

Road beat: 2015 Tundra ride quality excels



The 2015 Toyota Tundra is a complete package. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Toyota's new third generation 2015 Tundra (refreshed in 2014) has finally got it right (keep reading and you will understand). Toyota has been making trucks for decades with the Tacoma owning the mid-size class for years and one of its biggest competitors, the Ford Ranger no longer in production.

In the full size realm, Toyota started with the T100 in 1992, which morphed into the first generation Tundra in 1999. Although it had an 8-foot bed and was considered by some automotive types as a full size pickup, it was smaller,

especially in the cab. It was more like a 7/8 truck. But it was a great truck. Go try and find a used first generation Tundra; good ones are expensive.

In 2007 Toyota brought out a real full size "half-ton" Tundra pickup, matching the size and dimensions of the Big Three in every way, including power with a 5.7L 381 hp V-8. In several tests of this second generation Tundra, there was no question it was effectively the equal of the competition in almost category, except one, ride quality. Toyota tried too hard to make its truck feel tougher than the competition and it did that by making it ride more like a heavy-duty truck. It could be bouncy over expansion joints. In my first test of the 5.7L about six years ago, I remarked that the oscillation was intolerable. In a 4.6 version tested a few years later it was much improved, but still not perfect.



Specifications

Price (1794 Crew Max 4X4, as tested) \$48,880

Engines

4.0L DOHC, 24 valve V-6 270 hp @ 5,600 rpm

278 lbs.-ft. of torque @ 4,400 rpm

4.6L DOHC 32 valve V-8 310 hp @ 5,600 rpm

327 lbs.-ft. of torque @ 3,400 rpm

5.7L DOHC 32 valve V-8 381
hp @ 5,600 rpm
401 lbs.-ft. of torque @
3,600 rpm
Transmission
Five speed automatic (4.0L
V-6 only)
Six speed automatic (4.6L,
5.7L V-8)
Configuration
Longitudinal front
engine/rear wheel drive/four
wheel drive
Dimensions (as tested)
Wheelbase 145.7 inches
Length 228.9 inches
Width 79.9 inches
Height 76.2 inches
Track (f/r) 67.9/67.9 inches
Ground clearance 10.4 inches
Bed size (l/h/w)
78.7/22.2/66.4 inches
Weight 5,880 pounds
GVWR 7,200 pounds
Tow capacity 9,000 pounds
GCWR (gross combined weight
rating) 15,300 pounds
Fuel capacity 26.4 gallons
Steering lock to lock 3.71
turns
Turning circle 44.0 feet
Brake rotor diameter (f/r)
13.9/13.6 inches
Co-efficient of drag 0.38
Performance
0-60 mph 6.61 seconds
50-70 mph 3.63 seconds

50-70 uphill 4.98 seconds
Top speed Without a governor
it would probably hit 130
plus mph. It=s got a lot of
air to push.
Fuel economy EPA rated at
13/17/15 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 14-15 mpg in rural
country driving and 19-20
mpg on the highway at legal
speeds.

While this new third generation is more of a refreshed second generation with new sheet metal and interiors, it is mechanically quite similar to the second generation except for one thing, this new third generation rides smoother than a baby's butt. Fabulous.

Toyota also brought out a new top of the line model, the 1794 Edition, which turns out to be an obscure reference to the location of the San Antonio plant where Americans assemble the Tundra. Still don't get the 1794? You see that was the date of the founding of the JLC Ranch upon which the Tundra plant is located. Texas wasn't even Texas back then and Sam Houston was only 1 year old in 1794. It wasn't an American ranch. It appears to be a feeble attempt to mimic Ford's King Ranch pickups.

Outside the new Tundra is a bit busy, but styling a pickup to be different is a tough job considering it is a true three-box design. Let's put it this way, it is good looking and everyone who looked at it remarked on its beautiful color, Sunset Bronze Mica, which is exclusive to the 1794 edition. It is captivating; Toyota may sell this truck because of the paint finish. Surprisingly, the coefficient of drag is a low (for a pickup) 0.38.

But it doesn't end there. Wait until you open one of the doors and take a look inside. King Ranch watch out. First are the soft oil tanned leather seats. Fabulous number two. The rear seating has more luxury, comfort and space than a limousine. Even the floor mats are trick. About the only comment is I would have left out the basket weave on a couple of the trim pieces. The instrument panel is also new and well done. The front chairs are as comfortable as they look. Kudos, Toyota.

The nuts and bolts of the new Tundra are a carryover, including most powertrain, suspension and chassis components with some obvious beneficial tweaks as is evident in the much improved ride quality. Three engines are available, a 270 hp V-6 found also in the Tacoma/4Runner, a 4.6L DOHC V-8 of 310 hp and a stroked version of that block displacing 5.7L and producing 381 peak hp (at 5,600 rpm) and peak torque of 401 lbs.-ft of twist at a low 3,600 rpm. The 5.7 came with the 1794 Edition. Performance is excellent with a 0-60 mph elapsed time of 6.61 seconds. Passing runs are also quick with 50-70 mph on a level highway requiring just 3.63 seconds and the same simulated pass up a six percent grade slowing that time to 4.98 seconds. Compared to the 4.6L V-8 this times are a half to a full second quicker. The six speed auto tranny needs special mention for its incredible shifting smoothness. While a part-time 4 x 4 system, all testing was done in rear wheel drive.

Considering its weight (5,860 pounds) and large engine, fuel economy is not the forte of the 1794 4 x 4. EPA rates it at 13/17/15 mpg city/highway/ combined. On the highway at 70 mph with the engine spinning just 1,800 rpm, the Tundra averaged 19.4 mpg on a two-way run. Overall in rural hilly driving expect 14-15 mpg. It did average 17.4 mpg on a trip from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe and back at mostly legal speeds, plus a 10-minute stop for the Wagon Train and several full throttle passes. Fuel tank is a bit small at 26 gallons.

Suspension is a carryover from the prior generation, meaning

fully independent double wishbones up front and a live, solid axle with trapezoid multi-leaf springs in the rear. Low-pressure nitrogen gas shocks reside in all four corners. Steering is a hydraulic rack with a winding 3.71 turns lock to lock. Another big surprise is the short 44 foot turning circle. Wheels are 20 x8 inches shod with 275/55x20 tires and the track is 68 inches front and rear. Lots more surprises to come such as excellent handling with good cornering power, a flat, stable cornering attitude and good steering feedback. It will “surprise” you at seven to eight-tenths driving. After eight-tenths you can feel the rear end start to rotate, but if you are paying attention, it telegraphs its intentions well. It may seem big and ponderous, but it is actually relatively light on its feet.

As said before, ride quality is baby butt smooth. No expansion joints, no bobbing and weaving, no float, just an extremely smooth controlled ride. It is a pleasure on the highway. Sure there is some jiggle on choppy surfaces, but there is no jarring.

Braking is done by four wheel ventilated discs of nearly 14 inches in diameters. You could serve a Thanksgiving turkey on discs that big. Of course every conceivable acronym is standard and in panic stops from 40 mph are achieved in 46 feet. Vehicle stability control, traction control and in this 4x 4 model, A-TRAC or active traction control is standard.



Luxury has not been

sacrificed.

I have already described one of the best truck interiors ever, roomy, comfortable, connected, convenient, full power and then some. Lots of cubbies and storage as well. Just open the door and you will understand.

One of the newer styling designs are the deep cargo boxes now in the Tundra, over 22 inches deep. Even the width between the interior wheel wells is 50 inches. While the box is a short 5½ five, the box looks and is voluminous. With the tailgate down there is about 7.5 feet of length. It will haul a big motorcycle.

Pricing starts and ends at \$47,320, plus \$995 for the trucker from San Antonio. Chrome clad wheels and running boards add another \$565; \$48,880 and you are all done; for a 4 x 4 Cowboy Lexus.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.