

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

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Mazda pickup offers something for everyone

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

Here's a no-nonsense truck that's perfect for a single guy or gal, a couple with small children or a contractor.

This may sound trite, but it's got something for everybody. Really.

The Mazda B4000 4x1 Cab Plus pickup is so versatile it can handle towing, taking the family to dinner or hauling a kitchen dinette set across town. It's high off the ground for anyone who loves four-wheeling in a field full of mud and muck.

Best of all, it's a comfortable pickup. My two little girls loved to sit in the rear jump seats. My 4-year-old told me the seats were perfect for her. She and her sister could easily see out of the truck and the belts fit around them perfectly. I even stuck the booster car seat in there for my 3-year-old (very awkward) and it fit decently.

Up front there's a split bench seat, which makes getting a passenger into the back very easy. The bench seat can also accommodate three adults, and there are



ROAD TEST
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lengths and in 2- or 4-wheel drive. Hey, that's a lot to choose from, and prices start at just \$9,925.

There are engine choices as well. The B2300 has a 112-horsepower 2.3-liter 4-cylinder engine, while the B3000 is powered by a 145-horsepower 3.0-liter V6.

I tested the B4000 4-wheel drive Cab Plus SE model. This baby has one of the largest and most powerful powerplants in its class—a 160-horsepower 4.0-liter V6. That translates into fun four-wheeling and easy towing of anything under 5,900 pounds.

The suspension is outfitted with an independent twin traction beam with stabilizer bar, and the ride is smooth for a pickup. You're not going to get a luxury-type ride, but it doesn't knock you around the cab like a lot of other manufacturers' trucks.

Sporty body-side graphics add some color and give the truck a special look.

The truck's bed has added durability with its double wall construction and stake pockets. It can be outfitted with a bed liner for around \$275, a great value if your plan to haul stuff.

The standard privacy glass, located on the quarter and rear windows, is there to reduce ultraviolet rays and heat damage and offers a bit of security for important packages stored in the rear cab.

I haven't seen many vehicles outfitted with a key-activated switch for the passenger airbag.

Someone asked me why anyone would turn the passenger airbag off. Well, if you've got an infant, you've got to turn it off to protect that baby. Industry studies have found that when an airbag deploys and a rear-facing infant car seat is in the front seat, significant injury or death can occur.

The rear jump seats can't accommodate an infant car seat, so the

switch is there. Great idea.

The shift-on-the-fly capability allows you to simply switch into 2- or 4-wheel-drive from the driver's seat. The switch, located right of the steering wheel on the dash, locks the front hubs automatically. That means you don't have to exit the truck to manually lock the hubs.

The base price of the B4000 is \$19,460, which looks like a steep pricetag. In reality, this truck has a standard equipment list that'll poke your eyes out if it's so good.

Take a look: Full gauge group (including a tachometer), headlights-on warning chime, 4-wheel anti-lock brakes, 2-speed transfer case with shift-on-the-fly, power assisted steering, power assisted brakes, 72-amp heavy-duty battery, heavy-duty shock absorbers, underbody skid plates, front and rear mud guards, all-terrain 15-inch tires, a high-mount stop light, cargo box light, engine compartment light, map light, intermittent windshield wipers, dual mirrors, an AM/FM cassette stereo, tinted glass and fold-down center armrest with storage.

The B4000 tested had a lot more equipment on it, like air conditioning, a premium cassette stereo, sliding rear window, keyless entry, towing package, anti-theft system, privacy glass, power window/locks/mirrors and cruise control. With all that equipment, it pumped up the price to just a hair under \$25,000.

For that price, you won't expect this pickup to be easily dismissed by people on the street. It isn't. One woman driving a late-model pickup rolled down her

window to get information about my test truck after chasing after me for four traffic lights. And a stockboy at an office supply store who lugged a 5-foot-long table into the flatbed for me said "that's so COOOOL" when he first laid eyes on the truck.

Performance the B4000's got. You wouldn't expect it to be so, but the 4-speed automatic transmission performed well. It's not even sluggish when traversing steep inclines.

All in all, this is a pickup that measures up 100 percent to give you good value, versatility, durability and comfort. Can you really ask for anything more?

1996 Mazda B4000 Cab Plus Truck

Vehicle class:
Standard 4-wheel-drive pickup.
Engine:
3.0-liter 12-valve V6.
Mileage:
17 city / 21 highway.
Where built:
Edison, N.J.
Base price:
\$19,460.

If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI 1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox...Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com. Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti News Features.

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