

## Sport Trac: A great truck from Ford

Advertising Feature

### GAReport



Anne Fracassa

BY ANNE FRACASSA  
AVANTI NEWS FEATURES

Dear Anne:

I read with interest your reports each issue of the Observer & Eccentric. You have a good grasp of what people are interested in a vehicle and after reading the report I feel that I know the car almost as well as if I drove it myself.

However, quite often your enthusiasm comes across as endorsement. This concerns me because my perception is that you often test foreign (especially small Japanese) nomenclatures and leave the domestics and their far flung divisions out of the picture.

Many of your readers in the Detroit area work on those cars and trucks and would like to see your good words about their products. We also cannot make ours better unless we know what it is people like yourself don't like, and believe me, we listen.

I would hope that your road tests would roughly match with nationwide sales percentages so that you drive the top 10 cars and trucks each year, along with significant new cars. Maybe I am biased (OK, I know I am) but I know a lot about Subaru from reading your reports, but not much about Mercury or Buick, or even Jaguar.

You should try out an X-Type Jaguar (and I apologize if you did and I missed it) since you cannot match the luxury and performance with all wheel drive at that price. And you get to have the leaping kitty on the front. Purr-fect. I think it would temper your enthusiasm for Subaru and Suzuki to see what real leather feels like.

Keep up the good work, I will keep reading.

Edwin Moses

Keep e-mailing us your letters. We listen when you write us. We'll try real hard to get some Fords, Jaguars and Mercurys for future reviews. Until then, here's a Ford truck road test...

The only thing I didn't like on Ford's new Explorer Sport Trac sport utility vehicle was the available lockable hard tonneau cover. It was hard to open and harder to put stuff in the rear bed.

Back there, you'll find a 51-inch (or 29.6 cubic feet of



2003 Ford Explorer Sport Trac has versatility.

cargo space) pickup box that you can outfit with a swing-over tubular bed extender that considerably extends the bed even farther. The tubular frame locks in place and is very lightweight. Even from outside the truck, it's easy to put in place.

OK. Enough about the pickup box. Let's get into some of the meat and potatoes of what makes the Explorer Sport Trac a very special truck. Inside, it's really not very different from the Explorer, which is still the best-selling SUV.

Interior appointments are very, very nice. Seating is comfortable. The Sport Trac I drove had leather seats that were very soft and comfy. There are two buckets up front and room for three with a rear 60/40 split bench seat. In the back seat are head restraints on the outboard seating positions.

The leather seats up front also feature manual lumbar adjustments and 4-way head restraints for both positions. You can also choose from cloth bucket seats that have a 6-way adjustable recline feature for the driver.

The interior is very nicely laid out for the driver. The only disturbing feature was the center stack that houses the heating/venting/cooling and AM/FM/CD/cassette stereo. You actually have to take your eyes fully off the road to operate the controls. I didn't like that at all. I guess after some time, you'll probably get used to it -- just like typing or something. But I didn't like the placement of both those components.

Everything else is smartly placed and geared totally to the driver's experience. Stalks are within fingertip reach and instrumentation is easy to understand.

The optional overhead console features map lights, a compass, outdoor temperature and a garage door storage bin. The center storage console is geared toward the rear passengers by allowing them rear heater/air conditioning controls, headphone jacks and audio controls.

The Sport Trac features four full-size doors that allow

passengers in and out very effectively. The interior is very roomy. Large people can fit back there comfortably.

Powered by a 4.0-liter single overhead cam V6, the standard Sport Trac comes with a 5-speed manual transmission that outputs 210 horses. Opt for the 5-speed automatic overdrive transmission for ease of operation. You'll be able to tow a maximum of 5,300 pounds with Sport Trac.

Driving around town and traveling to the upper reaches of Michigan's lower peninsula was a joy. Handling was superb. Ride quality is really wonderful. Sport Trac also features shift-on-the-fly 4-wheel drive system that would be a joy to have off-roading or having fun in the snow. The 4-wheel-drive system is available in both configurations of the Sport Trac, either with the 5-speed manual or 5-speed automatic.

Fuel capacity has been changed to add a little more than 2 more gallons this year, increasing it to 22.4 gallons. That gets you nearly to the top of the mitten from Detroit. Fuel economy ranges from 15 to 21 mpg, depending on transmission and whether you outfit it with 4-wheel-drive or not.

As for the looks of the Explorer Sport Trac, it's beautifully executed in every way. The Explorer series has always had handsome looks -- that's why it sells so well.

I would seriously take a look at Sport Trac as an alternative vehicle that's perfect for a family who needs the versatility of a pick-up truck.

Write Anne Fracassa at avanti1054@aol.com.

Ford Explorer Sport Trac  
Vehicle class: Sport Utility Vehicle.  
Power: 4.0-liter single overhead cam V6 engine.  
Mileage: 15 city / 19 highway.  
Where built: Louisville.  
Price as tested: \$31,400.

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