

NEW SILVERADO 1500 GETS ITS DIESEL

BY JOE SAGE

WE PUT FUEL MILEAGE AND TOW TECH TO THE TEST

The all-new Chevrolet Silverado 1500 has had what GM calls a cadenced launch strategy, from its original rollout, to the addition of a breakthrough 2.7L powerplant launched in Arizona this winter (see our JanFeb issue), and now of a 3.0L Duramax diesel, completing the Silverado light and medium duty lineup. (The broader Silverado lineup includes completely new 500HD and 3500HD heavy duty pickups also launched in this issue.)

We joined Chevrolet in the Bend, Oregon region—similar in many ways to Northern Arizona, with high altitude volcanic plains and evergreen forests—to put the new powertrain to the test.

TOWING: A diesel pickup is especially good at towing—with its massive torque, it can bring a significant load up to speed seemingly effortlessly.

One area all the manufacturers have been paying extra attention to for the past few years is making towing easier for both the expert and the novice, and for this, Chevy had an idea. We'd each bring along someone "with little or no towing ex-

perience," allowing us to really experience the new Silverado's various backup, hookup and load-monitoring systems from the clean-slate perspective these are designed to accommodate.

That might be easier said than done, as we quickly realized just how many people we know who already tow—whether race cars, rally rigs, horses, livestock, boats or all of the above, these are the circles we run in. But we described the event to one friend, a Valley pharmacist who grew up in Wyoming, where we might think everybody has a big pickup and something to tow. However, she did not grow up on a ranch and, in fact, despite being a serial purchaser of interesting vehicles, has never bought a pickup—nor even wanted one, which turns out to be the flip side of growing up in Wyoming for some people. And she was game.

Chevrolet's research indicates that 57 percent say towing operations can be stressful—and executive chief engineer Tim Herrick jokingly suggests the other 43 percent may be lying. Chevy fig-

ures its towing tech will thus be part relationship counselor—"we save marriages," says Herrick, whose data further suggests that 12 percent of users have had a fight with a significant other, family or friend during the process. (We can think of cowboy-cowgirl relationships that have actually bonded this way, but do not have data on that.)

Towing is one of the most competitive benchmarks among pickups. Payloads and tow capacities—carefully charted out by each model's frame length, bed length and cab style; and by engine, transmission, transfer case and rear end—tell the tale of who is king of the segment at any point in time. And, as any one of the manufacturers knows very well, the bar rises each time and gets conquered anew. But there's more to it than that final number. When you have a big pickup in one hand and a heavy and/or cumbersome trailer in the other, bringing those two hands together is a critical point, all the moreso depending upon the degree of experience of the operator. That's where our inexperienced co-driver kicks in.

Trailer features on the new Silverado 1500 include a trailer checklist, a towing label on the door pillar (a breakthrough for the large percentage of people who have traditionally either guessed or just remembered as best they can), trailer brake-

gain memory, and the ability to store up to five different trailer profiles—one for your boat, one for your RV, one for your horses, one for your racecar, one for a weekend cargo rental and so on.

All the big players have been devoting considerable clever effort to the related tasks of targeting that specific hookup point more accurately and more easily, with ever-increasing pools of technology available in their kit. As with anything where more and more binary wisdom is available for the cost of ever more inexpensive cameras and chips, some easily become overkill, which in turn can be good or bad, largely depending upon whether it gets in the way. Our greenhorn tow driver would separate the wheat from the chaff.

CAMERAS: Grasping and monitoring your trailer's (and overall truck-trailer package's) status at all times in essential. Silverado's eight cameras offering up to 15 different views not only help with alignment at hookup; they also let you keep an eye on your bed load, the road behind you, and even the contents of your trailer. A fan favorite is the "transparent trailer" feature (shown at right), which allows you to "see" that road behind you as though the trailer were barely there. This is not magic, of course, but rather uses peripheral views to fill in the blanks for perspective and orientation.

We've tested systems with a wide range of complexity, some of which have confirmed our jaded feeling that just knowing how to do it can be the best approach. That's also why Chevy had us each bring someone new to the game.

Silverado's approach is clean, clear and directly augments a reality-based approach: the cameras and steering simply generate an on-screen centerline (much as with automotive backup cameras that forecast your wheel paths), to help you guide your hitch straight to the trailer—which proved uncannily accurate for both the trained and untrained, with our newbie driver nailing most things on the first try, others on the second. Tasks included backing up to hitch to a boat or cargo trailer; and a coned course for a sequence of braking, circling and 100-foot backup drills. Our guest's performance was so impressive, she was then turned loose to tow 35,500 pounds with the HD, not originally part of the plan (see other feature).

BED: The new Silverado 1500 has GM's Durabed standard, a high-strength steel build with integrated liner for higher cargo volume, solid tie-downs at all four corners (plus available movable), power up/down tailgate, task lighting, 120v power outlet, even larger corner steps than before (now good up to a size 13 boot—whew, we just make it).

FUEL MILEAGE: Our drive through the region highlighted one more key attribute of the new 3.0L Duramax diesel package—its fuel mileage. Though EPA figures had not been tallied yet, a cou-

ple of dozen of us could give big pickup hypermiling a try. We zeroed out our fuel mileage indicators as well as our odometers and headed out on the local roads, climbing from about 19 mpg into the 20s, inching into the 30s, then—well, hypermiling may not be our thing. A beautiful mountain two-lane is sooner than later going to give you a challenge or two of its own, and tapping the 3.0 Duramax's 277 hp and 460 lb-ft of torque are a sure way to beat those challenges. We knew that someone had beat 40 mpg the day before, and we knew that some of our fellow travelers this day were really focused on this. We abandoned any dreams of a fuel mileage trophy and instead enjoyed the truck's full power cruising abilities.

Several people did have results in the 40s that day—truly remarkable for such a beast. Chevy's own data suggests you can regularly hit 40 mpg at a steady 50 mph in a 2WD truck (35.9 in a 4x4), descending to mid-20s at 70 mph.

LINEUP: The full 2020 Silverado 1500 lineup's plant capacity is being rebalanced to assure Chevy will be able to build enough crew cabs to meet demand (which stands at 70 percent nationwide). They expect demand for diesels to continue to grow, though sales are forecast at about 10 percent, with the majority anticipated to remain 5.3L gasoline models, with a 6.2L gasoline engine bracketing a bell curve at the premium end.

The 2020 models will add standard features—Herrick says "everything on the 2020 HD will work its way into the 2020 1500"—including adaptive cruise control and the "invisible trailer" view. Maximum tow capacity for the 2020 Silverado 1500 will hit 13,400 pounds in the RST trim 6.2L gasoline truck, stated as of now to be best in segment.

Along with the new 2020 HD models also featured in this issue, Chevrolet now has an entirely new light duty and heavy duty Silverado lineup. ■

