

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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2020 Ford Expedition
Platinum 4x4 EcoBoost

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



Glorious domesticated beast BY JOE SAGE

Have you driven a Ford... lately? That slogan from years past springs to mind as the automaker pursues its declared goal of ceasing the manufacture of "cars" (other than Mustang and Ford GT), putting vehicles such as this big SUV (or the F-350 heavy duty pickup also in this issue) ever moreso in the position of core brand ambassadors. (Even Mustang is feeling this influence, with the advent of the Mustang Mach-E electric SUV.)

This is not all bad. Case in point: this beautiful and highly capable Ford Expedition.

Expedition was born in the late 1990s, a larger sibling for the top-selling Ford Explorer, but built atop the F-150's basic body-on-frame structure (in the era of the curvy "aero" F-150). A few years later, it was joined by the larger, F-250-based Excursion, which satisfied a few competitive points Ford customers had long clamored for. By the mid-2000s, though, Expedition had entered its second generation, while political sensibilities of the time led to the big Excursion's departure. Two years later, the third-gen Expedition arrived, with a more trucklike character that helped fill the Excursion's void (as general capabilities also continued to increase dramatically in both the pickups and the SUVs). Expedition also introduced the EL variant, about a

foot and a half longer, also helping it to pick up that Excursion torch. (This extended version is now known as Expedition MAX.)

If you just read "Expedition" and "Excursion" enough times to make your head spin, that may be another reason it's not all bad to now have just the one. Plus, Expedition had always struck us as a better name for the biggest in the lineup, anyway. (Be that as it may, a return of the Excursion some-time down the road wouldn't really surprise us.)

The Ford Expedition we're driving here is gen four, new for the 2018 model year—to our eye the most handsome and (though refined and lightly glamorized) most trucklike Expedition yet.

Despite its civilized character, Expedition is a pretty big rig. We don't want to say it's ponderous, though it certainly helps if you're used to driving a full-size pickup. If not, this is a great place to start.

We're very used to big pickups, and we made friends with this vehicle pretty quickly. We knew it was going to be blue, so we had visualized the vivid hue of an Explorer ST. Instead, the Expedition arrived in this classier subdued blue that complements its aluminum build. (We get a kick out of paint names, but this one is officially called simply Blue Metallic.) A top-level Platinum interior, with

such amenities as ceramic-toned heated and cooled massaging leather seats with quilted bolsters, along with a 375-hp EcoBoost V6 turbo and smoothly calibrated 10-speed automatic powertrain, all sitting on advanced suspension atop a ControlTrac® 4x4 drivetrain and 22-inch wheels, set the stage for a pampered yet high-performing week. It was going to be a busy one. Pandemic lockdowns had not kicked in yet (by a matter of days), and we had a daily high-miles commute to Phoenix Raceway for the first several days, with a couple of days of significant rain following that.

Initial settings and adjustments were smoother and easier than average, easily setting up comfortable and highly functional features throughout (of course with a handful of system implementation quirks and nitpicks noted, universal in this era).

Temperatures during this spring week varied tremendously, but the combination of heated and cooled (did we mention massaging?) seats and a highly effective air handling system (once we set it on max, anyway), with ceiling vents for rear passengers, provided a comfy cocoon in all conditions.

The Expedition is a relatively high vehicle, with almost 10 inches of ground clearance, but for a taller person, like us, that's an easy step-in-step-

out. If you're shorter, you'll appreciate the vehicle's retracting running boards. If you're tall, you can lock them away. If you're short or tall, you can also lock them in deployed position, handy for taking care of rooftop loads.

The vehicle is also large inside. If you're familiar with the F-Series pickups, you'll recognize the same geometrically handsome instrument panel and vents, while seats are more carlike in style. The cabin's size makes some controls—touchscreen elements and vents toward the right side—a stretch for a shorter person, to be expected.

The interior layout is executive class. Legroom is above 40 inches in all three rows (way above in the first row) and even third-row headroom (which is always compromised by being raised for suspension) is almost as much as in the other rows.

On the road—in the always aggressive and competitive traffic of our freeways—the Expedition is nimble as well as powerful. Grabbing a more favorable spot in an adjacent lane is mission easily achievable, with plenty more power (and even more torque) on tap to quickly extricate yourself from any uncooperative traffic tangle.

Suspension is perfect for this vehicle—tough but always comfortable. We happened across an uncharacteristic war zone construction patch at one point that would have knocked the axles off a lesser vehicle, but in this we hardly felt it.

Thanks to someone who suddenly tore out of a side street onto a high speed frontage road at track speed, straight across four lanes, aiming for an otherwise unreachable freeway on-ramp, we also learned that the brakes (for which we don't have complete specs) are sports-car effective.

You can very slightly feel the electric nature of the steering at first, but that soon fades away, leaving behind simply great handling.

SPECIFICATIONS

BUILDaluminum alloy body / high strength steel frame	
PLANTKentucky Truck Plant	
SEATINGeight (seven w opt 2nd row buckets)	
ENGINE3.5L EcoBoost V6 turbo, alum/alum alloy	
HP/TORQUE375 hp / 470 lb-ft	
DRIVETRAINControlTrac® 4x4 (4x2 avail)	
TRANSMISSION10-spd auto w SelectShift®	
SUSPENSION F: indep short & long arm, coil-over shocks, stblzr bar; R: indep multi-link w stblzr bar (rear mechanical load-leveling available) (F/R: Gas-charged continuous damping available)	
STEERINGelec power-assist rack & pinion	
BRAKESpower 4-wheel disc, ABS, brake assist, EBF	
WHEELS22-in machined alum w painted pockets	
TIRES285/45R22 AS BSW	
LENGTH / WHEELBASE210.0 / 122.5 in	
TURNING CIRCLEnot stated	
GROUND CLEARANCE9.8 in	
APPR / BRKOVER / DEPART23.3 / 21.4 / 21.9	
HEADROOM (F/2/3)42.0 / 40.0 / 37.3 in	
LEGROOM (F/2/3)43.9 / 41.5 / 40.9 in	
CARGO CAPACITY20.9 / 63.6 / 104.6 cu.ft	
WEIGHT(4x4) 5623 lb	
TOW CAPACITY(4x4) 6500 lb or if equipped w Heavy Duty Tow Pkg: 9200 lb	
GCWR(4x4) 12,500 lb or if equipped w Heavy Duty Tow Pkg: 15,200 lb	
FUEL / CAPACITYregular unl / 23.6 gal	
MPG17/22/19 (city/hwy/comb)	
BASE PRICE \$77,085	
SECOND ROW BUCKET SEATS595	
DESTINATION CHARGE1395	
TOTAL \$77,680	

Our Platinum trim level (\$77,085 as a 4x4) is expected to account for about one in five purchases. The base Expedition XLT starts at \$52,810.

As a nod to the trucklike basis of the Expedition and to the trucklike direction of Ford overall, there are two new models of interest: a King Ranch edition (see our F-350 in this issue) at about \$1000 less than Platinum, and a new F-150-derived FX4 Off-Road package, which seems sure to broaden the appeal and positioning of the Expedition and the overall Ford truck brand itself. ■

MPG NOTES & ANECDOTES

We don't routinely keep track of fuel mileage. Other than with, say, an EV, ours are not hypermiling efforts. But this one caught our eye early on. For one thing, we had this vehicle for the week that included a race weekend at Phoenix Raceway, which would typically mean at least four 95-mile round trips. A 40-mpg car could do it in about 10 gallons, while a 10-mpg car would take 40 gallons—quite a difference in cost, and even adding refueling time to a busy weekend. The Expedition with EcoBoost V6 is rated at 22 mpg highway—with a 23.6-gallon tank, enough for almost 520 miles—though on aggressive Valley freeways, "your mileage may vary," and we certainly were not doing freeway miles only.

Our weekly vehicles generally travel about 30 miles en route to us, and we're not sure when or where they fill 'em up. With all vehicles more frugal than they used to be, we don't always even look, and we hadn't looked at this one.

As we hopped in to head out to the track the first time, we happened to notice we were down a quarter of a tank already (which would mean about six gallons consumed, out of about 24). We'd only run three or four to-the-corner-for-a-sandwich type errands, it seemed. But we found ourselves glancing down again in about 10 miles—wow, less than 5/8ths of a tank. We took an odo reading and checked delivery records later—our errands and these first freeway miles added up to 52 miles, or it was about 80 if they had filled it at their end. Hmm. If the latter, the gauge indicated those 80 miles had used about 9.5 gallons, a rate of about 8.4 MPG. That sounds horrid, but it's still just about 11 gallons per round trip to NASCAR, though with race traffic, other errands and so on, it's take more.

We checked all this another time or two, early on, but basically put one circular foot in front of the other and refilled as needed. At the end of our week, the vehicle's own readout (and these seem to be fairly reliable these days) indicated an average of 13.5 MPG for all our varied tasks combined.

That's not bragworthy in its own right, but then again, this is an almost three-ton machine with spacious seating for eight (the weight of whom would consume more fuel, of course). And it does use regular octane fuel.

The 375-hp V6 turbo (with 470 lb-ft of torque and healthy tow capacity) is the most popular engine in the F-150 and the only one available in the Expedition. Given the vehicle's power and performance, as well as its high level of build and its capacities, the whole deal seems reasonable. ■

