

Ford F-Series Super Duty puts best foot forward

by Joe Sage

Following last year's introduction of an entirely new, industry-changing, aluminum-intensive Ford F-150, we now have the introduction of an aluminum-intensive F-Series Super Duty lineup. Reengineered top to bottom, these handsome brutes are ready to take on a rocky riverbed in Arizona, an above-timberline dirt pass in Colorado, any construction site, or a rough road to the Hermosillo rodeo with a six-horse gooseneck in tow.

We haven't done those things yet—stay tuned—but we did meet up with Ford at Phoenix International Raceway for a look at the new trucks' bones, an autocross course, towing competition and high-tech trailer backing drills.

F-Series sales have ruled the roost for decades, with the Chevy-GMC lineup perennially in pursuit. But it's aggressive double-digit growth from Ram pickups that has really caught Ford's attention. As such, the new Ford Super Duty lineup has made a point of nudging their figures past Ram in such key areas as maximum towing and diesel grunt.

We started our day with classroom time—a series of presentations displaying and describing Ford's new construction, from an all-new body (which learns a lot from the aluminum F-150, but is beefed up throughout, with, for example, heavier gauge and more ribbing in the bed, a significantly higher-spec frame, enhanced built-in tow-

ing structure—even below-the-box fifth-wheel trailer prep in every truck.

The new Super Duty trucks are now built much as the F-150s, with military grade high-strength aluminum alloy and high-strength steel, together shaving off 350 pounds. That weight savings has been applied to strengthen the rest. The all-new, fully boxed frame, more than 95 percent high-strength steel, is up to 24 times stiffer than the previous frame, allowing for more cargo and towing capacity. (The new body is also more dent- and ding-resistant than the old steel body.)

Ford is staking a new claim to most power for 2017, with their 6.7-liter Power Stroke V8 turbo diesel putting out 925 lb-ft of torque and 440 hp, for the moment exceeding the 2016 Ram Heavy Duty lineup's 900 lb-ft of torque from their 6.7-liter Cummins inline-six diesel. (Heavy duty pickups are not EPA-rated for fuel economy, so there is not a stated direct comparison between the Ford V8 and the Ram six on this.)

The Ford 6.2-liter gasoline V8 claims best-in-class torque of 430 lb-ft (Ram's 6.4L HEMI V8 is just one pound-foot behind, at 429). Ford's gasoline horsepower (which they don't promote as actively) is 385, versus 410 in the Ram HEMI.

Cargo and towing capacities are always tricky to tally, with variables in GVWR, dually setups,



goosenecks and fifth-wheel trailering in play. The new F-Series Super Duty's specs are their highest yet and, as with the engines, carefully calibrated to edge out Ram for now. Maximum gooseneck towing is 32,500 pounds on the 2017 F-450 (the 2016 Ram tops out at 31,210). Conventional and fifth-wheel towing lead their classes, at 21,000 and 27,500 pounds, respectively (Ram moves to fifth-wheel or gooseneck at 18,000 pounds and to all gooseneck at 25,000). And Ford's new maximum payload is 7,630 pounds, to Ram's 7,390.

We did a demo of new trailering technologies in the 2017 Super Duty lineup. Unlike the F-150, which offers a hands-on (but arguably rotationally counterintuitive) steering controller, the Super Duty has extensive visual feedback—from a color-coded screen display that advises your degree of steering within optimized bounds, to a high-mounted camera and screen guides for

aligning the trailer, to a four-camera system, including one integrated into your own trailer, to see every aspect of your trailer hookup or backup in progress, a 360-degree view. Adaptive (speed-sensitive) steering augments the process.

Adaptive cruise, collision warning and brake support work even at full speed with a 32,500-pound trailer in tow. Blind spot monitoring is effective even with a trailer up to 33 feet long.

It's not uncommon for a builder to put special emphasis on cupholders, and Ford has developed a clever new one, with a sliding top that instantly changes between two or four cup receptors, to optimize combinations of cup and storage needs.

Attention has also been paid to what you stash in the bed, with a set of stowing ramps available, a remote tailgate release with power lock, a tailgate step and receivers for industry-standard stowage and accessory systems.

We put every bit of this to the test at PIR, hitching and backing up gooseneck trailers, running an autocross course with acceleration, extreme braking, tight slalom at speed, and in some cases a 32,500-pound load. We ran the same course with a full selection of Ford Super Duty pickups in different trim levels, as well as a variety of carefully matched competitors from Ram and GM. (The Toyota Tundra is not a heavy-duty pickup, and Nissan Titan has actively placed itself between light and heavy duty.)

The all-new 2017 Ford Super Duty F-Series will be built at Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville and goes on sale later this year.

The pickup kings have been outdoing one another for years now, and we can be sure Ram's engineers are hard at work nudging their numbers up again. One thing for certain in the endless wars of power, capacity and features—the result is always Mutually Assured Improvement, and the customer wins big. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

MODELS	F-250, F-350, F-450
CABS	Regular, SuperCab, Crew Cab
TRIM LEVELS	XL, XLT, Lariat, King Ranch, Platinum
BOX LENGTHS	6.75 ft, 8 ft
WHEELBASES	160, 176, 142, 148, 164 in
REAR WHEELS	single, dually
WHEELS	17", 18" steel or alum; F-450 19.5"

ENGINES:

6.2L 2v SOHC EFI V8 (flex-fuel)	
HP	385 hp
TORQUE	430 lb-ft
6.7L 4v Power Stroke® Diesel V8 (B20)	
HP	440 hp
TORQUE	925 lb-ft

TRANSMISSIONS:

GAS OR DIESEL:	
.....TorqShift 6-spd auto w/ SelectShift®	
GAS F-250 ONLY:	
.....all-new TorqShift-G 6-spd auto	
ALTERNATORS	(5) from 157/175 to 377 amp
DRIVETRAINS	4x4, 4x2
REAR AXLES	(11) choices: limited slip, non-limited slip, electronic locking
PTO	Live-drive power takeoff, either engine

TOW CAPACITIES	up to 32,500 lb
PAYLOAD	up to 7,630 lb

BASE PRICES

F-250	XL	\$ 32,535
	XLT	36,740
	LARIAT	45,105
	KING RANCH	54,260
	PLATINUM	62,110
F-350	XL	\$ 33,705
	XLT	37,920
	LARIAT	46,275
	KING RANCH	55,435
	PLATINUM	61,775
F-450	XL	\$ 53,945
	XLT	58,810
	LARIAT	65,635
	KING RANCH	72,455
	PLATINUM	77,125

CONSUMER EVENT: Get up close and personal with the all-new 2017 Ford Super Duty at Phoenix International Raceway during NASCAR weekend in November. There will be vehicle drives, interactive displays and towing demonstrations, with product experts on hand to answer your questions, plus a chance to win your own 2017 Ford F-Series Super Duty. The event will be at PIR's ZoomTown Nov 8-10 and at the NASCAR Can-Am 500 November 11-13. Sign up at SuperDutyDrive.com.

