



Neither rain nor sleet nor snow nor dead of night

shall keep this truck from its appointed rounds

The classic Post Office slogan springs to mind as we take this nightlife-ready special build north to meet the elements

by Joe Sage

Tundra has long been sort of the odd-man-out among pickups, evolving from a “7/8-sized” T100 to Tundra, then to conventional full-size, but never achieving a presence as big as the major brands. (It comes only as a 150/1500 equivalent, and its lack of a heavy duty model surely limits its impact in the marketplace.) Setting aside relativities, Tundra offers all the fundamentals of the category’s definitions of size, format and function.

DoubleCab or CrewMax cab and bed variables aside, there are basically three levels of Tundra—SR5, Limited, and Platinum or 1794 Edition (those last two roughly equal top tier level, with varying style and finish details).

Most fundamentals, including a single 5.7L V8 gasoline engine, are the same across the entire Tundra lineup, other than in TRD Pro,

which has beefed-up suspension and added skid plates for higher ground clearance and tougher off-road duty. Our last full-week Tundra drive, last summer, was an Army Green TRD Pro, and we found a lot to like.

Toyota revealed two new Tundra Special Editions last summer—the Trail Edition and the Nightshade Edition we are driving here.

Nightshade is conceived with more of a Gotham City at midnight persona, while Trail as more of a great outdoors adventurer. Trail is based on the SR5 CrewMax, while Nightshade is based on Limited with either a DoubleCab or CrewMax build. Both are built on the basic Tundra, with the same engine, transmission, four-wheel-drive system, suspension, steering, brakes and other fundamentals. Details vary by general style and



function. Based as it is on the mid-level Limited, the Nightshade Edition has a solid set of features and finishes at a decent price.

Overall, either should be just about equally good for a run up I-17 to the high country, other than a difference in wheels and tires, significant in winter. Nightshade does have bigger wheels and wider tires than the Trail Edition, ours bearing Dunlop SP Sport 5000M Ultra High Performance All-Seasons. Combining UHP and all-season characteristics in the same tire is a new direction from several tire makers, and though they’re a minor miracle, they are certainly not full-blown snows. We’d been keeping an eye on the forecast for up north, thinking about a dash to Flagstaff or beyond for a change of weather. We weren’t intending to four-wheel or winter rally drive,

just to snag a few snapshots in the snow.

Skies were clear in the Valley all morning, and desert weather systems often vaporize before they hit. But by midday, we could see a wall of major weather building to the north. Good! That’s what we want. We headed out.

The drive up I-17 has built-in challenges—mostly two lanes each way, twists and turns and radical elevation changes, all the things we love that preserve the terrain and make for a great drive. The Tundra delivered the power, performance, handling and solid lane-holding always welcome here, to continually avoid being boxed in by semis, campers, livestock trailers, cars and trucks large and small, new and old, at wildly varying speeds.

Tundra’s intelligent transmission gets the job done reasonably if somewhat imperfectly—for example, on a long uphill grade where it needed to shift down, it shifted up, then realized its mistake and shifted down. On the plus side, that was quick and did not cost us any noticeable speed or momentum.

As we neared Flag at about 3:30 pm—having already noted sunset time, but not adding a factor for the thick blanket of weather forming between us and the waning sun—we were greeted by late dusk light or lack thereof. We stopped shy of town, before it got any darker, and grabbed these photos.

We headed into town at about 4:30, and by now it was not only completely dark, several inches of snow had fallen, and it was getting heavier. Winter driving skills vary in Flagstaff—people have come from all over, plus many have just pulled off while passing through on I-40—and pockets of slip-sliding chaos were developing in spots. An overnight might give us great morning photos. It might also give us a really long drive back, as the Interstates (if open) slow down considerably during heavy snowfalls. Most of all, it wasn’t even 5 pm yet, far from bedtime. We decided to head back home that same evening. We had plenty of slow traffic and wide plow wings to dodge for the first half-hour or so, then smooth sailing.

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY PLANT	San Antonio TX
ENGINE	5.7L DOHC EFI V8, 32v Dual VVT-i, EFI dir inj, aluminum block
HP/TORQUE	381 hp / 401 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-spd electronically controlled auto w ECT-i intelligence, sequential shift mode, uphill/downhill shift logic, tow/haul mode
DRIVETRAIN	4x4: 4WDemand part-time 4WD w electronically controlled transfer case, active traction control (A-TRAC) and automatic limited slip differential (Auto LSD)
DIFFERENTIAL RATIO	(w tow pkg) 4.30
TRANSFER CASE (HIGH/LOW)	1.000/2.640
SUSPENSION	F: indep high-mounted dbl-wishbone w 1.42" stblzr bar & low-pressure nitrogen gas shocks; R: live axle w trapezoid multi-leaf springs, outboard-mounted low-pressure nitrogen gas shocks
STEERING	rack & pinion hydraulic pwr w fluid cooler
BRAKES	F: opposed 4-piston, vented disc, 13.9"; R: 78.4 sq.in each side, total 156.8"/rotor
WHEELS / TIRES	20x8 alum alloy / P275/55R20
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	228.9 / 145.7 in
BED LENGTH	66.7 in
TRACK (F/R)	67.9 / 67.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	49.0 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	10.4 in
APPROACH / DEPARTURE	26 / 16°
HEADROOM (F/R)	39.7 / 38.9 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.5 / 42.3 in
WEIGHT	5680 lb
GVWR	7000-7200 lb
PAYLOAD	1440-1560 lb
WEIGHT	5680 lb
TOW CAPACITY	9800 lb
GROSS COMBINED WEIGHT	16,000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.87 oct reg unl / 38.0 gal
MPG	13/17/14 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$47,305
NIGHTSHADE SPECIAL EDITION	smoked chrome grille w body color surround, black badging, black door handles, black mirror caps, black exhaust tip, black 20" wheels, black leather-trimmed seats
LIMITED PREMIUM PKG	JBL audio, front & rear parking sonar, blind spot monitor, rear cross traffic alert, anti-theft system & immobilizer
MOONROOF	power tilt/slide w sliding sunshade
RUNNING BOARDS	
DOOR SILL PROTECTOR	
SPRAY-ON BEDLINER	
SPARE TIRE LOCK	
DESTINATION CHARGE	
TOTAL	\$53,354

All in all, we consumed some eight or nine hours for a short visit up there, but it’s always worth it. The drive, after all, is the best part.

Toyota Tacoma has totally dominated mid-size pickups for years (though a lot of competition has recently shown up), while Tundra has a far smaller share of full-size. All in all, they’re not that different, making Tundra surely worth a look.

Both premium and utilitarian, Nightshade’s interior doesn’t mind a little mud on the floor, while its beautiful leather finish is ready for a night on the town. This Nightshade Edition is shiny and classy when cleaned up, though now we know it can dress for anything. ■

