The West, when women are telling the story

By Emily Wortman-Wunder, High Country News

For years, starry-eyed initiates to the West's backcountry have packed along classics like John Muir's "My First Summer in the Sierra," Edward Abbey's "Desert Solitaire," and the journals of Lewis and Clark. These writers inspire us, open our eyes to the beauty and the fragility of the rugged West, and give this landscape a mythic resonance.

However, much of that myth has been written by men. "Here, in the wilderness, a man could be a real man, the rugged individual he was meant to be before civilization sapped his energy and threatened his masculinity," writes environmental historian William Cronon, describing the ethos that's shaped, and misshaped, our understanding of what wilderness is. Even the women writing in this tradition – Mary Austin, Terry Tempest Williams, Leslie Marmon Silko – often write about the struggle to make their way in a world dominated by men.

Recently, though, women have been storming the barricades. From Cheryl Strayed's best-selling memoir of hiking the Pacific Crest Trail to Claire Vaye Watkins' myth-busting fable of a waterless California, many of the exciting new names in the literature of the West are women. If the traditional vision of nature is one of struggle and conquest, of man testing himself against solitude and the elements, what does this shift mean for our collective vision of the wide-open spaces of the West?

Read the whole story

Road Beat: Toyota Tundra, getting it right



The Toyota Tundra continues to improve in nearly every category. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

It's been more than three years since my last visit with this third generation Tundra and my last review remarked how Toyota finally made the Tundra into a real "Cowboy Cadillac" with a ride smoother than a baby's butt. This new Tundra feels even a bit smoother, perhaps a little less jiggly over Caltrans challenged pavement.

While this third generation is now in its third year of

production at its new San Antonio, Texas, plant, incremental improvements have been made, small tweaks here and there all to improve the driving experience and what an experience it is.

Outside, the Tundra looks big, almost like a three-quarter, 1-ton truck. It stands tall at 77.2 inches with the TRD equipment. But with the CrewMax you get an extra 8 inches of rear seat room, which makes for limousine proportions out back, but the bed is a shorty with a length of just 67 inches and with a width of 66 inches, it is almost a perfect square. And it is deep at more than 22 inches. Consequently, length is no more than a standard cab long bed Tundra or 228.9 inches or about 10 inches longer than a Suburban. Width however is 80 inches and you can feel that breath when inside. It gives beamy a new definition. Coefficient of drag isn't as bad as you would think at 0.38.

And with tweaks to the design, Tundra is a great looking ride especially in my Quicksand color. This enamel color looks 5-feet deep.

With its big 5.7L iForce DOHC 32 valve, direct injected V-8 it pounds out 381 very big horses at a low 5,600 rpm and 401 pounds of twist at just 3,600 rpm. It drives the rear wheels and all four wheels via an on demand two-speed system through a six-speed auto cog-swapper. And it rocks as it is a bit quicker than my experience with the top of the line 1794 edition from three years ago, as this beast romps with a 0-60 mph time of under six seconds, posting an average of 5.88 seconds. That is world class. And it is backed up by 50-70 mph passing times of 3.14 seconds on a level highway and 4.95 seconds up a 6-7 percent grade. That's a half second improvement in the first two parameters and a 0.03 second improvement in the last uphill parameter. Wow.



Specifications

Price (Crew Max 4X4, as tested) $51,488

Engines

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

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 77.2 inches

Track (f/r) 67.9/67.9 inches

Ground clearance 10.6 inches

Bed size (l/h/w) 66.7/22.2/66.4 inches

Weight 5,560 pounds

GVWR 7,200 pounds
Tow capacity 9,000 pounds
GCWR (gross combined weight rating) 16,000 pounds
Fuel capacity 38.0 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 5.88 seconds
50-70 mph 3.14 seconds
50-70 uphill 4.95 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 15-16 mpg in rural country driving and 19-20 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

Throttle response is extremely strong and immediate, but yet you can baby this unit along with a feather foot as well. Nice throttle.

But performance like that out of a big, 5,560-pound vehicle doesn’t come without a price at the pump. EPA fuel economy numbers are 13/17/15 mpg city/highway/combined. But it does a little better on the highway, recording 19.4 mpg at a constant 70 mph which is the exact number from three years ago with the engine turning about 1,850 rpm. In my trip over the Sierra to

Carson City, the big Tundra averaged a tolerable 17.2 mpg in aggressive driving. Overall the Tundra averaged 15.4 mpg, but with its huge 38-gallon fuel tank, you can see a huge range of well over 500 miles on the highway. But the fill up of 30 plus gallons (you don't want to have to push this truck) will approach $75-$80. It runs on regular.

My TRD equipped Tundra came with special double wishbone suspension up front and a live axle suspended by multi-trapezoidal leaf springs with TRD Bilstein's in all for corners and special coils up front and a 2.5-inch lift. Steering is a bit slow at 3.71 turns lock to lock but its turning circle is remarkably tight at just 44 feet. Tires mounted on huge 20 x 8 inch alloys are 275/55 series rubber which give the big Tundra surprisingly good grip and cornering power. Yes, it has to be guided, but it works pretty darn good. It biggest issue is it feels big. Kind of like seeing the fastest airliner in the sky, a Boeing 747, which appears to look like the slowest, especially on landing, because of its size.

Ride quality is much improved to the point of being ultra-smooth and quiet on smooth roads and comfortable on maintenance challenged roads. It now rides like that aforementioned "Cowboy Cadillac." Toyota has got it right.

Brakes are huge with four ventilated discs of nearly fourteen inches in diameter with the fronts having four piston calipers. They are powerful. All the safety acronyms are present along with a backup camera, a real necessity, and eight air bags. Headlights are very good.

Here I go again with that "Cowboy Cadillac" stuff as the interior is sumptuous, ready for the opera. Heck, it's so roomy inside they could hold the opera inside. All kidding aside, the interior is mammoth, a bench seat could hold four abreast with enough seat belts. A good thing it's really quiet or you would have to shout to your passenger who probably feel

like he/she is sitting across a football stadium.

Everything is done with leather and other first-rate materials, and the instrument panel has all the requisite gauges including a volt meter and oil pressure gauge. It’s an easy to read unit as is the simple to use trip computer.

The center stack is fairly easy to use, but it will take some dual of about 15 minutes to master it. Then it’s a piece of cake.

The bed, while short and within about half an inch from being square, is deep like the Marianas Trench in the Pacific. It will pack the cargo and everything you buy at Home Depot.

Stickering at a base price of $44 large, my Limited was loaded up with about $6K in options, all worth it including the $1,100 for the performance dual exhaust which sound fantastic, like a V-8 should. Not obtrusive on the highway, but when you get into the delicious throttle, nothing sounds better. Total for this “Cowboy Cadillac” which remember is made in Texas totals $51,488 including $1,195 for the rail car from near San Antonio. It’s a terrific ride and remember, it’s a Toyota.

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.

Mountain storytelling podcast to launch in Dec.

Brendan Madigan, owner of 38-year-old specialty retail shop

Alpenglow Sports, has launched a podcast initiative featuring intimate conversations with iconic mountain personalities.

Afterglow, a Mountain Storytelling Podcast, travels deep into the mind, heart and soul of world-renowned adventure athletes. The first season is a six-part series with weekly episodes that becomes available on Dec. 1 across multiple podcast platforms.

Afterglow is a series of organic, long-form and intimate conversations that reveal the possibilities, motivations and inspirations of iconic mountain athletes. Every conversation digs deep in the attempt to learn universal truths from the experiences of these athletes including who we are, why we are here and how these answers offer a pathway for the sharing of experiences, emotion and vulnerabilities that can potentially spark change and bridge divides.

Season one includes conversations with Tommy Caldwell, Will Gadd, Dave Nettle, Brendan Leonard, Doug Robinson and Chris Noble. The series kicks-off is a tandem chat with high altitude mountaineers Adrian Ballinger and Cory Richards, climbers of Everest-No-Filter fame.

Afterglow is entirely free and available on iTunes, Soundcloud, Stitcher, Google Play and more.

To maintain muscle and lose fat as you age, add weights

By Gretchen Reynolds, New York Times

Trying to stay trim as you age? Surprisingly, if you’re

cutting calories to lose weight, adding weights to your weight loss regimen may be more effective than beginning a walking program, according to a new study that adds to growing evidence that weight training is important for vigorous aging.

Successful weight loss is never easy, as most of us know from experience, and becomes more difficult with age. Instead of losing or maintaining weight as we grow older, most of us gain a pound or two each year during middle age.

At the same time, we also often begin naturally to lose some of our muscle mass, so that our bodies wind up increasingly composed of fat.

Read the whole story

Christmas and Santa coming to SLT museum

Lake Tahoe Historical Society is planning a festive day of free family fun on Dec. 9 from 11am-7pm.

The museum is being transformed into a Victorian Christmas scene. Tour the museum and 1930’s log cabin.

Santa arrives by sleigh at 5pm. There will be sleigh rides for all.

Ukulele Christmas music will be playing, the South Lake Tahoe Children’s Choral Society singing, plus there will be children’s activities and gift making along with refreshments of cookies, hot cider and more.

The entire event is free. The museum is at 3058 Lake Tahoe

Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

Road Beat: Latest Miata is sleek and supple



The 2017 Mazda Miata MX-5 should be a Nobel Prize winner. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

If there were a Nobel Prize for fun and motoring enjoyment, the Mazda MX-5 would be the hands down winner. No if, ands, or buts. Now in its fourth generation, the more time I spend in the left seat (the right seat ain’t too bad either), the more I want one. In my week of thrashing this MX-5 Miata through an

athletic regime at full tilt boogie, most of the time throwing some caution to the wind, the Miata averaged between 35 and 36 mpg. It is more economical than most every other car I have driven, except for some hybrids.

Its body is edgy, muscular and looks to be shaped by a Samurai's sword. During my week of testing, this car received more compliments of any test vehicle in recent memory. Some people rolled down their windows wanting to know about the car. There is no question, the "Kodo" school of design is the winner among manufacturers, think, Mazda 3 and 6 and their three CX models.

Miata has gone back to its original roots, being much smaller and lighter than its prior generation with a length of just 154 inches or about your basic Mini Cooper. But it is wide (for its length) at 68 inches affording a track of 59 inches front and rear while standing just 49 inches tall.

Under its beautiful bonnet sits a longitudinally mounted 2.0, high tech four-cylinder Atkinson cycle engine driving the rear wheels via a six-speeder manual tranny, that's so smooth, upshifting rarely requires the clutch, nice if you have a lazy left leg. Down shifting requires more skill. Atkinson cycle engines have extremely high compression (13:1) and late closing intake valves which improve engine efficiency by expanding the compression and power stroke ratios. See paragraph one as to overall fuel economy proof.



Specifications

Price $24,915 to about $33,000 plus $820 for the boat from Hiroshima, Japan

Engine

2.0L inline four-cylinder DOHC, 16 valves 155 hp @ 6,000 rpm 148 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,600 rpm

Transmission

Six-speed manual

Six-speed torque converter automatic

Configuration

Longitudinal front engine/rear wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 90.9 inches

Length 154.1 inches

Width 68.3 inches

Height (17-inch wheels) 48.8 inches

Ground Clearance (17-inch wheels) 5.32 inches

Track (f/r) 58.9/59.2 inches

Fuel Capacity 11.9 gallons

Truck volume 4.6 cubic feet

Turning circle (wall to wall) 32.9 feet

Steering lock to lock 2.7 turns

Wheels (std/opt) 16X6.5/17X7 inches

Tires (std//opt) 195/50X16//205/45X17

Weight 2,332 pounds

Weight distribution (f/r)

53/47 percent

Performance

0-60 mph 5.91 seconds

50-70 mph 3.32 seconds (3rd gear)

50-70 up hill (6%) 4.53 seconds

Top Speed Estimate 140 plus mph (have ear plugs)

Fuel economy EPA rated 26/33/29 mpg city/highway/combined.

Estimate 30-32 mpg in suburban driving, 35 mpg in rural driving and 40 plus mpg at 70 mph on level ground.

Power output is still very good at 155 hp at 6,000 rpm along with 148 pounds of peak twist at 4,600 rpm. Performance is absolutely world class with a 0-60 time of 5.91 seconds backed up with a level simulated pass time of 3.32 seconds and an uphill pass of 4.53 seconds. Nailing the throttle will pin your backside to the seat. Miata rocks, especially third gear. Although not a 500 hp 5.0L powerhouse, this 2.0L mill gives you good power in the lower gears from 1,500 to 2,000 rpm. Throttle response feels like its connected to your brain.

While the fuel tank is just 12 gallons, your range will be limited by your own physiology as this Miata averaged 42 mpg on the highway at 70 mph, meaning an easy 400 miles. EPA rates the Miata at 26/33 mpg city/highway meaning a combined number of about 29 mpg. But while they are the government mandated test numbers, I achieved much higher numbers, my round trip to South Lake Tahoe and back averaged 40.1 mpg using full throttle in at least 15 of the passing zones up and down Highway 50.

Handling is the real Nobel effort of Mazda. The laws of physics have been redefined by Miata. Suspenders are state of the art, steering is a quick double pinion power rack (2.7 turns) and while wheels are 17X7 inch alloys the tires aren't huge meats at 205/45. Those tires make the Miata more playful. Also, which needs mention is the under 33 foot turning circle and its more important light weight of 2,332 pounds. Changing directions in a Miata is about the most fun you can have either in the vertical or recumbent position. Not much else comes close. It does exactly what you want and nothing you don't. And if your exuberance gets the better of you, your corrections can even be more fun and satisfying. It loves to rotate and getting the rear end out will not cause you a five-yard penalty of back field in motion.

Ride quality is firm. But you won't be braking any fillings and it is well controlled. And it is remarkably quiet, even with the top down. But don't expect it to be a CX-9. The engine spins 2,900 rpm at 70 mph.

Safety includes most of the acronyms including the braking ones, even lane departure warning, along with four-wheel discs. Headlights are fabulous made even better by the adaptive front lighting and automatic high beam.

Within the confirms of my Grand Touring roadster (soft top) is a rather luxo interior, with plenty of leather on the seats, steering wheel and shifter, plus full power except for the seats. Instrumentation is about perfect and now that I have had plenty of seat time with Mazda's multi-function commander control, I have finally got it down. It's still not the best, but it works, but there are still too many steps involved in the control system.

The other thing missing is luggage and interior storage capacity. The small trunk is actually quite usable and although it only holds 4.6 cubic feet, it is well shaped. If you golf however, Fed Ex or Ship Sticks will be pre-programmed

into your phone or computer. No glove box or center console storage, either but there is a little compartment between the seatbacks which is basically inaccessible while seated, unless you are a member of Cirque du Soleil.

Pricing for your basic Miata starts at below $25 large, but my “loaded” Grand Touring model stickers for $30,065, plus $835 for the boat from Hiroshima, japan. It’s a lot of fun for the money, but be careful how you have your fun as the penalties are more than five yards. Miata is about driving enjoyment. Did I forget to mention it’s also an economy car designed for the long and windy way home.

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.

Tahoe National Forest photo contest winners announced

The winner of the 2017 Tahoe National Forest photo contest is “Celestial Wilderness” by Joseph Dondelinger of Foresthill.

Second place is “Dreamy Nights,” also by Dondelinger, and third place is “Mountain Biking Into the Light on the Lavezzola Creek Trail” by Jeff Barker.

The winning image was of Castle Peak in the moonlight. According to Dondelinger, he used an app on his phone to get the timing of the Milky Way just right. The second place image shows Duncan Peak Lookout at twilight. Third place shows a mountain biker on the Lavezzola Creek Trail.

To see the winning images go **online**.

AARP tax program seeking volunteers

The South Lake Tahoe branch of the AARP Foundation’s Tax-Aide Program is seeking individuals interested in working in the volunteer-run tax preparation and assistance center.

Volunteers will be helping people in the South Lake Tahoe and surrounding area with free and individualized tax preparation services.

Two types of volunteer positions are needed. Facilitators are volunteers who welcome taxpayers, help organize the client’s paperwork, and manage the overall flow of tax preparation services. Counselors are volunteers who provide tax preparation services, work directly with the taxpayer to fill out tax returns, and electronically file the quality-reviewed returns.

The Tax-Aide Program has a need for bilingual speakers as well.

Experience is not necessary. New volunteer orientations are scheduled for Dec. 7 and Dec. 11.

For more information about the program or how to become a volunteer, contact Rosalie at 530.577.4849.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Ralphie

Ralphie is a playful, active Border Collie mix. He is about 1 year old and weighs 30 pounds.

Ralphie will do best in a home where he gets plenty of exercise, and possibly some agility or herding training. No cats, please.

Ralphie is neutered, microchipped, and vaccinated. He is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go to the Tahoe animal shelter's Facebook page to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call 530.573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go **online**.

– Karen Kuentz

Santa pictures with pups help Tahoe nonprofit

Wild Blue Dogs, the nonprofit that raises money to help dogs with cancer, is putting on two events in December.

People may have their dog’s picture taken with Santa on Dec. 9 and Dec. 16 from 1-4pm at Tahoe Beach Retreat in South Lake Tahoe. A $10 donation is suggested. (At the same time, Mrs. Clause will be at the hotel making cookies and crafts with kids.)

Canines and Cocktails will be at Sidelines inside Tahoe Beach Retreat on Dec. 18 from 5-9pm. Roast s’mores and bring the furry family members for a 25 percent discount. Dogs are allowed in the hotel lobby or patio area.