

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 four 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. Its 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.