

Beyond the city limits BY JOE SAGE

Ford Maverick—a unibody on the same platform as Ford Escape, which originated with the Ford Focus sedan and is also used for Bronco Sport—inevitably gets positioned relative to the great many variants of conventional cab-and-bed-on-frame F-Series and Ranger pickups. Here’s a new build that will help close the mental gap.

Tremor is an “Off-Road Plus Appearance” package available on the upper two of three Maverick trim levels (XLT and Lariat, not XL) and only with the EcoBoost engine, 8-speed automatic and AWD drivetrain (not with the hybrid powertrain and not with a FWD EcoBoost or XL AWD EcoBoost).

The build involves a \$2200 AWD package, then the \$4490 Tremor Package, which brought our XLT from about a \$24k base to \$34k with a few options, a sweet price for an enhanced capability pickup. (We’d move to the Lariat for \$3500 more if budget

allowed, for keyless start and dual-zone climate.)

Tremor’s FX4-based advanced AWD system includes a twin-clutch rear-drive unit with differential lock; five drive modes including Trail Control (off-road cruise that handles throttle and brakes so you focus on your path); an inch of height added from upgraded springs and shocks; a heavy-duty transmission cooler; and upgraded half-shafts.

Visual cues include a new grille, blacked-out Ford logos, black headlamps and taillights, Tremor Orange tow hooks, updated fender vents, and, on ours, patterned stripes on hood and lower doors.

In town, the Maverick provides great maneuverable, satisfying acceleration, solid cornering, a power burst in a pinch—in any extreme situations maybe with not much to spare, but all we needed.

To take a better look at what the Tremor brings to the game, we headed out of town. Our paved

miles on a narrow, winding, often empty, sometimes cliff-hanging two-lane, was punctuated by various UTVs, big trucks and sports cars coming the other way. This stretch was a great test of its tidy size, as well as handling, agility and sometimes brakes, and the truck did extremely well.

We headed off-pavement to a favorite test spot, a near-U-turn at gravel speeds, then up a steep and rugged dirt trail rich with rocks and gullies.

As we barreled up it, still in default 4WD, the drivetrain adjusted its grip to conditions until it could go no farther. That seemed disappointing, so we carefully backed down to the start and played with our pushbutton options. As usual, some drive modes weren’t applicable, such as snow or tow-haul, and applicable ones were open to interpretation—mud-ruts or sand, always a tough choice, as our conditions are usually a bit of all of the above. We chose sand, also locking in the rear differential for good measure; we were already in 4WD. And

this time, we drove right up to the top, as intended, like magic. The system is impressively engineered, and we aced it with our first guesses.

Our high spot requires a familiar seven- or nine-point turn on the cliff-hanging head of a pin. We get out to visually check repeatedly, always, while this truck’s rear camera was also a gem. (One oddity was that our rear camera stayed on-screen after putting the truck back in drive. With plenty to keep an eye on besides the screen, and scenery similar in all directions, this seemed highly dangerous, in this case showing us about 12 feet behind us when we had about two feet out front. We highly recommend they reprogram this.)

Back at the bottom, we popped back out of special modes, unlocked the rear diff, and headed to the paved road and toward town. It was a great session, all receiving an A grade, once you know your buttons and screen. And through all of the above, every time we stepped out of the truck and every time we hopped back in, we found ourselves saying, man, this is a nice truck.

Our final run was to the airport, mostly rush

hour-ish freeway. This truck was a pre-production unit (which could be a factor in our camera story), and fuel mileage numbers were not yet available. Based on our known stats, we figure we achieved 18-20 mpg in our highly mixed usage.

It may be true what some urban colleagues say: no matter how much you love big trucks, unless you have specific need for one, for many people this unibody compact could arguably be all you truly need. As an adventuring platform, with the new Tremor build, it may be just getting started.

We’ve seen F-150 introduce the breakthrough Raptor, then add Tremor, then Raptor R; Ranger has a Tremor now but not a Raptor; Bronco has a Raptor now but not a Tremor. And Maverick now has a Tremor but not a Raptor. It’s fun to read these tea leaves and speculate. A Maverick Raptor may or may not be unlikely. (Bronco is built on Ranger’s truck frame.) But Ford Performance engineers do seem to love tackling a challenge as much as their fan base loves clamoring for the next big thing. It may just boil down to whether Ford is too tied up with EV evolution to even deal with it. ■

Ford Maverick just won 2023 TRUCK OF THE YEAR in the Rocky Mountain Automotive Press (RMAP) Vehicle of the Year Awards.



As usual, we contemplated whether this compact truck could ever have a bed long enough to sleep in (if not an eight-footer, rare even in big trucks), while considering the structural qualities of a unibody and how that requires longer cab structure for overall rigidity.

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico
ENGINE MFG	.....Cleveland or Valencia, Spain
BUILD	.....unibody SuperCrew pickup, high-strength steel frame, mild steel body
ENGINE	.....(opt) 2.0: EcoBoost 4-cyl DOHC Ti-VCT alum/alum, powder forged rods
HP/TORQUE	.....250 hp / 277 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....9.3:1
TRANSMISSION	.....8-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	.....advanced AWD w 4WD lock
SUSPENSION	.....F: indep MacPherson strut-type w coils, twin-tube hydraulic gas shocks, stblzr bars, alum lower control arm, steel subframe, cast knuckle; Tremor adds off-road-tuned suspension w increased ride height; R: (AWD) indep multi-link trailing arm w twin-tube hydraulic gas dampers, coils, stblzr bar, steel subframe, cast knuckle; Tremor adds off-road-tuned suspension w increased ride height
STEERING	.....electronic pwr-assist
BRAKES	.....F: 325x27mm; R: 302x11mm
WHEELS	.....(Tremor) 17-in machined dk alum
TIRES	.....(Tremor) 235/65R17 A/T
TURNING CIRCLE	.....40.0 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....9.4 in
APPR/DEP/BRKVR	.....(Tremor) 30.7 / 22.2 / 19.0°
OVERHANG (F/R)	.....34.6 / 45.1 in
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....200.7 / 121.1 in
WIDTH	.....(incl mirrors or folded) 83.5 / 77.9 in
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....40.3 / 39.6 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....42.8 / 36.9 in
BED LENGTH	.....54.4 in
BED WIDTH AT WHEEL HOUSE	.....42.6 in
CURB WEIGHT	.....3807 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....2000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....87 min 91 rec oct / 16.5 gal
MPG	.....t.b.d.
BASE PRICE	.....\$24,455
EQUIPMENT GROUP 300A: (AWD for XLT)	.....2220
TREMOR OFF-ROAD PLUS APP PKG	.....4490
FORD CO-PILOT 360	.....650
SPLASH GUARDS	.....180
KEYLESS ENTRY FOB (1)	.....242
BEDLINER SPRAY-IN	.....495
(4G WIFI HOTSPOT: removed)	.....(20)
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1495
TOTAL	.....\$34,247

(Note: prices have increased; see below. Note also: Ford says “due to high demand, the current model year is no longer available; contact your dealer for more information.”)

2023 FORD MAVERICK LINEUP

2.5L hybrid	FWD		
XL	.....	\$22,595	
XLT	.....	24,855	
Lariat	.....	28,355	
2.0L EcoBoost	FWD	AWD	4WD*
XL	.....	\$22,595	.....\$24,815
XLT	.....	24,855	.....27,075 ▼ 27,075
Lariat	.....	30,575	.....30,575

*Advanced AWD w 4WD lock (also referred to as Advanced 4WD) is required for Tremor Off-Road Packages, available on XLT and Lariat trims