

PAIN IT BLACK

by Joe Sage

PICKUPS are complicated to outfit from scratch, with options, packages, capabilities and variables galore. Starting points are bed length, cab size, 4x4 capability, engine size and other basics. Trim levels can help you narrow things down, and Ram 1500 offers you more trims than you can count on both hands. Then again, sometimes it's best to just see what the dealers have on hand. Planning from scratch or inventory ready to roll, a special edition is something you can easily wrap your arms around, and Ram always has several.

Arizona has dual personalities—home to some of the finest off-roading in the world, but also to showy world class resorts and country clubs. This in itself can make your pickup choice challenging, depending upon your diverse lifestyle.

The Ram 1500 we're driving here is a Crew Cab 4x4 in Limited trim, with two key specifics added: EcoDiesel and Black Edition.

The latter is achieved with a Black Appearance Package (available only on top 1500 Limited trim, though also on Ram 2500 and 3500 HD trucks). It's

saturated with visual cues inside and out: all exterior badging, grille, headlight bezels, door handles, mirrors, bumpers, exhaust tips, aluminum wheels and more are black. Diamond Black Crystal Pearl-Coat paint is automatically part of the build, but another \$100. Also included are a striking sport performance hood, tow hooks and a folding tonneau cover for the bed. The interior is black premium leather, and though color is not a factor, the package also includes an upgrade to 19-speaker Harman Kardon premium audio.

The 3.0L V6 turbo diesel (\$4995) is one of four powerplants offered on Limited (3.6L V6 eTorque is standard, with 5.7 V8 HEMI, regular or eTorque, also available). The diesel is gen-3, with updated turbo, intake ports and fuel injector nozzles.

Its off-roading is not at the extreme level of 1500 Rebel or 2500 Power Wagon, but its 4x4 bones far exceed trucks of even a few years ago, and ours adds a thorough set of skid plates front to rear for just \$395.

We first toughed out a near-hurricane force

monsoon storm in this truck, then took it to the car wash for a good cleanup—and then decided to get it dirty again. We had no plan, schedule or maps, just a highly capable truck. Heading up I-17, we didn't have six horses or a boat to tow, but the EcoDiesel's 480 lb-ft of torque plus the 8-speed automatic should do great with a load on this climb.

On a whim, we exited at Bloody Basin Road, between Sunset Point and Cordes Lakes, into Agua Fria National Monument. This road promptly turns to dirt (with a sign duly noting this is not an alternative to taking I-17 to Phoenix, though given enough time and the right equipment, it probably could be). We took a few successively rougher dirt and gravel roads from there, staying in rear-wheel drive for awhile without a care, then making a point of popping it into 4WD Auto as conditions grew more storm-rutted, hilly, curvy, gravelly and sandy—no rock crawling, just the type of drive anyone might tackle with a nice weekend wilderness picnic iced down in the optional Ram Boxes (\$995).

Two other options we'd always take are the 33-gallon tank (\$445, up from a standard 26), enough to eliminate a stop or two on a decent road trip, and



the trailer brake control (\$295), vital when needed.

We returned via a steep gravel climb into Cordes Lakes to the north, then back down I-17, reminded that this generation Ram 1500, new two years ago, has a lightweight steel and aluminum build that's the strongest ever, while its road manners are also the smoothest ever (all of which contributed to the pickups' record 18 percent sales increase from 2018 to 2019).

Black trucks are surprising popular in urban Arizona, despite the heat, as roads are kept cleaner

than most places. The Black Edition has an edge on elegance, while its off-road skills accommodate most people's usage—not the Rubicon or a Baja rally, just life in a state with a lot of dirt and gravel roads, places to go and things to see.

Special editions generally have a one-year run, though this pandemic-impacted model year cycle could bring surprises. Your best move is to check dealer stock sooner than later, if this black beauty rings your bell. ■



2020 Ram 1500 Crew Cab (and certain 2019 models) are the first full-size pickups to earn the highest Top Safety Pick+ rating by Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), in each of the six crashworthiness tests conducted by IIHS, aided by FCA's patented splayed front frame rails. Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB) technology was graded "superior," benefiting from the industry's only pickup-segment application of Integrated Radar Camera Module (IRCM), one of more than 100 available safety and security features.



SPECIFICATIONS

BUILD	steel cab, double-wall steel box
CAB - SEATS F/R - BOX	Crew - 3/3 - 5'7"
ENGINE	3.0L V6 EcoDiesel turbo, chain-driven DOHC 24v, common rail 29,000 psi, cast-iron block, alum alloy heads
HP/TORQUE	260 hp / 480 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	16.0:1
MAX ENGINE SPEED	5800 rpm
DRIVETRAIN	4x4
TRANSMISSION	8HP75 8-spd auto
TRANSFER CASE	elec 2-spd 2HI, 4WD auto, 4HI, locked, neutral, 4LO, locked
AXLES	F: 215mm; R: 325mm standard
SUSPENSION	F: upper, lower A-arms, coils, twin-tube shocks, stblzr bar; R: five-link w track bar, solid axle, prog rate coils, twin-tube shocks, stblzr bar. (Air susp avail)
STEERING	electric power steering
BRAKES	F: 14.9x1.2 vented, 2.2" 2-piston; R: 14.8x0.87 solid, 2.2" single-piston
WHEELS	(Black Pkg) 22x9 blk alum
TIRES	(Black Pkg) 285/45R22XL A/S
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	232.9 / 144.6 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	(std wheels) 8.2 / 8.7 in
APPR-DEPART-BRKVR	(std wheels but incl optional skid plates) 19.0-24.9-17.4
HEADROOM (F/R)	40.9 / 39.8 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	40.9 / 45.2 in
TOW CAPACITY	9710 lb
FUEL	ultra-low sulfur diesel
FUEL CAPACITY	(23, 26 std) optional 33 gal
MPG	21/29/24 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$56,965
3.0L V6 TURBO DIESEL GEN 3 w 800-amp battery, lower active grille shutters	4995
3.92 REAR AXLE	95
PAINT: Diamond Black Crystal Pearl-Coat	100
PROTECTION GROUP: skid plates for front suspension, steering gear, transfer case and fuel tank	395
BLACK APPEARANCE PACKAGE: black exterior badging, black headlamp bezels, 22x9 black aluminum wheels, 285/45R22XL all-season tires, tri-fold tonneau cover, sport performance hood, tow hooks, 19-speaker Harman Kardon premium audio	3995
BED UTILITY GROUP: four adjustable cargo tie-down hooks	545
LIMITED LEVEL 1 EQUIPMENT GROUP: adaptive cruise w stop & go, advanced brake assist, full speed forward collision warn-plus, lane keep assist, parallel & perpendicular park assist w stop, ventilated rear seats, surround-view camera (not w trailering mirrors)	2295
DUAL-PANE PANORAMIC SUNROOF	1495
MULTI-FUNCTION TAILGATE	995
33-GALLON FUEL TANK	445
RAMBOX® CARGO MANAGEMENT SYSTEM	995
TRAILER BRAKE CONTROL	295
DESTINATION CHARGE	1695
TOTAL	\$75,305