

"Owner's Report" On Best, Worst Pickups

Are you satisfied with your pickup? How could the manufacturer improve performance, fuel economy, and construction? Have you modified your pickup in any way? What accessories have you bought for it?

These are some of the questions we asked randomly selected pickup owners in an effort to highlight those pickups that perform with flying colors, and to pinpoint the "lemons" that fail because of poor performance, or failure of the dealer or company to provide service.

Here's how the survey shaped up.

"It's a hodge podge of foreign-made parts that are a nightmare to service or repair. We've had no major problems in 5,000 miles but I dread the day it sputters," says John Spears, Cotulla, Tex., unhappy with his 1986 Ford F-150 Super Cab with 5-liter engine, fuel injection and overdrive. "Why can't they build a no-frills truck that an average farmer can operate, service and repair. Fuel economy on this truck is no better than my 1977 F-150 Super Cab with a 351 cu. in. engine. Gets about 12 mpg. Next time I'll buy a foreign pickup because that's what you get anyway and they're cheaper."

Norman Foellmi, Sparta, Wis., owns a 1981 Ford Courier with a 2.3 engine. "It steers hard. The dealer said there's nothing we could do because the ball joints are lubed for life with sealed bearings. I called Ford and they referred me back to the dealer, who did nothing. I finally loosened the rubber boot around the ball joint and found one that had no grease from the factory."

Ed Bates, Condon, Ore., had trouble with his 1984 Dodge Power Ram 350 1-ton with crew cab. "It's a good truck but it has severe vapor lock problems in warm weather. The fuel line is routed above the muffler. The tank outlet needs to be changed to the left side and fuel lines routed up the left side of the frame away from exhaust heat. We bought it to pull our 27-ft. travel trailer but during several trips we've had trouble whenever the temperature gets in the 80's and 90's. It loses power or stalls. We rerouted fuel lines and installed an electric fuel pump, as well as a new fuel tank, but it didn't solve the problem. Chrysler came out with a modification kit after nearly 2 years to solve the problem but wouldn't install it on the pickup because it was no longer in its original condition due to our modifications. We wouldn't have worked on the truck if it had performed in the first place. We've stopped making payments to Chrysler."

Vernon Goering, Moundridge, Kan., owns a 1982 Ford F-150 Super Cab short wheelbase pickup. "It's equipped with a 300 cu. in. 6-cyl. engine. It's economical, has good power, and is easy to service. We've driven it over 111,000 miles and feel it's too good to trade off."

"It performs well but fuel economy is poor. We get just 8 to 9 mpg," says Joe Wiwi, College Corner, Ohio, pleased with his 1983 Ford XLT 4-WD. "We've had very little trouble in the first 50,000 miles, although the

tires had little traction and wore through at 20,000 miles. Construction and paint are good."

Charley Chaney, Willow, Alaska, says his 1977 Chevrolet EL Camino has been a "best buy". "We're very satisfied. It's got 160,000 miles with only minimum routine maintenance required. I don't know why they ever changed it."

"We have 115,000 miles on our 1974 Dodge D100 pickup and I'm sure it'll go another 50,000 miles before overhaul. All we've had to buy are tires, shocks, spark plugs and three batteries. We get 22 mpg with the 4-speed transmission. We will have to have a brake overhaul soon for the first time. It still has the original clutch even though we do lots of trailer pulling," says Andy Gustad, Volin, S. Dak.

"My 1983 Dodge Ram 1/2-ton has plenty of power with its 318 engine and holds the road very well. We have had a few problems with the front drive, however," says Willard Sonner, Easton, Minn.

"Transmissions on 1980 model Chevrolets don't hold up. Many owners have installed older Chevy transmissions. I installed a '72 transmission when the one in my 1980 Scottsdale went out at 30,000 miles," says Herman Funk, Lisbon, N.Dak. "We've had other troubles with this pickup, too. The dealer wouldn't honor the warranty on the springs so one side of the pickup is 2 in. lower than the other. The dash lights often go out and the cruise control never worked. It has a very poor paint job and the chrome trim won't stay on. We had to attach it with screws."

"Our 1985 Ford F-150 XL pickup with fuel injection gets good gas mileage of 19 to 20 mpg on the highway and 14 to 15 around the farm," says Robert Macha, Marlin, Tex.

John Bakker, Tyler, Minn., likes his 1984 Ford 250 XL with 4-WD. "It's my first Ford and I'm happy. Quiet cab and smooth riding for a 3/4-ton with 4-WD. Exceptional traction. One problem is that the tailgate seems to be a weak spot. It closes okay but it's not as structurally strong as on other pickups. Also its mileage of about 11.7 mpg in 2-WD could be improved."

"I don't think a 1986 model could hold up to the loads and abuse I've given my 1973 Chevrolet Custom Deluxe heavy-duty 1/2-ton," says Daryl Spicher, Hingham, Mont. "It's held up real well, although I just rebuilt the engine and transmission for the second time at 130,000 miles."

Emerson Shurr, Valparaiso, Ind., likes his 1984 GMC 150 model pickup with a V-8 engine. "Rides well, has good power and is easy handling. Our only problem was that the rear axle broke off. They should beef it up with more steel."

"This truck runs fine except for the automatic transmission which went out at 30,000 miles. Also, the fan went through the radiator and hood of truck. We were billed \$1,226 for both jobs. GM paid a small portion of the bill," says Leland Anderson, Fergus Falls, Minn., who owns a 1982 Chevrolet C-10.

"Our 1985 Ford Ranger 2-WD with a 4-cyl. 5-speed gets 27 to 29 mpg around town and more on the highway. It's got a very comfortable ride. We added a bed liner and overload springs. I'd buy another one but I'd like to try the V-6 engine with 4-WD," says Dallas F. Boge, Gales Creek, Ore.

"I'm very pleased with my 1982 Dodge Prospector 4-WD 3/4-ton pickup. Good mileage and low maintenance. All we've had to replace in 70,000 miles of tough use is the alternator," says Dean L. Freeborn, Rickreall, Ore. "One thing they could improve would be to make the sidewalls heavier. If they made them any thinner you could throw a shovel through them."

"We've had over 60,000 miles of trouble-free use," says John DeMull,

"The steering has a tendency to wander when going down the road."

Sand Lake, Mich., about his 1983 Ford 350 diesel. "It's got one defect. Like all Ford pickups, the steering has a tendency to wander when going down the road."

Joe B. Thomas, Bloomington, Ind., likes this 1986 Ford F-250 4-WD with 7.5L engine. "Fair gas mileage and great power. I've pulled as much as 29,000 lbs. gross weight with it pulling a gooseneck trailer. We installed an Ebro pto and hydraulic pump to operate the hoist on the trailer and installed a gooseneck hitch."

"When I bought my pickup it had the lightest springs available despite the dealer's assurance that it had heavy-duty springs. So I bought a set of Firestone bellows type air spring boosters designed for motor homes. They're a big improvement over bone-jarring heavy-duty springs. Just a few strokes with a tire pump boosts load capacity when needed and the extra air is easily bled out for a better

ride when not needed," says Paul Conkright, Jones, Mich., pleased with his 1974 IHC 200 series 3/4-ton with automatic transmission and 4-WD. "It's well-built and we've made few repairs with the exception of the front disc brake pads which need replacing every 5,000 to 7,000 miles. In my experience disc brakes just aren't quite the thing for farm pickups. Drum brakes require far less maintenance. A simpler tractor-type carburetor would also be more practical for farm pickup use. However, I'd buy another one of these trucks if IH still made pickups."

Alfred Bonifield, Bell City, Mo., has had good luck with his 1984 Chevrolet S-10 pickup. "Fuel mileage is very good and it performs and handles well, too. Have had little trouble but the seat could be improved. It's got some broken springs."

"My 1982 Chevrolet S-10 with V-6 engine is fine for little jobs but it's not meant for hauling heavy loads. Power isn't there for towing but fuel economy is great. My major complaint is that the clutch is not very smooth. In city driving it has a tendency to hang up. Also, too much dust gets into the cab. I like the way the seat rides, though," says Kevin Larmer, Harrington, Wash.

Curtiss Berndt, Free Soil, Mich., is happy with his 1984 Dodge D-250. "Excellent load-hauling vehicle or for use anytime in place of a passenger car to go to town. Has never needed a repair. Could use better fuel economy, however."

"My 1985 Ford F-250 4-WD with 300 cu. in. 6-cyl. engine has good power and an easy shifting 4-speed. It could use a quieter running power steering pump and I'd like to see grease fittings on the front steering and drive shafts. It also needs tires with better traction. Radials do not pull in mud," says Otis Caldwell, Dry Ridge, Kent.

"In general I'm satisfied with my 1985 Ford F-150 300 6-cyl. but the tires that came with the truck made it dangerous to operate due to sway. I replaced them at 2,000 miles. Also, the gearshift is so hard to put in reverse that my daughter and wife have to use both hands. And the paint is so thin anything will scratch through the surface," says Gary Dinkel, Culver, Ore. "On the plus side, it gets anywhere from 16 to 19 mpg and handles well. Fairly quiet and uses no oil after 20,000 miles. They could improve the seal on the doors, go back to one key for door and ignition, and be more realistic on weight certification."

"Our 1981 GMC 2500 Sierra Grande with a 350 engine spun a rod bearing in 1985 with 24,000 miles on it. It was out of warranty so I had to pay for it myself even though it was due to a bad oil pump. Fuel economy, at 10 mpg, is not good and the air conditioner never worked right."