a crew cab plus full eight-foot bed (21 feet 7.4 inches on a 169.4-inch wheelbase). And all this in town.

Earlier this year, we called the Lexus LS long wheelbase sedan "king of the road." The Audi A8L brought the same phrase to mind a month or two later. Now all we can do is shake our heads and smile as we indisputably think the exact same thing behind the wheel of this regal beast.

There is certainly no substitute for the grunt, the torque, the grip, the acceleration of a diesel, and this truck has it in spades.

As for the Facebook comment about not wanting to live within a mile when we fire it up, we're not sure whether he thought it would be smelly, or noisy, but it's neither. This is 400-plus cubic inches of 21st century clean diesel all the way.

Under acceleration, we had some very minor drivetrain chatter or wheel hop from the back, as the twin wheels test their grip in certain situations. It's pretty negligible, just a dually thing.

We did note that the brakes did not always feel as strong as the acceleration.

The owner's manual demands a cool-down period when you park, for the sake of the turbo. An idling chart dictates that after an uphill grade, you should wait 5 minutes before shutting down.

With no load on a cool day, less than a minute. After stop-and-go driving with a medium load, a full minute. If you've been driving at highway speeds, with a medium load, in what Michiganders might consider "warm" temperatures, idle for 2 minutes. After city traffic, with maximum load and warm temps, 3 minutes. (In our extreme summer temperatures, presumably a little longer, though at some point ambient heat takes over.) This life-extending engine behavior takes some discipline, but it'd be a good habit to develop. You can always sit and check your email. Or just kick back with the truck's Alpine sound system.

As with other Chrysler Group products we've driven lately, the audio is outstanding. This truck has a 506-watt Alpine system with 9 speakers and subwoofer. We equalized it readily, and it had plenty more headroom. It was the 4th of July, we had Michigan plates and Bob Seger on satellite—the experience was complete.

Other controls are intuitive and quick (though those in the touchscreen sometimes require your visual focus for a moment). Climate control primarily uses a physical knob that lets you control all fundamentals without a glance. The binnacle contains a well-executed combination of analog needles and contextual digital gauges.

Seats are ventilated (but not chilled). Small fans in the seat cushion draw air from the passenger compartment through fine perforations, to help keep the driver and front passenger cooler in high ambient temps. We checked this on a 110-degree day, figuring if we have a high ambient temperature in the cab it was not going to do too much, but it turns out that it feels pretty good.

The crew cab is so spacious, we figure you could utilize the interior as fully as a typical large SUV for most things (to the point that we wish the rear seats folded down into a flat floor area). Either way, there's still that full eight-foot bed waiting out back.

With as many comforts and as much power assistance as any modern vehicle has, it has to be a special challenge to engineer something like this big huge truck to feel like the big huge truck it is, for the driver who wouldn't have it any other way, while still keeping it manageable—in fact downright enjoyable—for anybody else who might end up driving it. That careful balance has been perfectly struck here.

A dually's a dually, but overall for our week with it we never really encountered any particular problems with its width. Once in awhile, we would have the urge to check both lane stripes in the mirror (carefully, since we were running so tight, heading down the road). On one high-speed

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freeway exit, we encountered a utility-box work truck parked two-thirds on the gravel but one-third in our righthand lane. Fortunately, the left lane was open, so we were able to swing over a little bit, but otherwise it would have required coming to a sudden and complete stop. A dually's a dually, and that's how it all worked out, just fine.

On a typical day of local errands, doing a U-turn to get into a parking lot space, we noted how incredibly maneuverable the truck really is. We were curious—as we always are—what the turning circle is. It seemed so good, we didn't know whether this was just a matter of expectations, or actually a tremendous number. And surely the dually width impacts the final fit, too.

Checking the turning circle on a beast like this one may seem as silly as checking the fuel economy on a Bugatti or the 0-to-60 on a Prius—it's just not why you buy 'em. But this truck's maneuverability had us curious. You can configure your RAM pickup a great many ways—regular, extended, crew or Mega cab; short or long bed; different engines; 1500-2500-3500 or chassis duty levels; two- or four-wheel drive. You can add the dually option to some. Against our common benchmarks of MINI or Jeep Grand Cherokee in the lower- and upper-mid 30s, the RAM is in a different league. A regular cab 4X4 has the smallest turning circle,

at 41.6 feet (smaller than the 2WD at 45.1, surprisingly). A long-box Crew Cab 4X4 hits 49.2 feet, while our 2WD turns in 53.2 feet. There is no spec given with the addition of dually wheels, but you get the idea. The numbers may suggest a challenge, but the actual driving experience is a refreshingly different story.

There's no question that a truck like this would be happiest living on a free-range ranch or tackling an industrial construction site.

At the higher end of the overall scale of pickups, this RAM 3500 dually costs more and takes up more space, but it does more. Social media skeptics aside, if someone buys this truck, it's not to overcompensate or stoke their ego. It's surely to accomplish a task. If they drive it all the time, it's also likely not to show off around town; it's likely because this one vehicle is for their core needs and taps out their budget. All business.

This big diesel dually is the direct opposite of a frivolous purchase. If you need this as a tool, you know who you are. Can this be someone's daily driver, as well? Indeed it can. Between the spacious cab and its clean but refined appointments, a solid sound system, and power and handling that are surprisingly easy to master in town, this truck will never let you down. ■