

THE RAM REPORT

With three engine options, which is the best for you? Words and images by Chris Mullett.

The introduction of the American Special Vehicles RAM range has really shaken up the top echelons of the ute market, particularly where the previously undisputed king of the ute brigade, the Land Cruiser reigned supreme.

Where devotees of US muscle cars could only source their vehicles from a variety of low volume converters, RAM Trucks Australia jumped the fence and started making right-hand drive models that fully conform to all Australian Design Rules with a quality of design and assembly that certainly matches, if not exceeds, the standards of assembly coming off the North American and Mexican production lines.

Delivery magazine has been monitoring the rise of RAM for two years, starting with the 2500 Laramie model that we have been running on our own test fleet. We've now added a 1500 Laramie and as we settle in to get better used to its performance levels, we've also now examined how potential buyers will be influenced by the engine choice available.



The RAM 1500 comes with a choice of body styles, trim and driveline options between petrol and diesel that pretty much determine the level of appeal to different buyers. The 2500 ratchets up the influence on the buyer to contemplate how seriously the factor of towing comes into play, while the 3500 is for the very dedicated load carrier that tows fifth wheelers or plant trailers and wants traditional leaf-spring suspension at the rear, rather than the superior ride and handling abilities of coil-sprung suspension all round.

The over-arching reason for buying a RAM is to stay on the right side of the lawmakers if you are in the habit of towing trailers and equipment of 4.5 tonnes on the towball or 6.9 tonnes on a pintle hook. Yes, it is currently possible to install a GVM upgrade on some other makes and models, but this option looks like being soon curtailed by the Federal Government. You can solve your GVM problem by walking into a RAM showroom and ticking all the right boxes.

The 1500 comes with a choice of two drivelines and two different size cab options. The petrol V8 5.7-litre Hemi engine provides 395 hp (291 kW) of power at 5600 rpm, with peak torque of 556 Nm rated at 3950 rpm. The latest addition to the range, the 3.0 litre, V6 Ecodiesel provides 240hp (179kW) at 3,600 rpm, with peak torque of 569Nm rated at 2000 rpm. Both engines couple to the eight-speed TORQUEFLITE fully-automatic transmission.

Buyer choice on cab and trim levels is two-fold. The Quad-Cab 1500 Express is slightly shorter than the Crew Cab 1500 Laramie and features cloth trim rather than leather, and has a reduced spec' when it comes to upper luxury items that includes heated and ventilated seats, a rear screen powered window, folding side mirrors, side steps, wheel arch flares and a smaller dimension touch-screen display.

If towing is your reason for purchase, the 1500 Express and Laramie 5.7-litre petrol V8 comes with a choice of diff' ratios to suit either a 3.5 tonne or 4.5-tonne tow capability. For 3.5 tonne you get a 3.21:1 rear diff ratio, while for 4.5 tonne you need to uplift to a 3.92:1 diff' ratio. The trade-off for taking the 3.5-tonne tow limit is a fuel economy improvement of 2.3 l/100km, the result of the different rear axle ratio.

If you opt for the 3.0-litre Ecodiesel the weight calculations all change, providing you with a 3.5-tonne towing limit plus a 735kg payload in the tub. For the Express V8 the payload in the tub is 845 kg, while for the Laramie V8 the payload is 800 kg. The 1500 with either engine does not provide the option of higher weight towing with a pintle hook. For that ability you have to move your sights to the 2500.

A word here about fuel economy. The quoted combined fuel figures for the V8 Hemi-engined Express and Laramie at 3.21:1 is 9.9 l/100km with the 3.92:1 diff providing a



RAM 1500 Ecodiesel 3.0 litre keeps braked towing limits to 3500 kg.

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combined figure of 12.2 l/100km. During *Delivery's* own test regime, while running unladen at 100 km/h with the 3.92:1 diff and no trailer, it's possible on a run to reduce that figure to a consistent 11.5 l/100km. There's some clever technology at play in achieving these figures as the electronic engine management system for the V8 shuts down four cylinders when cruising under light load.

If you are in the habit of hauling the full 4.5 tonnes behind you and want to press on regardless to achieve the maximum on road speed of 100 km/h be prepared to see the fuel consumption from the V8 petrol engine rise substantially. *Delivery's* early tow figures show the V8 petrol under the same circumstances is returning figures close to those expected from a Landcruiser diesel. Lift off the right pedal slightly and you'll see an instant benefit.

The 3.0-litre V6 Ecodiesel for the 1500 is from the same VM-Motori engine family as that used in the Chrysler 300S sedan and also some selected Maserati models. The combined fuel consumption figure comes in at 11.9 l/100km. With a 3.5-tonne tow limit and a tub payload 735 kg, it's only available in the upper level spec' of the Laramie Crew Cab and not with the Express Quad Cab.

Staying here with the focus on towing, if you are looking for the 4.5-tonne ability the 5.7-litre V8 Hemi petrol engine with the appropriate diff' ratio will capably tow the maximum weight. But, if you are towing your trailer all around Australia, or using it for hauling plant and equipment on a daily basis *Delivery's* advice is to opt up to the RAM 2500.

The reasoning here is simple and is based on our experience of the heavy truck industry we report on in *PowerTorque* magazine. The 2500 is built on a completely different chassis, is one-tonne higher in tare weight, sits on the road with high-weight trailers in this category better than anything else we have experienced, and it is powered by the excellent Cummins 6.7-litre straight-six B-Series diesel engine, matched to a six-speed automatic transmission.

The RAM 2500 is the ute for those that tow big weights and travel long distances. The Cummins B-Series pumps out 276 kW of power at 2800 rpm with peak torque of 1084 Nm rated at 1600 rpm. All engine options for RAM, in 1500 and 2500 guise, come with a selectable tow-shift preference selection which alters the gearshift protocol to suit the requirements of heavy-haul towing.

The advantage of the Cummins engine installation is the addition of an engine exhaust brake. This holds the driveline in check during descents where otherwise the engine would be rising in revs and in most cases negates the need for any additional service brake (foot brake) application. It's a great safety feature and one that *Delivery* has tested substantially.

When driving the three engine variants, the petrol V8 Hemi produces the exhaust note that will take all drivers mentally off to Bathurst if they enjoy a V8 burble or the occasional V8 howl. The 3.0-litre diesel V6 is quiet, capable and a pleasure to drive, but we'd suggest in this instance the V8 provides the better option, given its lower purchase price and optional higher towing rate.

The Cummins 6.7-litre diesel on the 2500 is just magnificent for anything and everything. It's noisier and more truck like in its behaviour, but during our testing it produced the lowest fuel consumption figure of any of the models rated for 4.5-tonne towing, with an unladen cruise figure of 10 l/100kms and an average tow figure of 15-16 l/100kms. It does lose out for accessibility in totally urban situations, as it is higher, longer and feels a lot wider than the 1500.

A final word here in our efforts to help select the ideal RAM for the specific application of towing. All models are all-wheel-drive 4x4 high and low range capable but don't expect to head into severe off-road country and climb over boulders and rocks. 4x4 for an American or European means sure-footed traction on snow and ice or gravel and dirt roads. With the level of power and torque that comes as standard, I can't imagine why any owner would need to chip the engine management system to produce a higher output, nor why a ute that already offers good ground clearance would need a suspension lift kit.

Our thanks to Alan Lamb, RAM sales expert at New Pioneer Motors of Mackay and Leo Parisi of Alan Mance RAM in Footscray, for their personal insight into the typical purchaser of a new RAM model, which seemingly suggests that there will be a glut of late model Land Cruisers hitting the used 4x4 ute market in the coming months. **D**

RAM 1500 Laramie with Ram Boxes and 5.7 litre Hemi V8 petrol engine

