

# RIDE 'EM

By Joe Sage

From among various vehicle comparo events hosted by different regional media groups, the Texas Auto Writers' Association (TAWA) Texas Truck Rodeo has long been recognized as a very big deal, with a top win here often going straight to billboards and prestigious Super Bowl ads. After all, "Texas means trucks."

The event has evolved a bit over the years, moving (during the decade or so we've been participating) from one big Texas Hill Country ranch to another, then to a small engineered course on a very small property for a few years, now back to big acreage in North Texas, at Eagles Canyon Raceway outside Decatur, which has about doubled its size beyond its 2.7-mile paved road course and club racing facilities (where TAWA Texas Auto Round-up often takes place in the spring). The new land has a variety of open dirt roads, with space for specially prepared features to be added for our event, as well.

Manufacturer participation and specific entries always offer insights, reflecting

market directions themselves. In today's industry climate, having something new is big news, as it always has been, but keeping the tried and true alive can be equally welcome. This event had plenty of both. Model years are still lagging a bit after the pandemic years, with about half the entries being 2024 and half 2023.

## SUVS

### Compact SUV

2023 Honda CR-V Hybrid Sport Touring AWD	.....\$39,845
2024 Mazda CX-50 2.5 Turbo Meridian Edition	.....43,860
*2024 Dodge Hornet R/T Plus	.....53,245
2024 Hyundai Kona Limited AWD	.....35,145

### Midsize SUV

2023 Jeep Grand Cherokee Altitude 4X4	.....\$54,070
2023 Kia Sorento X-Line	.....43,590
2024 Nissan Pathfinder Rock Creek 4WD	.....45,305
2024 Volkswagen Atlas SE	.....N/A

### Full-Size SUV

2024 Toyota Grand Highlander Platinum Hyb MAX	.....N/A
2023 Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat	.....\$106,420

### Off-Road SUV

2024 Jeep Wrangler 4xe Rubicon X	.....\$74,770
2024 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 392	.....95,945
2024 Toyota Sequoia TRD PRO Hybrid	.....77,565

### Luxury SUV

2023 Grand Wagoneer Series III	.....\$114,180
*2023 Genesis Electrified GV70 AWD Prestige	.....75,275
2024 Acura MDX Type S with Advance	.....75,295

*\*(Noted vehicles were also entered in Green category.)*

## PICKUPS

### Midsize Pickup

2023 Nissan Frontier PRO-4X	.....\$46,380
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### Full-Size Pickup

**2023 Ram 1500 Limited Elite	.....N/A
2024 Toyota Tundra 1794 Limited Edition	.....N/A

### Heavy Duty Pickup

2023 Ram 2500 Rebel	.....\$93,910
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### Off-Road Pickup

2023 Ram 1500 TRX	.....\$105,735
2024 Toyota Tundra HV 4X4 TRD PRO	.....N/A
2023 Ram 2500 Power Wagon	.....87,465

### Luxury Pickup

**2023 Ram 1500 Limited Elite	.....N/A
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*\*\* (Noted vehicle was entered as both Full-Size and Luxury.)*

## GREEN VEHICLE

2023 Jeep Grand Cherokee 4xe Trailhawk	.....\$73,125
*2023 Genesis Electrified GV70 AWD Prestige	.....75,275
*2024 Dodge Hornet R/T Plus	.....\$53,245

*\*(Noted vehicles were also entered in SUV categories.)*

## SELF-NOMINATED AWARDS

Manufacturers also enter "self-nominated" technologies and features for awards, with voting this year among a few presented infotainment systems and powertrains.

By brand and model—after consolidating category repeats (Hornet, GV70, Ram 1500) and multiple trims (Wrangler, Grand Cherokee, Ram 1500)—there were a core total of (15) SUVs and (4) pickups in play.

Voting is first performed within (11) cat-



egories, each generating an award. These are tallied via a formula of subjective attributes—each rated below, average, above or best in class, then scored for interior, exterior, performance, value and personal appeal. With so many categories, these produce a lot of outcomes, each from among just a handful of contenders (in several instances even just one).

The event culminates in two grand trophies via one more totally subjective vote—the SUV of Texas and the Truck of Texas.

Final results are always full of both affirmations and new insights. Voting used to be done and awards presented at the close of driving, but now are both done at later dates. We've all voted, but have no word yet on when results will follow. We generally never reveal our own votes, but do keep track, so we'll look forward to comparing them with groupthink. ■



Vehicle photos: Eric O'Hara and Kelby McGaughey of 1Off Productions  
Miscellaneous photos (waffle and freeway): Joe Sage