

Firmly established

BY JOE SAGE

Toyota Tacoma has been an especially popular truck for years, holding the top market position among midsize pickups, long a category of just two or three, with more than triple the sales volume of its nearest competitor. In the face of a huge resurgence in the segment, with four new entries from the Detroit Three, Tacoma still holds the number one spot, by more than double.

The truck's iterations are also well established, though they do shift and evolve. Any TRD badge grabs attention among performance devotees of many stripes, and TRD Pro trucks are the top dog for off-roaders. Evolution over the past five years has seen TRD Pro Off-Road, TRD Sport, TRD Off-Road and TRD Pro badging, with three of those four, or essentially all, in play currently (see sidebar).

There are fully 33 different basic builds of the Toyota Tacoma in six series currently, with variations including cab size—cab-and-a-half Access Cab or full-crew Double Cab (a naming scheme inconsistent with Tundra, where Double Cab is the cab-and-a-half)—4x4 or 4x2 models, short bed or long bed (atypically not always directly related to cab length), four-cylinder or V6, and manual or automatic transmission. Not every possible combina-

tion is available on each trim, to say the least.

With mission-focused TRD Pro, things are simple—all are V6 Double Cab, with your choice of manual or automatic. We'll note right here that the manual's base price is \$2705 lower than the auto.

If you might prefer an off-roader with the shorter cab and longer bed—or if for some reason you want a nominal off-roader with a 4x2 drivetrain—these are available in TRD Off-Road for \$7-10,000 less than TRD Pro. Note that while it's extremely common for one wheelbase and chassis to be the basis for a shorter-cab-longer-bed versus longer-cab-shorter-bed truck in many lineups, in the case of Tacoma, the longer-cab Double Cab is available (in some models) with either the short or long bed.

TRD Pro—the model we're driving here, higher in rank and price than even the luxe-outfitted Limited—has a number of build details that differentiate it from TRD Off-Road and others. Suspension is TRD-tuned off-road with 2.5-inch Fox internal bypass coil-overs and rear remote reservoir shocks. Sitting atop wider big-sidewall 16-inch wheels, its turning circle remains one of the tightest, its overall height increases by an inch, and ground clearance is slightly more (0.2"). Approach,

breakover and departure angles are all several degrees more than in other models (example: while TRD Off-Road's approach angle is three degrees greater than others, TRD Pro's is another three degrees greater than that).

Other functional and visual features unique to TRD Pro include its black "heritage-inspired" grille with front camera, black badging and overfenders, hood scoop and bedside with TRD Pro graphics, color-keyed mirrors, door handles and rear bumper, Rigid LED fog lights, black taillight sport bezels, power tilt/slide moonroof with sliding shade (also on Limited), those 16-inch black wheels, multi-terrain camera views (an option on TRD Off-Road), extensive analog instrumentation (shared with TRD Off-Road), included front dual-zone climate (also on Limited, optional on TRD Off-Road), TRD Pro black leather interior with 10-way driver's seat with 2-way lumbar plus 4-way passenger seat, TRD Pro shift knob and floor mats, and a top-spec infotainment system shared with Limited.

The 6400-lb tow capacity of the Double Cab 4x4 configuration is lowest among the V6 variants, by a factor of 100 to 400 lb against other builds (while all are thousands higher than the 4-cylinder).

Fuel mileage is a point or two lower in TRD Pro with manual transmission, though the same as in a manual TRD Off-Road.

Options on our truck are all very reasonably priced. One you can't miss is the Desert Air Intake (or "dirt snorkel" to us), a device not intended to battle a mile-high Sonoran Desert monsoon haboob dust storm, but rather to redirect engine air intake away from the wheel wells while sand- or dirt-cruising. At first, you may think this unit is visually a bit much. But in no time, it becomes a significant part of the truck's whole identity—TRD Pro with a dirt snorkel? This says it all.

Around town, power could be more, though it was strong in instances where it was urgently needed and we punched it. We might say the same about brakes. Power probably suffered most from this truck's automatic transmission, which would shift, hunt and surge even at consistent speeds and occasional grades. We note that the big Tundra TRD Pro has an "intelligent" version of the transmission (ECT-i), and that might be all this Tacoma needs. Or, as noted earlier, you can get a manual transmission in the Tacoma and save \$2705 doing so—a win-win in general, or if you are a manual fan in the first place, a triple win.

We took the truck for a session in one of the region's off-highway vehicle (OHV) parks, where, as you would expect, it was a champ. Here, its smaller size and tighter turns are big advantages, supplemented by a powerful set of front, side and rear cameras and inclination meters. Ride and handling are rock solid and precise—and whether those are traits you will or will not prefer for daily driving, it's all part of the build—you will embrace the truck for its overall capabilities. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

PLANT	San Antonio TX
ENGINE	3.5L V6 D-4S injection Atkinson Cycle w VVT-iW intake, VVT-i exhaust
ALTERNATOR	130A
HP/TORQUE	278 hp / 265 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	4x4
TRANSMISSION	6-spd ECT auto (man avail)
TRANSFER CASE	(hi/lo) 1.00:1 / 2.57:1
DIFFERENTIAL RATIO	(4x4 auto) 3.909
SUSPENSION	F/R: TRD-tuned off-road w 2.5" Fox internal bypass coil-overs and rear remote reservoir shocks; F: 1.18" front strblzr bar
STEERING	power rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 10.75 vent disc; R: 10.0 drum
WHEELS	16" machined contrast black alloy
TIRES	P265/70R16
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	212.3 / 127.4 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	9.4 in
BED LENGTH	(short) 60.5 in
TURNING CIRCLE	40.8 ft
APPR-BRKVR-DEPART	35 / 28.5 / 23.9°
HEADROOM (F/R)	39.7 / 38.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.9 / 32.6 in
WEIGHT	4425 lb
PAYLOAD	(auto) 1175 lb
TOW CAPACITY	(Double Cab 4x4) 6400 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unl / 21.1 gal
MPG	18/22/20 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$46,665
DESERT AIR INTAKE	725
TRD PRO GRAPHICS PKG	699
PREDATOR TUBE STEP	649
OPTIONS: TRD air filter (90), door sill protector (79), mini tie-down loop (45), tailgate emblem (160), D-rings (55)	429
DESTINATION CHARGE	1120
TOTAL	\$50,287

(33) BUILDS IN (6) SERIES INCLUDE:

SR	4cyl or V6, all 6AT, access or double cab, SB/LB, 4x2 or 4x4	\$26,050 to \$32,315
SR5	(same mix as SR)	\$27,825 to \$35,690
TRD Sport	all V6, 6AT or 6MT, both cabs, SB/LB, 4x2 or 4x4	\$32,745 to \$37,575
TRD Off Road	all V6, 6AT or 6MT, both cabs, SB/LB, 4x4 or one 4x2	\$34,000 to \$37,575
Limited	V6, 4x2 or 4x4	\$38,790 or \$41,865
TRD Pro	V6 4x4, AT/MT	\$43,960 or \$46,665

