



MIDSIZE MAINSTAY PICKUP

2013 TOYOTA TACOMA DOUBLE CAB 4X4

MSRP: 27,565 · AS TESTED: \$35,664

What's become of the midsize truck segment? Full-size, half-ton pickups have long been a staple of the U.S. market. The Ford F-series has been the top selling truck for decades, and was, for many years, the best-selling vehicle — car or truck — in the country.

For most of that timespan, Ford's compact Ranger pickups were also among the nation's top 10 sellers. But when Ranger (and the Dodge Dakota) departed at the end of 2011, no new models were waiting in the wings to replace them.

That two of the Big Three would choose to drop out of the mid-size truck market altogether is a head-scratcher. Technology and engineering gains have improved the mileage in full-size trucks, and that's eaten into the market for mid-size models. But even so, one size doesn't

fit all. In any event, one place that Ranger and Dakota's loss is not lamented is at Toyota. Their top-selling compact pickup Tacoma now plays to an ever widening audience.

Traditionally, no breed of vehicle is offered in a wider range of cabin and powertrain configurations than a pickup. Toyota follows suit with some 20 possible variations.

My test truck was a Double Cab 4x4, with V-6 and automatic transmission. To the starting sticker of \$27,335 was added a handful of options, the largest of which was the TRD Sport Upgrade (\$4,460). This package is geared towards off-roading, and its features include a locking rear differential, sport suspension, model specific wheels and trim, hill ascent and decent control, fog lamps and interior upgrades.

Double Cab fits three adults across in the rear bench, and the split back seat backs fold flat forward, so you can use the space for covered cargo carrying. There's additional storage available in bins behind the seats. The rear window is also a



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slider in TRD models, and the package also includes sport seats up front. They are comfortable and adjustable to suit a wide variety of body types. The standard, tilt/tele steering column (check) also helps

in that regard. Driver visibility is generally good in all directions. The rear seat headrests take a bite out of your straight back view, but they flip forward and out of the way when the seats aren't being used.

One of the great thing about trucks is that their switchgear is generally straight forward. Nobody gets too cute with the location or operation of controls. It's a trait I wish would catch on with cars, but I'm not holding my breath.

Two engines are available. The standard, 2.7-liter four-cylinder delivers 159 h.p. and 180 lb. ft. of torque. Transmission choices include a standard

five-speed manual and optional four speed automatic. The powertrain upgrade is Toyota's 4.0 liter V-6. It's rated at 236 h.p. and 266 lb. ft. of torque, and is paired with a six-speed manual or five-speed automatic. AWD four cylinders are estimated to get 18 miles per gallon city, 20 highway (manual); 18/21 (auto-matic). V-6 4x4's are rated at 15/19 (manual), 16/21 (auto.). The V-6/auto combo in my Tacoma was an even tempered pairing. It ran smoothly and was relatively quiet. I recorded 19.3 mpg's overall, in mostly in-town driving.

A V-6 4x4 Double Cab with 127.4-inch wheelbase and standard, 5-foot bed measures 60.3 inches long x 53.4 inches wide x 18 inches deep in the box. A long (140.6 inches) wheelbase version is also offered, with a 73.5-inches bed. Either way, there's 41.5 inches between the wheel wells. The max payload in my test truck was 1,315 lb. Whereas



the four-cylinder's max towing capacity is 3,500, Tacomas equipped with the V-6 and the Towing Prep Package (\$650) can pull up to 6,500 lb. Four adjustable tie-down cleats are included, as are (built-in) storage compartments (check). The tailgate operates easily with one hand. The inner bed is made from a sheet molded composite material. A 120v outlet is standard with the TRD package, and a variety of rail-mounted accessories are offered, such as bike racks and diamond plate storage boxes. A roof rack system is also available on Double Cab models.

Tacomas are rear-wheel-drive, with an available part-time 4WD system that includes a low range. Drivers switch between settings via dash mounted dial. Tacoma 4x4s have 9.1 inches of ground clearance. Angles of approach, break-over and departure are 35, 20 and 25 degrees, respectively.

While the TRD package adds to the truck's off-road prowess, there is a giveback in the form of a stiffer ride than the conventional suspension. I wouldn't say it's harsh, but it's bouncier on choppy pavement than the standard setup. Its ride quality improves as you add payload.

Another concession is that the TRD's tires have a blocky tread that is noisier on pavement than a conventional, all season tire would be.

The amount of time you plan to be off-road dictates whether the TRD package is worthwhile, or whether you'd be happier with simply 4WD. On road, Tacoma's handling is good by pickup standards and its brakes are strong.

It's not for nothing that Tacoma is the best-selling compact pickup. The Tacoma is a versatile, comfortable truck. If you don't need the increased payload and towing capacity of a full-size pickup, Tacoma provides a very nice option.