

## New Car/Review



## The New Bad Boy in Town, The Ford Super Duty F-250/350 Pickup Truck

by Larry Weitzman



Ford Full Line factory footage (14:26) [28.8](#), [56k](#), or [200k](#)

Competition is a wonderful thing. Especially, if you are a consumer. The Japanese auto industry taught us about competition. In the seventies and eighties they showed us that people would not just buy by brand but quality counted. And we have learned.

The 1999 completely new Super Duty F-250/350 pickup truck is a result of this intense competition among automakers. One upmanship is alive and well and we get the benefit.

For years Ford has been content in having the best selling truck on the market. Chevy & GMC were a very close second and Dodge was a distance third. That changed in 1994. Dodge shocked the industry with the new Ram truck. It was bold, and many thought beautiful, including this writer. It was also a terrific truck and set new standards of performance. It won Truck of the year honors at Motor Trend. Dodge sales have increased by over 200% since its introduction

Two years later when Ford introduced the new F-150 and light duty F-250, it was another leap forward in trucks. It was the most car-like full-size truck ever produced. It rode like a sedan and handled and performed like a sports car, while being able to carry over a ton in its bed. It had an advanced overhead cam (ohc) V-8 that gave surprisingly good gas mileage. It also had a third door for easy access in its Supercab version.

It has been two years since the introduction of the F-150 and now Ford has done it again. It has brought to market a totally new heavy-duty pickup truck, the F-250/350. It replaces a design that is over ten years old and what a design. Some will say that it has some of the looks of the Dodge Ram. I think that the hood line and front end do bear a striking resemblance to the Dodge Ram, however the rest of the truck is all Ford.

Its windshield appears to be more sloped; it has pronounced flared wheel wells and sleek side lines giving it a very aggressive look. It has extra large side windows that have an unusual dip at the front giving extraordinary visibility. This is one good looking unit.

The new trucks have a longer wheelbase in all models with an additional stretch of up to four inches. The benefit of this stretch can be found in a larger cab. More room in the front and rear. It is spacious. All models have 68 inches of shoulder room, which is about 10 inches more than your average sedan. The Supercab model has 115 cubic feet of interior room, which is larger than a Lincoln Town Car. It will bring new meaning to having to live in your car, which many of its buyers will do, in the sense that trucks many times double as offices during the day.

The frame looks as if it is constructed of railroad track. It looks and is very strong. Gross Vehicle Weight Ratings (GVWR) run from 8,800 pounds for a single rear wheel F-250 to a high of 11,200 pounds for the F-350 dual rear wheel model. That gives a payload range from about 1.5 tons to nearly 3 tons. These are serious trucks.

To power these new vehicles, Ford has provided two new gas engines (new to the heavy-duty trucks) and a beefed up diesel. The base motor is a 5.4l ohc V-8 used in the F-150 and Expedition. This engine was derived from the 4.6l ohc V-8 (the piston stroke was increased by .62 inches to create the 5.4l) used in Ford products since 1991 and is very proven. The 5.4l is one of my favorites for smoothness and power delivery which happens to be 235 hp @ 4,250 rpm and 335 lb-ft of torque at 3,000 rpm.

If you want more power, there is the 6.8l ohc V-10. Yes, I did say V-10. Not as large as the Dodge 8.0l V-10 but it is almost as powerful. It puts out 275 hp at the same 4,250 rpm and 410 lb-ft of stump pulling torque at 2,650 rpm. This V-10 was created by simply adding two more cylinders to the 5.4l V-8. There is complete commonality between both engines. This makes service and parts much less expensive. This V-10 upgrade lists for \$335.00, a relative bargain.

Both the V-8 and the V-10 are the first truck engines to provide a fail-safe cooling system that protects from engine damage in the event of coolant loss. Both engines also go 100,000 miles between tune-ups with just routine fluid changes.

Finally, there is the diesel. A monster motor. Called the Powerstroke 7.3l V-8, this is a real diesel having its roots from International Harvester of big rig fame. This turbocharged behemoth puts out 235 hp at only 2,700 rpm and an industry leading 500 lb-ft of torque at only 1,600 rpm. If you need to move, don't call Bekins, just put a chain around your current house, attached it to the heavy-duty hitch and step on the throttle. Just remember to disconnect the gas, electrical and plumbing, because that house is going with the truck.

There are three transmission options, a six-speed manual (a five speed with a super low creeper), five-speed manual and a four speed automatic with a power takeoff available with the 6.8l V-10 and the 7.3l V-8 diesel.

The suspension of the new truck is similar to the previous generation F-250/350. On two wheel drive models, Ford uses its unique twin I-beam independent front end with coil springs and a solid axle with leaf springs in the rear. The 4-wheel drive uses a solid front axle in place of the twin I-beam system with leaf springs. 1 3/8 inch gas type shock absorbers are used in all four corners. A stabilizer bar is standard in front an optional in the rear. All have been retuned and calibrated for the new truck.

I had a chance to sample three of the new trucks, a short bed crew cab (four full doors) V-10 with automatic, the same truck with the powerstroke diesel and a Supercab, long bed diesel with the six speed manual. All with four wheel drive. They were all impressive.

The ride and handling of the trio were the same. All had the same very positive steering with excellent on center feel. Feed back was accurate and sufficient road-feel was present without the numbness I have associated with Ford trucks in the past. Green Valley Road presented no problem in negotiating the truck through its curves. This is not a

Corvette, but it gives the driver confidence as this large vehicle tracks through the corners. It didn't feel at all cumbersome.

Their ride was very smooth. Going down the freeway, my passenger was able to read quite comfortably and when the road got bumpy all our fillings remained intact. Going over potholes and bumps did not create the usual jarring and shaking, with most of the jolt absorbed by the long travel suspension. There was no bottoming or excessive pitching. The body was very tight with no rattles.

These are powerful trucks. The automatics are easier to drive than the six-speed manual. They are not racecars but their performance is not far off. The V-10 was the quickest with an average rolling 0-60 time of 9.3 seconds. On level ground it will accelerate from 50-70 in about 6.5 seconds and up hill (about a 6% grade) takes about 9.5 seconds.

The diesel performs nearly as well. 0-60 takes about 10.5 seconds and 50-70 takes about 7 seconds. Going uphill slows the time to 10 seconds.

The new four-wheel disk brakes have great feel and provide straight sure, powerful stops. Rear wheel antilock brakes (ABS) are standard and four-wheel anti-locks are an option I would recommend (\$500.00 list price). On trucks over 10,000 GVWR, the four-wheel ABS option is standard. Another safety feature, a depowered airbag is standard for the driver and optional for the passenger (\$300.00 well spent).

Creature comforts abound. The seats are large and offer good support with just the right amount of softness. The leather trimmed, crew cab V-10 that I drove had the best front truck seats I ever sat in. I thought I was in an Ethan Allen showroom. The rear seats were almost as good. The leg room and spaciousness were incredible. If you want more room, you'll need to call Touch of Class and get a limo.

In upgraded models (XLT and Lariat), the center armrest doubles as an office with storage for a laptop, wireless phone and other supplies. There is a driver manually adjustable lumbar support for your lower back. Available and recommended power windows are a must if you are alone and want to lower the right window. The sound system with available with cassette and C/D resembles the proverbial concert hall.

There are only two cupholders, both emanating from the dash. There were none in the back seat area of the Supercab model, a small deficiency. The back seat of the supercab has plenty of room, but the angle of the seat is too steep for my liking. I wouldn't want to spend more than an hour or two back there. With the addition of two extra

doors now standard in the Supercab, at least access is easy. I could spend all day in the front, however.

It comes with a standard aux power port in addition to a cigar lighter. Full instrumentation including a tach is standard along with lots of door pockets, nooks and crannies for storage. Other options include power drivers seat, cruise control, limited slip rear end, running boards and the kitchen sink. Several preferred equipment packages are offered at considerable factory discounts.

Which truck do I prefer? I like the V-10. It is the smoothest and quietest heavy duty truck I have ever driven. There is so little noise at speed (wind or otherwise), that anything but a whisper seems like shouting. The crew cab short bed 4X4 that I drove had all the bells and whistles, including leather. It had a list price of \$34,000.

The diesel is also very smooth and strong and will tow better and use fuel more economically than the V-10, but most people use their truck as passenger cars. The V-8 diesel option also lists for an additional \$4,445. It doesn't make sense, unless you need it's special abilities or you just love that wonderful diesel sound. The problem with that is that you will have to listen to it from the outside, because inside the diesel intrudes very little.

If I were to buy a standard cab truck, the 5.4l V-8 would do just fine for almost any purpose including towing as the maximum trailer weight is 9,700 pounds. With basic equipment such as air and automatic, it would list for about \$21,000.00.

## SPECIFICATIONS

Price	\$19,160 to \$38,000
Engine Type	
5.4l V-8	235hp @ 4,250 rpm; 335 lb-ft torque @ 3,000 rpm
6.8l V-10	275hp @ 4,250 rpm; 410 lb-ft torque @ 2,650 rpm
7.3l V-8	Diesel 235hp @ 2,700 rpm; 500 lb-ft torque @ 1,600 rpm
Transmissions	4-speed electronic automatic 6-speed manual 5-speed manual 2-speed Transfer Case, manual or electric

## DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	137 in to 172.4 in
Length	222.2 in to 257.5 in
Width	80in single rear wheel, 95.5in dual rear wheel
Weight	4,960 to 6,290 lbs
Fuel capacity	29-38 gal

## PERFORMANCE

0-60	9.3 sec
50-70	6.5 sec
50-70 (hill)	9.5 sec
Top Speed	Way Beyond Sanity
Fuel Econ	My estimate is about 10-12mpg in town, 14-16mpg hwy