

The power of lust

Is the gotta-have-it factor everything? Maybe! by Joe Sage

While we were in Washington State for the NWAPA Mudfest comparo (also in this issue), we shuttled between the airport, lodging and driving facility in a craft perfect for the mission, the 2023 Toyota Tacoma TRD Pro. It fits nicely between a 4Runner TRD Pro we had at home in Arizona a few months ago and the bigger Tundra TRD Pro entered in Mudfest, not to mention the new Tacoma SR5 Trail Edition we had for a week last summer. And it stands on its own—out of a whopping 32 basic Tacoma builds, with varying cabs, beds, engines, trim levels and drivetrains, TRD Pro is the absolute top dog. This, in turn, is right in line with its tackle anything mission.

As we've noted before, both the Tacoma and its fraternal twin, the body-on-frame 4Runner, are consistently noted by both their unshakeable fans and a handful of detractors for the same thing—they never change (much). We have tended toward the "don't change a thing" camp, appreciating its clas-

sic burliness, as well as any number of specific features, such as beefy physical knobs you can operate with your gloves on.

But there is one thing. Tacoma TRD Pro is not weak or powerless. It's just geared for grunt. On a steep hill on the Olympic Peninsula's two-lanes or even a more gradual incline on a grade-limited Interstate, we might groan at maximum effort. (The transmission, by the way, is quite good through any and all of this.) Tacoma is powerful and tough, but it's built for strength. For some, this may lead to shopping the bigger Tundra. But Tacoma is a truck you love to love and can't wait to drive again. You just may wish it had a bigger engine.

Or perhaps bigger is not the key word. The full-size Tundra changed engines a couple of years ago, moving its powertrains from two V8s to two i-FORCE V6 engines, regular or a light hybrid twin-turbo i-FORCE MAX. And those are both 3.5-liter V6s, same as Tacoma, though delivering either 389

or 479 hp, compared to Tacoma's 278. What's more, the move increased Tundra's fuel economy ratings by five or six points across the board with the i-FORCE engines. Same displacement doesn't necessarily mean same physical dimensions, but surely these could fit under the Tacoma's hood.

Power is one comparative between Tacoma and Tundra (and 4Runner and Sequoia). Size is another, and this will sort itself out for most buyers. But then there's cost. Might the high-tech i-FORCE engine push Tacoma's prices too high, or close enough to Tundra to complicate the comparison? It seems Tacoma has enough sales volume to build versions of both for awhile, to see how that goes.

But longstanding lust for the Tacoma should rule the day—it has always had that gotta-have-it factor and most likely always will. You just can't wait to get your hands on it and on (or off) the road again. It may be craving more power, yet you're always craving more time with it, just as it is.

Well, good news—just a couple of weeks after this issue publishes, we expect Toyota to reveal exactly what many have wished for—i-FORCE for the Tacoma lineup. Stay tuned! ■

Our Tacoma TRD Pro in Washington State was the same great color as our 4Runner TRD Pro here recently—its stunning current showpiece, Solar Orange.



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Guanajuato, Mexico
ENGINE	.....3.5L V6 D-4S direct & port injection Atkinson Cycle engine w/ VVT-iW (var valve timing, intelligent, wider) intake & VVT-i exhaust
HP/TORQUE	.....278 hp / 265 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd ECT automatic
DRIVETRAIN	.....4x4 w/ part-time 4WD
DIFFERENTIAL RATIO	.....3.909
SUSPENSION	.....F: dbl-wishbone w/ stblzr bar, TRD-tuned off-road susp w/ 2.5-in FOX internal bypass coil-overs; R: leaf-spring w/ staggered outboard gas shocks, TRD Pro w/ rear remote reservoir shocks
STEERING	.....power rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 10.75 vented; R: 10.0 drum
WHEELS	.....16-in TRD black alloy
TIRES	.....P265/70R16 all-season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....212.3 / 127.4 in
WIDTH / HEIGHT	.....(w/ overfenders) 75.2 / 71.6 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....9.4 in
APPROACH / DEPART / BRKOVER	.....36.4 / 24.7 / 26.6°
TURNING CIRCLE	.....40.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....39.7 / 38.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....42.9 / 32.6 in
INSIDE BED LENGTH	.....60.5 in
BTWN WHEEL WELLS	.....41.5 in
WEIGHT	.....4550 lb
PAYLOAD	.....1155 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....(with opt V6 tow prep pkg) 6400 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	......87 reg unl or higher / 21.1 gal
MPG	.....18/22/20 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE\$49,390
PREMIUM PAINT: SOLAR OCTANE425
DESTINATION CHARGE1335
TOTAL\$51,150

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