

# MOTORTREND

JANUARY 2019



CAR • TRUCK • SUV • PERSON

# OF THE YEAR



# RAM IT ON HOME

WHAT A 21ST CENTURY TRUCK CAN DO

**MOTORTREND**  
TRUCK OF THE YEAR **2019**®

RAM 1500

Words  
Christian Seabaugh  
Photographs  
Brandon Lim



## WINNER | 2019 TRUCK OF THE YEAR

Canadians ask more of our trucks than we do of any other vehicle. In any given week, the average half-ton pickup might find itself commuting like a sedan, hauling a bed full of bricks and sand, towing some Jet Skis, navigating muddy ranchland, or exploring off-road trails. It's no wonder that we bought 2.8 million of the things last year.

The best-selling pickup in the United States last year—and indeed in every year for the past four decades—has been the Ford F-Series. But our 2019 Truck of the Year should give pause to prospective Blue Oval loyalists (or buyers of any truck, for that matter) because there isn't a truck out there that so precisely hits the diverse needs of the segment better than the 2019 Ram 1500.

The fifth-generation Ram 1500 is the latest in a long line of evolutionary leaps for Fiat Chrysler Automobiles' bread-and-butter truck. The newest version, more than any other, seems poised to meet the needs of the 21st century truck buyer, with more variety, capability, comfort, convenience, and value than ever before.

### Advancement in Design

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but there's no arguing that Ram retains its reputation for stylish functionality. "Best-in-class: sophisticated without going over the top," editor-in-chief Ed Loh said.

The 2019 Ram 1500's clean-sheet redesign throws out many of the design cues we've come to expect from a Ram pickup—while still being unmistakably Ram. Gone are the crosshair grilles, mini-Mack fenders, and even the traditional Ram badge in most places. Instead, the 1500 provides buyers a choice of seven grilles and three head- and taillamp designs. Its 15 wheel designs feature stronger six-bolt hubs, ranging from an off-road-friendly 18 inches to an urban cowboy 22-inch style. And that's on top of your typical pickup choices of extended or crew cab and bed sizes of either 5-foot-7 or 6-foot-4. A regular cab and 8-foot bed are expected next year.

"I love the styling," road test editor Chris Walton said, eyeing the Ram 1500 Rebel. "It's like the Viper of Rams."

The interior updates, from the volume-grade Big Horn all the way up to the luxurious Limited, are even more impressive. Every Ram cabin has the tools needed for both work and play. The Ram's configurable center console turns the space into an office, with room inside to swallow a bag and laptop, space for your phone and drinks, and a center console lid that can function as a desk.

When it comes to technology, Ram provides three versions of its Uconnect infotainment system, including a choice of an 8.4-inch or Tesla-like 12.0-inch touchscreen. "The center stack layout is a combination of Volvo (screen), Audi (switches), and Jaguar (rotary shifter)," Walton said. "The clever center console (phone charger/pocket, sliding bins, and side pockets) is something Honda would do. Ram has done its homework on picking the benchmarks for both design and packaging."

Although a Silicon Valley-aping infotainment suite will certainly draw eyeballs in showrooms, the cabin's functionality and furnishings are even more impressive.

Crew cab versions feature a flat floor in back and seats that flip up, allowing you to store valuables in the safety of the cabin. RamBins, hidden underneath the rear floor-mats, have grown in size to better accommodate hitch receivers or ratchet straps. In a first for pickups, the new Ram 1500's higher trim levels have a rear bench seat that reclines up to 8 degrees and is heated and cooled, as well. Ever been chauffeured in a truck before? Now you can be.

We were particularly impressed by the level of fit and finish. Every trim, from the base Tradesman up to the Limited, furnishes at least one two-tone cabin treatment, injecting a bit of personality and style into the cabin at any price point. Unlike some of its competitors, Ram took the profitable luxury market seriously by offering two flavors of luxury trucks—the saddlebag-equipped (seriously) Laramie Longhorn and the thoroughly modern Limited.

"GM has to be kidding, going up against this with the High Country and Denali," features editor Scott Evans said. "This is a luxury interior. Look at this wood! This leather! The metal, stitching, design, attention to detail!



**A Silicon Valley-aping infotainment suite will draw eyeballs, but the functionality and furnishings are even more impressive.**

The leather on the grab handles! Cadillac could learn a thing or two by spending an afternoon in this cabin."

Hyperbole aside, he's right. The Ram's cabin ain't just good for a truck. It's good, period.

### Engineering Excellence

Looks can be deceiving, and you'd be forgiven for thinking the 2019 Ram is a bit old school in its approach. Freed from the obligation (and expense) of chasing maximum payload and towing capacities with all-aluminum construction, the Ram team instead invested in a shotgun approach to improve capability, efficiency, and performance. Underpinning it all is a new high-strength steel platform, 4.0 inches (102mm) longer and about 17 percent lighter than the old chassis. The aerodynamic sheetmetal is largely built from steel but with the strategic use of lighter metals for a total weight decrease of about 200 pounds (91 kg).

Like the previous version of the Ram 1500, our 2019 Truck of the Year continues to come standard with a coil-spring rear suspension (now with frequency dampers), which slightly sacrifices towing and payload capacity in favor of a better ride when compared to leaf-sprung competitors. A four-corner air suspension with five ride heights and load leveling is available, giving the best of both worlds when it comes to ride and performance.

"It's really a surprise on the road," testing director Kim Reynolds said after a stint in an air suspension-equipped 1500. "It's way more refined and sophisticated than the GMs. Steering is fluid and quality-feeling." The standard suspension won praise at the expense of its competitive set, too. "The coil-spring suspension is better in the Ram than the ride in any of the GM trucks," *MotorTrend en Español* managing editor Miguel Cortina said.

Despite the minor diet, maximum payload is up to 2,300 pounds (1043 kg), and max towing capacity rises to 12,750 pounds (5,783 kg), besting Chevrolet, GMC, Nissan, and Toyota's half-ton offerings—though shy of Big Daddy Ford's max towing by 450 pounds (204 kg).

Things get even more impressive under the hood.



**LEAN BACK** Rear seats in higher trims recline and are heated and cooled to boot.

Embracing global realities, two of the three available Ram 1500 engines come with supplemental electric motors to improve fuel economy and performance. These mild-hybrid powerplants, dubbed eTorque, use small starter-generators and a tiny 0.43-kWh battery stashed in the rear wall of the cab to aid the stop/start system and provide torque assist to allow the engines to lug around at cruising speed in four-cylinder mode longer and without having to downshift.

The eTorque system is standard on the base 3.6-liter V-6, which makes 305 hp and 269 lb-ft of torque, and is also available for a small premium on the top-level 5.7-liter V-8, which turns out 395 hp and 410 lb-ft of torque. A non-eTorque 5.7-liter V-8 generating the same output as



the eTorque version slots between the two electrified mills. (Because these motors aren't assisting when the engines' are generating peak power and torque, they don't affect those figures.) An eight-speed automatic is standard across the line, as is rear-wheel drive. Four-wheel drive, limited-slip or locking rear axles, and



**MASS APPEAL** Each Ram trim has a distinct personality. Here we see the volume Big Horn (right front) with traditional pickup styling cues. In back, the urban-luxury Limited gets sporty body-color trim pieces.



collision warning systems, adaptive cruise control, lane keep assist, blind-spot monitors, and 360-degree camera systems, with the ultimate aim of helping the driver avoid accidents in the first place. That's the true measure of safety.

**Value**

With pickup trucks, value is ultimately relative over a life of hard knocks and long miles. But we were impressed by the breadth of the Ram lineup. The base Tradesman model starts at \$43,345 and should need little more than a spray-in bedliner and tow hitch to be ready for work. The volume Big Horn model is even more impressive. One step up from the Tradesman and starting at \$46,845, the Big Horn models offer two-tone interiors, a smartphone-friendly 8.0-inch touchscreen, and more. Editors lauded our two Big Horn testers for their premium-feeling materials and high amount of content for the dollar.

Where Ram makes the biggest value argument is surprisingly in its two most expensive trims: the \$67,045 Laramie Longhorn and \$71,445 Limited. These two luxe trucks simply blow the competition out of the water. They offer the tech that contractors and civilians alike require and expect, and quite a few luxury automakers could learn a thing from the way Ram matches colors, textures, and materials in these cabins.

**Bringing Home the Gold**

No segment is more competitive or more important to Detroit's automakers and blue-collar American workers than half-ton pickups. These trucks are the face of their brands—purchased, driven, and loved by millions. They're dependable commuters, tools, and toys that form the backbones of our families. With such a diverse skill set needed, it's easy to just miss the target. But the Ram 1500 hits the bull's-eye. No pickup in the segment better balances capability, efficiency, value, and quality. The Ram 1500 retains its old-school appeal while being refreshingly modern in style and substance. It's refined and sophisticated without surrendering its dirty-fingernails roots. For that, the Ram is our 2019 Truck of the Year. ■

For those who simply want to hitch up and go, Ram makes life easy; for straight-up towing, the 1500 is rock-solid.

The result is that Ram has the most efficient V-8 in its class; the V-8 eTorque is Energuide-rated at 14.1/10.3/12.4 L/100km city/highway/combined with rear drive or 14.3/11.1/12.9 L/100km with four-wheel drive. Non-eTorque Ram V-8s net 16.2/10.5/13.6 L/100km (rear drive) or 16.1/11.0/13.8 L/100km (four-wheel drive) mpg. Our Real MPG testing of the V-8 models generally falls in line with the Energuide's results, but our eTorque V-8-powered 1500 Limited 4x4 beat the feds' numbers with an 18.7/22.6/20.3 score.



The one weak point would be the hard-working V-6 eTorque powerplant. Energuide-rated at 11.9/9.4/10.8 L/100km with rear drive and 12.2/9.7/11.1 L/100km with four-wheel drive, our Big Horn 4x4 model achieved an unimpressive 15.4/19.7/17.1 Real MPG score.

**Safety**

Neither the NHTSA nor IIHS has crash-tested the 2019 Ram 1500 yet, but we have no reason to believe our new Truck of the Year won't achieve top scores. The 1500's new chassis is built of high-strength steel and includes octagonal front-frame rail extensions designed to protect occupants in often-deadly small-overlap front crashes.

The Ram 1500 is also available with forward and reverse

three final drive ratios are also available.

The base eTorque V-6 is a lot of engine for the money. It makes its torque higher in its rev band, but it makes good use of the power it has. "It feels powerful even though it's a V-6," associate online editor Kelly Pleskot said. Evans agreed, adding that it "doesn't have the torque of the V-8s, but it has plenty of power; the deficit only manifests itself when passing our test of Arizona's 75-mph freeways."

In back-to-back driving of our otherwise identically equipped V-8 Ram 1500 Longhorn and Limited models, Evans was one of the few judges who could feel the Limited's eTorque assist at work. "I find the eTorque drivetrain a bit smoother through the revs and shifts and when accelerating up steep grades," he said.

The fuel economy benefits of the eTorque V-8s show up in our data, but towing performance is a bit of a wash; all of the Ram V-8s, eTorque or not, performed nearly identically in both instrumented tow tests—where the Rams towed between 6,600 pounds (2,994 kg) and 11,400 pounds (5,171 kg) and in our Davis Dam frustration test, which saw our V-6 Ram tester tow 4,020 pounds (1,823 kg) and the V-8s tow 7,780 pounds (3,529 kg).

**Performance of Intended Function**

Despite the many hats we expect our trucks to wear, at their heart, they are beasts of burden. To that end, the 2019 Ram 1500 excels.

The most important part of any pickup is its bed, and Ram continues to deliver. The bed rails have been

raised 38 mm to increase cargo volume, and the optional RamBoxes grow in size with minimal impact on bed space.

Some previous Ram innovations carry over, including the segment's best combo bed extender and cargo divider, which stashes against the cab when not in use, and a CHMSL-mounted camera that looks down into the bed so you can triple-check your tie-down work while on the move.

The one area where the Ram's bed could be better is its use of tie-downs, or lack thereof. GM changed the game this year—providing 12 standard tie-downs in the new Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra (three in each corner) and the ability to expand with movable optional tie-downs. Ram offers the standard four (one in each corner), plus another four optional moveable rail-mounted tie-downs. Ram would do well to follow GM's lead here.

The ability to access the bed is arguably as important as its construction. Missing GM's standard bumper steps, Ram makes up for it with its option sheet. One of the air suspension's many benefits is its access height mode, which lowers the bed's step-up height to match that of the bumper step. For those who skip the air suspension, Ram also offers a kick-down rear step that stashes up and away behind the rear bumper.

Ram made towing improvements, too. For those who simply want to hitch up and go, Ram makes life easy. The rearview cameras have high resolution, making it easy to hitch up without a spotter. Trucks equipped with blind-spot sensors have an extra party piece, too; after you hitch up and make a couple of turns, the blind-spot sensors will determine the length of your trailer and increase the size of the alert zone to include the trailer length.

As for straight-up towing, the Ram 1500 is rock-solid, especially when equipped with the air suspension. Towing the exact same 8,300 pound (3,765 kg) trailer as the GMC Sierras and Chevrolet Silverados, the Rams feel so much more confident and just plain happy while at work.

**Efficiency**

Pickups aren't traditionally known for fuel efficiency, but that didn't stop Ram from easing the pain at the pump. Lots of credit goes to the lineup of eTorque engines, but Ram also worked hard at ensuring the new 1500 is as aerodynamic as possible without sacrificing the utility of its pickup body. Its segment-best 0.357 Cd is achieved using grille shutters and spoilers integrated into the trailing edges of the roof and tailgate. On trucks without air suspension, an air dam deploys automatically at 35 mph; those with air suspension get an aero-mode ride height.



**LIMBO**  
Air suspension-equipped 1500s have five heights controlled by a rocker switch: Access, Aero, Normal, Off-Road 1, and Off-Road 2.

**SIDE POCKET**  
RamBoxes are back and better than ever. This versatile and secure storage space now takes up less room in the bed.



SPECS	2019 Ram 1500 Big Horn 4x2 (Quad)	2019 Ram 1500 Big Horn 4x4 (Crew)	2019 Ram 1500 Rebel (Quad)	2019 Ram 1500 Longhorn 4x4 (Crew)	2019 Ram 1500 Limited 4x4 (Crew)
Base Price	\$46,845	\$52,545	\$59,845	\$71,045	\$75,445
Power (SAE net)	395 hp @ 5,600 rpm (gas)/16 hp (elec)/395 hp (comb)	305 hp @ 6,400 rpm (gas)/12 hp (elec)/305 hp (comb)	395 hp @ 5,600 rpm	395 hp @ 5,600 rpm	395 hp @ 5,600 rpm (gas)/16 hp (elec)/395 hp (comb)
Torque (SAE net)	410 lb-ft @ 3,950 rpm (gas)/130 lb-ft (elec)/410 lb-ft (comb)	269 lb-ft @ 4,800 rpm (gas)/90 lb-ft (elec)/269 lb-ft (comb)	410 lb-ft @ 3,950 rpm	410 lb-ft @ 3,950 rpm	410 lb-ft @ 3,950 rpm (gas)/130 lb-ft (elec)/410 lb-ft (comb)
Accel, 0-97 km/h	5.9 sec	8.5 sec	6.4 sec	6.3 sec	6.5 sec
Accel, 0-97 km/h (Towing)*	16.8 sec	17.7 sec	16.6 sec	14.5 sec	14.5 sec
0.4 km	14.4 sec @ 97.6 mph	16.5 sec @ 84.5 mph	14.9 sec @ 93.1 mph	14.8 sec @ 94.4 mph	15.0 sec @ 82.1 mph
0.4 km (Towing)*	21.2 sec @ 67.5 mph	21.5 sec @ 66.0 mph	21.1 sec @ 68.0 mph	20.0 sec @ 69.7 mph	20.0 sec @ 69.4 mph
Davis Dam Frustration**	13.8 sec @ 239 m	13.2 sec @ 275 m	Not tested	14.8 sec @ 298 m	15.1 sec @ 305 m
CC Downhill Overrun	4.3 km/h	10 km/h	Not tested	2.3 km/h	2.3 km/h
Braking, 0-97 km/h	37 m	40 m	41 m	38m	40 m
Lateral Acceleration	0.76 g (avg)	0.71 g (avg)	0.76 g (avg)	0.74 g (avg)	0.74 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	28.1 sec @ 0.62 g (avg)	29.7 sec @ 0.54 g (avg)	27.7 sec @ 0.73 g (avg)	29.0 sec @ 0.57 g (avg)	28.3 sec @ 0.60 g (avg)
Energuide City/Hwy/Comb L/100 km	14.1/10.3/12.4	12.2/9.7/11.1	16.1/11.0/13.8	16.1/11.0/13.8	14.1/10.3/12.4
	*5,171 kg trailer **56-89 km/h acceleration with 3,529 kg trailer	*2,994 kg trailer **56-89 km/h acceleration with 1,823 kg trailer	*4,808 kg trailer **56-89 km/h acceleration with 3,529 kg trailer	*3,765 kg trailer **56-89 km/h acceleration with 3,529 kg trailer	*3,765 kg trailer **56-89 km/h acceleration with 3,529 kg trailer

†PRICES AS SHOWN ARE MSRP. EXCLUDES FREIGHT, AIR TAX, INSURANCE, REGISTRATION, LICENSE, RETAILER ADMINISTRATION FEES, NEW TIRE DUTIES AND DEALER ACCESSORIES ARE NOT INCLUDED. RETAILER MAY SELL FOR LESS.

