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Fuel-sippin’ Ram 1500 shakes the market

By DAN CRUMMETT

WHAT began as a mild upgrade on the popular half-ton Ram 1500 pickup got a little out of hand — and ended with a ground-up redesign aimed at making the vehicle the most fuel-miserly contender in its class. The work-over yielded a nice form to the function of the truck. It’ll certainly get the attention of Chrysler loyalists, as well as GM and Ford buyers.

The 2013 Ram 1500 is extremely tight, quiet and well-finished. It handles extremely well on roads of all types with electric rack-and-pinion power steering. And, with a 305hp, V6 Pentastar engine and the venerable 395-hp, 5.7-liter Hemi V8 as choices, the new truck has plenty of roll-on power — particularly through the new optional TorqueFlite eight-speed automatic transmission (the top two gears are both overdrive ratios).

Mileage estimates for the 3.60-liter V6 (with variable valve timing) and the eight-speed transmission lead the V6 pickup class for 2013, at 17 mpg city and 25 highway.

Little things add up

The fuel efficiency comes from a host of “little things” that add up to 20% better performance than the 3.7-liter engine in previous models. Engineers whittled weight on the vehicle with higher-strength steel; tuned the cooling system and fuel delivery for maximum efficiency; added a four-position air-suspension chassis to allow for off-road clearance needs as well as to take advantage of drag reduction — and ease of loading and entering the vehicle. They also provided for the engine to shut off during extended stops and automatically restart when the brake is released. Exterior style changes also reduced the drag coefficient of the 1500 to be comparable to many crossover SUVs.

The Hemi version with the eight-speed is also a leader in its V8 pickup class in fuel economy. This comes from variable valve timing and cylinder shutoff technology, although official U.S. EPA ratings were not available when this was written.

Notable interior upgrades include the UConnect System, with an 8.4-inch touchscreen display and Wi-Fi hot-spot capability. The UConnect wireless platform allows access to vehicle information, guidance programs and the Web.

At the top of the line, the Longhorn model sports all-leather accoutrements and real wood trim. The rear seats of all quad-cab models fold flat, with speakers mounted beneath — to provide more storage room than competing trucks.

The gear-shift selector is gone from the column on the eight-speed transmission models. The selector arm has been replaced with a handy rotary gear-selector knob on the dash at the driver’s right hand. The rotary selector communicates with the electronic-shift gearbox wirelessly and is quite easy to use. Forced up and down shifts are available with a touch of a button on the steering wheel and are almost imperceptible, as are normal upshifts from start to highway speed.

The 2013 Ram 1500 is an excellent example of what a highly competitive marketplace can do for consumers. The truck brings loads of new technology to the table, and at what Ram executives say will be a “very competitive” price point.

For pricing and more details, visit Iron/Tech at www.FarmProgress.com and search for “Ram.”

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