

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

Published Every Monday

CAR Report



1996 Dodge Ram oozes with power

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

This truck oozes testosterone.

I don't care if you see the Dodge Ram pickup truck on a construction site, dirty and dusty as a work truck, or a Dodge Ram Club Cab in the driveway of a suburban home poised ready to haul a couple of kids to the local ballfield — it just oozes testosterone.

Never has a car company captured the true essence of a full-size truck, making it so in control, so commanding, so... masculine.

But you know what? It isn't just men buying this truck. I've seen young blondes and brunettes, middle-aged moms driving their kids to school and yes, there are young men and middle-aged men and elderly gentlemen driving Rams.

These people are truly "TRUCK" people.

Take my neighbor, Marty, for example. He's been tooling around in his Ford F-150 for almost 10 years now. Tough truck, he says, been through some rough and tough times. But he had his eyes on a Ram. Another guy down the street had just bought one.

After checking with dealers all over town, he found there



ROAD TEST
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were no more 1995s around. Disappointed — no, crushed — he settled in for what may have been another four or five months before the new models adorned the showroom floor.

But after dropping off his kids' baseball equipment, Marty spotted a car hauler with some Dodge products on it — and lo and behold, there was a lone, black Ram Club Cab on top. It must've been the last one — Club Cab sold out its production run in 1995.

Well, Marty followed that

car hauler, stayed on its bumper for miles until it pulled into a Dodge Truck dealership. It wasn't even off the hauler when Marty was handed the keys to his new Ram.

"I snagged one," he said with an ear-to-ear grin as he drove into his driveway. I keep telling Marty he's going to rub the paint off of that Ram if he doesn't quit washing and polishing it every day.

He's what I call a true "truck" person. No mistaking here, the 1996 Dodge Ram is a real truck. Test-driven was the Club Cab, just like Marty's — even black. And it was a real gem.

The Club Cab has a full bench people-sized back seat. We went up north to Birch Run, about an hour's drive north of Detroit, and came back with a truck-load (no pun) of stuff in the back seat and my 2- and 4-year-olds girls never whimpered — that's how

much room there was back there. (If you don't have toddlers, you may forget how large and clunky those toddler car seats are.) Both the Regular Cab and Club Cab have the roomiest interiors of any other full-size pickup on the market, by the way.

The Dodge Ram is offered in Regular Cab, Club Cab and Cab/Chassis models, in 1500, 2500 and 3500 models, in 2- and 4-wheel-drive and in gas and diesel engine versions.

Safety has been well thought out here as well, with a standard driver's side airbag, side impact beams and available 4-wheel anti-lock brakes.

There are three trim levels available, including Work Special, LT, SR and Laramie SLT. There are a variety of engines in most models, like the 5.9-liter V8 (170 horsepower), 5.2-liter V8 (220 horsepower), 5.9-liter V8 (230 horsepower), 8.0-liter V10 (300 horsepower) and the 5.9-liter in-line

6-cylinder Cummins turbo diesel (215 horsepower). You can even choose between a 6.5-foot or 8-foot box, depending on the model you want.

We had the ST trim level, which provided a lot of standard equipment, like tinted glass, a carpeted rear cab, two coat hooks, sun visors that had map storage straps, an AM/FM stereo with cassette and clock, 6-way power driver's seat and two-speed intermittent windshield wipers.

The center console is really neat. It's got plenty of storage and can handle a laptop computer as well. Fold everything down and there's a good-sized work area. Fold it up and away and there's plenty of room for another passenger.

Much has changed on the 1996 models, including new sequential multi-port fuel injection for the 8.0-liter V10 engine, increased engine power and torque on the Cummins diesel, on-board diagnostics for all powertrains, new cast aluminum wheels standard on the 1500 SLT and Sport package, new exterior colors, and later in the model year, there will be the availability of a camper suspension package.

The Dodge Ram is a sweetheart of a truck.

Now I'm just dying to get my hands on a Ram outfitted with a Cummins.

As Tim Allen would say if he had a Ram: "Hu-hu-hu..."

Anne Fracassa, senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures, writes about new cars and trucks from Detroit.

1996 Dodge Ram Club Cab	
Vehicle class	Full-size pickup truck
Engine.....	5.9-liter V8
Mileage	15 city / 19 highway
Where built.....	Saltillo, Mexico
Price as tested..	About \$22,000

Our Aging Cars Deserve Attention

(CC) — The "graying of America" is a phenomenon that applies to our nation's aging cars as well as their owners. Latest industry reports show our car population now is nearly nine years old, the oldest it's been since 1980.

Eighty percent of these vehicles are three years old or older, more than 30% are ten years old or older.

A car is not necessarily a clunker because it's old, emphasizes the Car Care Council, but it is more likely to be a candidate for repairs and it certainly deserves more frequent under-the-hood checks.

Survey results from National Car Care Month vehicle checks indicate a continuing condition of maintenance neglect on vehicles of all ages. This is due in part to the fact that 80% of all gas is pumped at self-service pumps, where people neglect under-hood checks.

But it's also due to tight money — preventive maintenance some times takes a back seat to other home hold items, with the ultimate result being costly emergency or catastrophic repairs.

Car Care Council

If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox... Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com

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