

Changes in latitude

A long, semi-purposeless drive in Ram's purpose-built Rebel. By Joe Sage

Ordering your own new pickup to spec is one of the more complicated vehicle purchases you might tackle. Fuel, engine, transmission, transfer case and rear end choices, times cab and bed choices, times all the other options and packages in the book, give you hundreds if not thousands of possible combinations. Checking available inventory can save a lot of pain and suffering. Having a new truck just plopped in your lap can also do this.

RAM REBEL: When we receive a truck to drive for a week for review, we don't have to make those tough choices. This 2018 Ram 1500 Rebel Crew Cab 4x4 arrived in white and black over black leather, with upgraded Uconnect and audio, Ram Boxes, a tonneau cover and other goodies. Nice specs.

We've had the Ram Rebel for a week before. We've it them at Ram lineup launch events (and are about to drive the all-new 2019 model). We've driven them at trophy competitions including the Texas Truck Rodeo, Active Lifestyle Vehicle Awards in Arizona, and Mudfest (the Pacific Northwest's Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year awards). We've driven them at FCA's off-road proving grounds near Chelsea, Michigan. We've driven with the truck's lead engineer, Elizabeth Krear, getting a play-by-play on how none of the impressive Rebel-specific attributes and features compromise any of the elements of a base Ram 4x4—Rebel has specialized suspension and considerably expanded wheel travel for its 33-inch tires, but all its special duty adaptations subtract nothing from the basic capabilities and specs of a mainstream Ram 1500—same fuel mileage, same towing within literally just a few pounds, and so on.

Now that you can order a Rebel with a leather

interior (like our sample here) and with or without bold Rebel graphics (ours came without), it's hard to think of a situation where it wouldn't cover all bases (unless you need more payload or towing, but for that, there's the Ram 2500 Power Wagon).

ROAD TRIP: With one eye always on our vehicle schedule and the other on a map, we hatched half a plan before this truck even arrived: a possible dash up to Northwest Colorado. This drive can be done in about 14 hours nonstop (one friend insists just eleven), but with the scenery en route, not to mention some cliffhangers, it's best done in daylight, with well-timed overnights. A motel stop anywhere from Moab, Utah to Grand Junction, Colorado gives you daylight for spectacular Monument Valley, as well as for any deer, elk, pronghorn, moose and/or blizzards in Northwest Colorado.

With its huge tires and adjustable ride height, a Rebel would be great in the legendary snows of the Colorado Rockies. On the downside, the region was having a low snow year to that point. On the upside, skies and roads were predicted to be clear, and we definitely needed to make good time.

The Ram Rebel would be ready for us Wednesday, but would be at a vehicle drive event in California for its first few days. We arranged to have the truck waiting at the airport, ready to swing home for some winter gear and head north. Unfortunately, this would run us through Monument Valley in the dark, but it would work overall.

ARIZONA: We were interested in fuel mileage for the long haul, with Rebel's big 5.7L HEMI V8's fuel-saving "multi-displacement" cylinder deactivation at cruising speeds (the same trick that makes a Dodge Challenger Hellcat a reasonable daily driver when not out thrashing it at the track). Note: you

can also buy the Rebel with a Pentastar V6 (and for that matter as a 4x2, which a few do each year).

In the first 30 miles of town and urban freeway, our readout ranged from 16 to 33 mpg regularly, with bursts into the 40s and 50s, even 99 at one point, single digits at another; 16 began to dominate. Climbing I-17 between 2,000-3,000 feet, we were at 10-11 mpg, which could make our long trip twice as expensive as we'd hoped. But as we hit Sunset Point and headed across the grassy open plains, we were reading 17 to 45 mpg. Nice.

Bear in mind, we were driving as normally and energetically as ever, with steep climbs and slower semis, RVs and microcars to conquer in stride.

It had been a long time since breakfast in California, so we pulled off to grab a bite at the Highway 69 exit. "Nice truck," we found ourselves saying reflexively as we got back in. Back on I-17, as we left a lesser truck in the dust on a steep climb, we concluded that one cool thing about the Rebel is that as it gets bigger and tougher, it also gets faster. You do sometimes feel its take-on-anything tires on pavement irregularities just a little, but that's an appropriate part of the balance of duties in this truck. Also, despite our having long legs, we noted it could use a "dead pedal" left footrest.

As we passed the 4000-foot mark (the second time, north of Verde Valley), we noticed the binnacle was bearing an "aero" readout—notification that the air-adjustable ride height had automatically hunkered down for our highway speeds.

It was getting dark as we passed through Flagstaff, but we were pretty good on gas, though it's quite a stretch between pumps from there north. Our Rebel had the 32-gallon tank option (a \$445 must-have), so we forged on into the night.

NAVAJO NATION: North on US 89, about half-way from Flagstaff to the US 160 turnoff, you cross into the Navajo Nation, which the route traverses for almost as many miles as the Arizona portion to



(Below) Monument Valley, the ultimate Western panorama, is a Navajo Tribal Park. Though its image shouts "Arizona," it's mostly in Utah. // (Above) Fisher Towers Road and the Colorado River outside Moab. // (Right) Cameron Trading Post in northern Arizona; I-70 through Glenwood Canyon, Colorado.

that point. We stopped at the Cameron Trading Post but didn't refuel yet, nor in Tuba City, as we wanted to minimize our fuel stops on the overall trip. We took on 22.3 gallons in Kayenta. Guesstimating our early mileage around town, this was a rough 15.5 mpg, not bad against its 17 combined rating, considering this included not only local errands, but the climb from 1700 feet in the north Valley to over 7000 near Flagstaff, with a lot of up and down throughout, all in a fast-moving big 4x4.

UTAH: Monument Valley is on the Navajo Nation, a little bit in Arizona but mostly in Utah (the state line is about 23 miles north of Kayenta). Crossing it at night was even a decent one-time trade-off, especially when timed with an almost-full supermoon. As midnight passed, we thought about stopping for the night in Mexican Hat, or Bluff, or Blanding, or Monticello, but each push onward



SPECIFICATIONS

FORMATCrew Cab, 5'7" box
SEATING CAPACITYfive (2/3)
CONSTRUCTIONladder-type frame, steel cab, double-wall steel pickup box

ENGINE ...5.7L HEMI® V8 multi-displcmt VVT
HP/TORQUE395 hp / 410 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION8HP70 8-speed auto
DRIVETRAIN / REAR AXLE4x4 / 3.92
STEERINGpower assist
SUSPENSION ...F: upper/lower A-arms, stblzr bar, Bilstein monotube shocks w air susp; R: five-link w track bar, stblzr bar, Bilstein monotube shocks w air susp.
BRAKESF: 13.2x1.1 vented two-piston; R: 13.8x0.87 disc single-piston; ABS F/R.
WHEELS17x8 aluminum
TIRES33-inch Toyo Off-Road
LENGTH / WHEELBASE229.0 in / 140.5 in
GROUND CLEARANCEF 9.8 in / R 9.3 in
WIDTH / HEIGHT79.4 in / 75.5 to 79.6 in
TURNING CIRCLE46.2 ft
APPR/BRKOV/DEPARTup to 23.9/24.2/27.8°
WEIGHT (F/R)5387.61 (3141.9/2245.71) lb
TOW CAPACITY10,140 lb
GVWR / PAYLOAD6900 / 1510 lb
FUEL CAPACITY(standard 26) opt 32 gal
FUELregular unleaded (midgrade rec)
MPG15/21/17 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE\$47,395

THE FOLLOWING ARE INCLUDED:

FUNCTIONAL/SAFETY FEATURES: front/side-curtain, rear airbags; Class IV hitch receiver, 4-corner air suspension, remote keyless entry, locking tailgate, 4-wheel ABS discs, cruise, remote start, ParkView rear camera, day/night rearview mirror, theft deterrent system.

INTERIOR FEATURES: Uconnect 4C w 8.4" display, Android/iOS, SiriusXM/HD radio, 2USB+aux, remote SD card slot, integrated voice command w Bluetooth, 6-speaker audio, dual-zone auto climate, perforated steering wheel w accent stitching, wheel-mounted audio controls, heated steering wheel, power 10-way driver 6-way passenger seats, heated front seats, power lumbar adjust, off-road truck rubber floor mats, rear power sliding window, second-row in-floor storage bins, fold-flat load floor storage.

5.7L HEMI V8, dual bright-tip exhausts1450
8-SPEED AUTOMATIC500

SEATS: leather-trim buckets w Rebel logo1545

LUXURY GROUP: LED bed light, power heated auto-dim mirrors / power fold / courtesy lamps, visors w illum vanity mirrors, overhead console w garage door opener695

PROTECTION GROUP: transfer case & front suspension skid plates225

RAM 1500 BLACK REBEL GROUP: 17x8 matte black alum wheels, powder coated fr bumpers595

REAR WINDOW DEFROST195

KEYLESS ENTER N'GO300

BLACK TUBULAR SIDE STEPS595

32-GALLON FUEL TANK445

ALPINE AUDIO: 9 spkrs, subwoofer495

UCONNECT 8.4 NAV: add GPS nav795

RAM BOX CARGO MGMT SYSTEM: four adjustable tie-down hooks, divider, extender1295

TONNEAU COVER w embossed Ram's head500

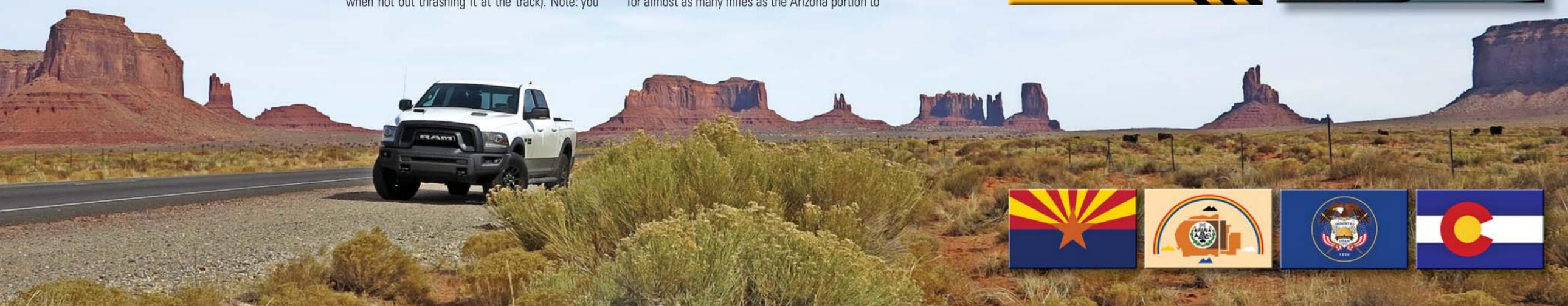
TRAILER BRAKE CONTROL295

SPRAY-IN BEDLINER495

DESTINATION CHARGE1395

TOTAL\$59,210

ASSEMBLY/SOURCESWarren, Michigan
Engine Saltillo Mexico
Transmission US
Content: 57% US/Canada, 27% Mexico



The frontier still lives in Northwest Colorado. / Downtown Steamboat Springs. / Dawn at Wilson Arch in Utah, an easy roadside stop if you don't have time for Arches National Park (note teeny person up in there). / First glimpse of the San Francisco Peaks.

Our route was about 760 miles each way: 312 miles from Scottsdale to the Utah line, 222 miles across Utah to the Colorado line, and from there to our turnaround in Steamboat Springs either 220 or 226 miles (we took one route up, another back for that stretch). Figuring the Navajo Nation as the sovereign entity it is, that's 182 miles to the Navajo Nation, 150 miles across the Navajo Nation, 202 miles across the balance of Utah, and Colorado 220/226.

would help in the morning. Sleep would also help, so we called it quits in Moab, where there are a great many hotels, even in the off-season.

The Rebel would of course have been happy to just stay in Moab, home to world renowned off-road red rock adventures. But we were just driving through. In the morning, with the temperature now about 20, we were on our way. We took a favorite shortcut as the sun came up: Fisher Towers Road along the Colorado River northeast of Moab, about 15 miles shorter and officially five minutes longer, though more like an hour longer if you stop to take photos, which we did and you surely will.

COLORADO: Whether you take the shortcut or the main highway, you end up on I-70 headed east into Colorado via Grand Junction, then (optionally) through Glenwood Canyon—one of the last and most challenging sections of the Interstate Highway system. We fueled up for the second time, just shy of Vail—25.6 gallons—then put the Interstate behind us and drove north on beautiful two-lane Colorado 131 to Steamboat Springs. Home to an average of 27 feet (or likely as not 40 feet) of snow per ski season, they were having a dry winter, which in ski town terms meant just 130 inches of snow by late January, rather than the normal 250 or so. We would have welcomed a good blizzard, just for the variety (and driving fun), but dry roads and clear skies saved significant time overall.

We still benefited from the Rebel's four-wheel drive and big tires (which, along with four inches of additional length, give it a turning circle that's bigger than a standard Rebel short bed crew cab, but that still feels remarkably tight), maneuvering snowpacked ranch roads and plowed piles around town. Four feet of fresh snow would have been a ton of fun in the Rebel—and such a storm did arrive a couple of weeks after our trip. Next time!

For five days on the road, we were in Steamboat Springs itself for basically a day and a half.

ON THE FLIP-FLOP: Our downbound route and cycle were almost the same, but for Steamboat Springs to Grand Junction, we drove west on US 40 to Craig, Colorado, then south on Colorado 13 to I-70. We spent a few hours visiting in Grand



Junction and Fruita, grabbed nighttime breakfast at Denny's, then headed toward Moab. It was dark and it was late, so we skipped Fisher Towers Road, sticking with I-70 till US 191 south to Moab.

Both ways, at Moab we grabbed clean and easy chain motels, each about \$70 this time of year including pretty decent breakfasts at both. We gassed up once more in Moab, enough to get us back to metro Phoenix with just a hair to spare.

We stopped at Wilson Arch between Moab and Monticello—a quick substitute for experiencing the 77,000 acres of Arches National Park. And we caught Monument Valley in daytime this time.

A KEEPER?: Cruising down I-17 toward Phoenix, our fuel economy read in the low 20s, hitting 27 as we exited onto a Valley freeway. The week's average was 18.8 mpg—with no fuel-sipping hypermiling, just all-out road tripping, with considerable climbs, local miles in several towns and inefficient cold weather in the mix. This close to 20 mpg in a HEMI is something to be real happy with. If all your time is around town, it'll be a little lower. But with a truck like this, you'd be remiss not to get out of town when you can. We did, and we had a ball.

This Ram Rebel was a (theoretical for us) keeper. Color, trim and options were fine (saving us some tough choices). We wish it were available with a manual transmission, though virtually nothing is, and it made almost no difference on a drive like this. We're tall and probably wouldn't order side steps, but could live with them. The one thing we're still pondering are the Ram Boxes. We've happily used them for hot off-road treks in Arizona, loaded with ice and water bottles. The trade-off is that they consume width within the bed itself—still with a clear four feet between wheel wells for building materials, but for carrying substantial loads of mixed items, that volume in front of and behind the wheel wells is valuable.

But that's it. And since it was already in our hands, we could live with it exactly as built. ■

