

Popularity contest

BY JOE SAGE

Ford last year reentered the midsize pickup segment with a vengeance, bringing back the Ranger nameplate after a six-year absence, on an entirely new and highly evolved truck.

As you've surely noticed, they are not alone. Here all along have been two Japanese trucks, which are also no longer alone, with multiple new midsize pickup entries from the Detroit Three (and more likely to follow). A whole slew of midsize EV pickups are also on the horizon, while also fighting for market share are a couple of existing and/or upcoming pickup-bed unibodies.

Shopping for a pickup can be mind-numbingly complex, but Ranger keeps it simple: three trims, 4x2 or 4x4, and SuperCab or four-door SuperCrew. All have the same 2.3-liter EcoBoost turbo-four and 10-speed automatic. SuperCrew (which also means a 5-foot rather than 6-foot bed) adds \$2175 to \$2400. 4x4 adds about four grand. Anything further comes down to options and packages.

Our sample here is the top model—Lariat, 4x4, SuperCrew—also bearing both an FX4 off-road package and a black appearance package (as well as other packages and options). Alternately available are chrome or sport appearance packages. All have a 7500-lb tow capacity, while our truck's tow package adds receiver and 4/7-pin connector.

With the very reasonably priced FX4 package, this Ranger is a capable off-roader, a qualification

we put to a decent test at one of the region's best OHV parks, where it proved to be solid and tight, both in build and maneuverability. It's not a maximum-spec competition rock-crawler (and our truck's shiny, wide black package wheels suggest caution here), but its abilities go way beyond what 90 percent of people would ever throw at any truck (even if they spend money on radical trophy competition-level articulation and such). If you are a 110-percent, however, newly announced for Ranger are three Ford Performance package builds, at right.

Close to 100 percent of owners use their truck as a daily driver, and here we were pleased with the Ranger's power and equally tight maneuverability—we regularly performed inner-lane-to-inner-lane divided boulevard U-turns—as well as its crisp, clean weekday professional styling.

Though with a few horses less than its top-selling Japanese rival, Ranger's EcoBoost adds turbo power and almost 20 percent higher torque, creating (along with its 10-speed automatic) an experience praised repeatedly in our logbook—power to pass or grab a freeway lane, power to climb, power to haul (which we didn't do) and power to off-road—and it has significantly larger brakes.

The other comparison that inevitably springs to mind is Ford's full-size F-150, the nation's top-selling vehicle of any kind. Size-related differences seem obvious, though even some of those are sur-

prising. Ranger's cabin is narrower, as to be expected, but seating position is just about as commanding as in the full-size truck. F-150 offers higher trim levels—which might make for a pretty pricey Ranger (but who knows what the future holds)—and F-150 offers the Raptor extreme off-road dune-runner (and while Ford does not comment on future product, rumors and online comments persist in predicting a similar build for Ranger).

Fuel mileage estimates might not sound stellar for a smaller four-cylinder vehicle, but then again it is all in the 20s, it's a beefy 4x4, it's higher than the fuel mileage in its long-established Japanese competitor, and it tows more than that truck, too.

More people than ever are shopping for a pickup. There are many factors in any buyer's decision process, often including brand loyalty (though this has opened up a bit in recent years in the highest-loyalty-of-all pickup market). Japan has ruled midsize pickups for a long time, Ford full-size. Popularity breeds popularity—from junior high to the truck dealer's lot—creating powerful badge traction and brand momentum. Ford aims to break that momentum in the midsize segment (as do others).

F-150 remains reigning champ in full-size trucks, and that in itself seems to bode well for Ford's potential in the newly competitive and highly populated midsize pickup segment. The new midsize Ford Ranger lets you get into the top-selling full-size truck's younger brother for as little as about the same price as many a midsize sedan. Where you take it from there is entirely up to you. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

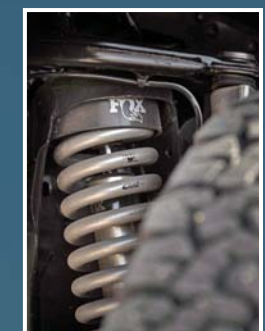
ENGINE	.....2.3L EcoBoost I-4 16v DOHC alum/alum
HP / TORQUE	.....270 hp / 310 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	.....4x4
TRANSMISSION	.....10-spd SelectShift auto
TRANSFER CASE RATIO	.....4HI 1:1, 4LO 2.717:1
SUSPENSION	.....F: short- & long-arm indep and tubular stblzr bar; R: Hotchkiss-type non-indep live, leaf springs, outboard shocks
STEERING	.....elec power assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 12.24x1.33 disc, 2" twin-piston caliper; R: 12.12x0.94 disc, 2.12" single-piston caliper. Non-asbestos organic pads
WHEELS / TIRES	.....opt 18" alloy / 265/60R18 A/T
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....210.8 / 126.8 in
BED LENGTH	.....(nominal 5') 61 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....41.99 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....8.9 in
APPR / BRKVR / DEPART	.....28.7 / 21.5 / 25.4°
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....39.8 / 38.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....43.1 / 34.5 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....43.4 cu.ft
PAYLOAD	.....1560 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....7500 lb
WEIGHT	.....4441 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....regular unl / 18 gal
MPG	.....20/24/22 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE: Lariat SuperCrew 4x4	.....\$38,675
EQUIP GROUP 501A: Tech Pkg; SYNC3, Bang & Olufsen 10-speaker HD-SiriusXM audio, nav; remote start; rain-sensing wipers.....	2005
PAINT: Rapid Red Metallic tinted clearcoat.....	395
BLACK APPEARANCE PKG: 18" black paint alum wheels, black grille w black surround & black bars, black mirror caps, 5" black running boards, body-color front bumper, black lower fascia, black sill plates, Tough Bed spray-in bedliner.....	1995
FX4 OFF-ROAD PKG: tuned off-road monotube shocks, off-road tires, electronic-lock rear differential; exposed steel front bash plate; skid plates for steering motor, transfer case & fuel tank; cluster screen with pitch/roll & steering angle info; Terrain Mgmt System & Trail Control.....	1295
TRAILER TOW PKG	495
FLOOR LINER, TRAY STYLE	160
SECURICODE KEYLESS-ENTRY KEYPAD	95
TONNEAU PICKUP BOX COVER, HARD FOLD	995
DESTINATION CHARGE	1195
TOTAL	\$47,305

In a sort of cart-before-horse nod to Ford Ranger's tough capabilities and credentials, the new Ford Bronco (see also in this issue) is based on the same platform as Ford Ranger—and the Bronco is set to go head-to-head against the world's most serious off-roaders.

RANGER ADDS THREE NEW FORD PERFORMANCE ACCESSORY PACKAGES

Three new off-road, adventure-ready accessory packages from Ford Performance bring greater personalization and fun-seeking capability to 2019 and 2020 Ford Ranger 4x4 pickups. Dealer-installed, all three packages include an off-road leveling kit with Ford Performance optimized-tuned FOX Shocks, new 17-inch Dyno Gray wheels and Ford Performance graphics on bed and windshield.



FORD PERFORMANCE LEVEL 1 PACKAGE:

- Off-Road leveling kit
 - FOX "Tuned by Ford Performance" 2.0 Performance Series internal floating piston monotube front and rear shocks tuned by Ford Performance Engineers to optimize on and off-road performance
 - Ford Performance 17-inch Dyno Gray wheels
 - Ford Performance bedside graphics and Ford Performance windshield banner
-\$2,495 MSRP + installation



FORD PERFORMANCE LEVEL 2 PACKAGE: includes Level 1 content plus:

- Ford Performance engine calibration, which increases horsepower by 16 percent to 315 at 4,500 RPM and increases torque by nearly 20 percent to 370 lb.-ft. at 2,500 RPM
 - BFGoodrich KO2 265/70-17 tires
 - Rigid off-road fog light kit
 - Ford Performance calibration
 - Blue tow hooks
 - Ford Performance stainless steel license plate frame
-\$4,495 MSRP + installation



FORD PERFORMANCE LEVEL 3 PACKAGE: includes Levels 1 and 2 content plus:

- Rigid 40-inch LED lightbar kit
 - Red tow hooks
 - Ford Performance by ARB winch-capable front bumper
 - Ford Performance chase rack
 - 2.3-liter Ford Performance sport exhaust
-\$8,995 MSRP + installation

On average, customers added approximately \$650 worth of Ford accessories to each Ranger pickup sold in the US in 2019, its first year back in the US market. Ranger leads Ford's new accessories product strategy (which will expand further with the all-new Bronco) to provide greater personalization seamlessly in the catalog. Ford Performance Level 1 and Level 2 packages for Ranger arrived in August. Level 3 arrives next summer. See a Ford dealer or performanceparts.ford.com for details. ■