

35,500 POUNDS

BY JOE SAGE
IMMENSE NEW HD PICKUPS HAUL IMMENSE LOADS

While the all-new Chevrolet Silverado 1500 light duty pickup has grown into its wider range in stages (see other launch feature in this issue), the equally all-new Silverado HD heavy duty pickup has come to the light of day over time in its own way. Chevy brought a full-size mockup of the HD to us here in Phoenix last November (looking real, but a foam or equivalent build—we could look but not touch, and with no interior). In February, we were invited to Flint, Michigan, for the full reveal of the HD trucks and a tour of the factory line where they were about to start full production this summer. Then in June, we flew to Bend, Oregon, to drive the full range for the first time.

Usually, a launch drive is a first look *and* a first drive, but although we had seen this one before, it's always a different experience in motion, in multiple trims and configurations, and in the light of day. So bold is this new truck, it turns a lot of heads and stops a few people in their tracks the first time they see it. But it's a quick adjustment. The stylists at GM regularly do this well, creating a new look that goes from startling to familiar in no time, while the prior goes from familiar to yesterday's news. While the new Silverado HD seems to still be startling some people online, we are quickly and fully acclimated. It looks tank-rugged, suitable for the heaviest of heavy duty purposes.

Executive chief engineer Tim Herrick identifies two major groups buying heavy duty pickups: those who earn a living with one; and those who haul their prized possessions with one. Some haul a valuable item aside from work; and some work without hauling a prized item; but in a great many cases—from heavy construction to farming and ranching to manufacturing and beyond—they are one and the same. (And, as Herrick points out, even those with heavy prized possessions just for fun are likely to know a thing or two about earning a living.) At that prized possession end of the scale in particular, a premium, creature feature and tech-rich interior is increasingly important. Across the spectrum, sheer capability remains the touchstone.

The new Silverado HD is available with two engines, both also beasts: a new 6.6L gasoline V8 purpose-built for the HD (with 401 hp and 464 lb-ft of torque, 22 percent more torque than the engine it replaces); and an also-6.6L Duramax turbo-diesel V8 (with 445 hp and 910 lb-ft of torque) connected to an exclusive Allison 10-speed automatic. Intriguingly (and uncommonly), both engines are priced the same. New axles, locking rear dif-

ferential, prop shaft, U-joint and 12-inch ring gear combine with the strength of the Duramax to deliver the full 910 lb-ft of torque in first gear. The diesel also has a range of cooling upgrades, from a functional hood intake and 28-inch fan to engine after-run of up to 15 minutes.

Front suspension is unusual for the segment—a short/long-arm configuration rather than a solid axle, aiming to deliver the best possible ride anywhere from empty to hauling a full payload.

The HD's Durabed build, which resembles a factory spray-in liner, is about seven inches wider inside, accommodating increased cargo volume, and includes 12 fixed tie-down points, nine movable points, upgraded lighting, 120-volt outlet, power up-down tailgate, cornersteps and also front-of-box bedsteps good enough for size 13 work boots and 500 pounds of load.

Important in the high country, the truck's front fascia is winter-ready two ways: it's engineered for snow plow installation with no cutting; and it has an integrated engine heater outlet. There's also a factory-installed and warrantied power take-off (PTO), ready for quick installation of farm or ranch equipment, power dumps and spreaders. Also important in the high country for anyone, Chevrolet says the new gasoline engine has no loss of GCWR and tow ratings at altitude (they note some



others lose 20 percent or more at 10,000 feet).

Tow capacity is a major claim of the new Chevy Silverado HD, with the 3500 HD diesel rated at up to 35,500 pounds, a whopping 52 percent increase from its predecessor, putting it in first place for the moment. "We know our friends in Auburn Hills and Dearborn are hard at work to hit 35,501," says Herrick. But today they wear that crown. A gasoline 2500 HD truck tows up to 17,400 lb, an 18 percent bump up from the truck it replaces.

On our full drive day on the open roads of central Oregon, our loads were kept to what were legal with a commercial driver's license (CDL)—12,100 pounds for the gasoline 2500 HD and 14,000 pounds for the diesel 3500 HD. But on the prior afternoon, we had staged our adventures at the sprawling Bend Municipal Airport without re-

striction: towing the maximum—the 35,500-lb anvil truck above—on the runways with a single-cab short-box 3500 HD dually, a purposeful power tug; and doing donuts around a helipad serving as skidpad, towing the bulldozer below. Engine and other drivetrain specs aside, tow capacity is determined by the truck's cab and bed configuration, but every diesel dually 3500 HD will tow above 30,000 lb.

All bear an extensive list of tow features—grade holds, sway and rollover controls, five-profile storage, cameras and mirrors, as well as a prominent VIN-specific trailering label, to avoid any bad guessing of an individual truck's capacity.

We might have thought a cowboy or construction field worker who's used to wrestling the most out of their truck might think this is all for techies and even be happier without it. But having tried it

all, we now think they'll say, "Heck, I used to have to think about all that stuff and frankly I didn't like it—and if I didn't think about it, I might regret it. Now I don't even have to think about it." A no-tow-experience guest on hand to try the hookup and backup procedures of the new Silverado 1500 was welcomed behind the wheel of these beasts as well—and she took to this with the same confidence as with the lighter trucks and loads.

Heavy duty pickups have been getting a lot of attention, both in the marketplace and from the manufacturers themselves, who have been hustling to make them at least as stylish and technically advanced as that biggest-selling vehicle of all, the full-size light duty pickup. This seems the natural growth of an overall booming segment, but we have an additional theory that the explosion of midsize pickups over the past couple of years has created a nudge for the full-size buyer to differentiate themselves that much more, by moving to the heavy duties. We suspect these will do well. ■

