

# wheels

A U S T R A L I A N M A G A Z I N E



# New V8 hero!

How RAM  
built the most  
**convincing big  
ute on sale!**



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STAR!**

Think US pick-ups are slow  
and take ages to stop?  
**You'd better read this...**



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BIG UTES ARE BECOMING BIG BUSINESS, BUT SHOULD

YOU JOIN THE SUPER-SIZED TREND? LET'S FIND OUT

# MONSTER TRUCKS

WORDS CAMERON KIRBY

PHOTOS NATHAN JACOBS



COMPARISON / MONSTER TRUCKS

**F**ILLING MY EARS is the deep burble of what can only be a V8 engine, the rear vision mirror lets me glimpse a large practical tray, and ahead of me is a straight, empty drag strip. It's all oddly familiar, with images of Australia's home-grown Holden and Ford V8 utes at the front of my mind. The mental picture is nothing but a cultural ghost of Australia's lost manufacturing, with those car-based utilities now dead and long buried.

What I'm experiencing is a new era (for Australians at least) of pick-up performance, and it comes in a package that's as subtle as a bald eagle holding a shotgun. Australia, meet your new V8 ute overlords: the Chevrolet Silverado 1500 and Ram 1500 Laramie.

Representing the GM faithful is the Silverado, sold by the soon-to-be rebranded HSV in a single high-specification LTZ grade for \$113,990. Ford doesn't have an officially licensed F Truck in the country so taking its place in the blue corner is Fiat Chrysler's Ram brand, distributed locally by Ateco with approval from North America. We have the top-spec Laramie specification on test which carries a sticker price of \$99,950. Both pick-ups are delivered to Australia as they would be sold in the US and then undergo a 're-engineering' process at Walkinshaw's Clayton facility at the hands of skilled Aussie workers.

While both 1500s are substantially larger than our traditional dual-cabs (roughly 100mm taller, 200mm wider, and a full half metre longer) they still sit beneath the truly gargantuan 2500 offerings from both Chevrolet and Ram that have been sold locally. But it's not just size that differentiates these powerhouse pick-ups from your usual worksite fare. You won't find any turbo diesels here; both have atmo V8 petrol engines under the bonnet.

Dep ed Enright and myself have brought both behemoths to Heathcote Raceway for what surely has to be one of the strangest (if not heaviest) performance testing exercises in *Wheels'* recent history. Enright has just finished recording numbers, so I've jumped into the Chev for a familiarisation run.

The 6.2-litre petrol V8 builds revs gradually as I load it up against the torque converter. Side-step the brake and there's a brief squeal from the Goodyear Wrangler Trailrunner all-terrain tyres as they use 313kW/624Nm to get the 2588kg mass moving, the central diff transferring power fore and aft as required. It's an impressive middle finger to physics as the big beast squats and then lunges forward. The 10-speed automatic slurs through the ratios but it's surprisingly quick: in 14.5sec I'm past the 400m mark and travelling at a licence-incinerating 150km/h. The 0-100km/h sprint takes 6.4sec. There's currently no ute on sale that can beat it in a straight line.

The Ram isn't far behind. Its 5.7L V8 is down on capacity and performance compared to the Chev, yet it still runs a respectable 6.8sec to 100km/h and is only three tenths shy to 400m.

While the Ram is the less powerful of these two, its engine has more character. It has a hearty engine note and it builds revs more readily, which makes it feel more energetic. And its eight-speed auto (controlled by a dash-mounted dial) is less prone to short-shifting compared to the Chev, so you get to enjoy more of that bent-eight burble as you build speed.

Despite the slightly smaller capacity, the Ram is thirstier, drinking 14.5L/100km during our test compared to the Silverado's 13.5L/100km. We had a VW Amarok 580 along as a benchmark and turbo diesel V6 drank 9.8L/100km. Going big has its consequences.

Peeling out of Heathcote, it's easy to see the appeal of these large pick-ups. Both boast impressive towing capacities (a claimed 4500kg braked each is a full tonne more than the best dual-cab), making them prime targets for people with regular heavy hauling duties. Ram provides trailer brake assist, but the Silverado goes the extra-mile with a specific towing drive mode and sway control.

But where they really raise the bar compared to more traditional dual-cabs is their luxury and refinement. Interior room rivals that of the largest SUVs, with both featuring more cup holders than a cinema, vast centre consoles, heated steering



## Chev Silverado

### 1. SAFETY FIRST

Being a newer model, the Chev is equipped with active safety missing from the Ram including AEB, lane departure warning, adaptive cruise and forward-collision warning.

### 2. PARTY BUS

Cruising five-up in the Silverado is a breeze. There is space under the 60:40 split rear seat to store toolboxes etc. The bench folds up for extra space when two-up.

### 3. DON'T TOUCH

Electric tailgate on the Chev can be operated from inside the cabin. There is also a handy side-step and lights that illuminate the tray. Payload is 712kg, 88kg less than the Ram.

## Ram 1500

### 1. DIGITAL WORLD

Both pick-ups are rammed (geddit) with tech. Digital touchscreens, smartphone mirroring and sat-nav are all standard. RAM's 8.4-inch screen larger than Chev's 8.0in unit.

### 2. COVER UP

A flat platform can fold out to cover the transmission tunnel when rear seats are stowed. Unusually, sunroof eats into headroom up front, but not an issue for those riding in the back.

### 3. SLIMMED BACK

RamBoxes can be locked remotely, but make for a narrow rear tray (1270mm). Still, 1737mm length means there's plenty of space. Tailgate is operated manually.



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SPECS

RAM GETS IT DONE

NO 1 NO 2



RAM 1500 LARAMIE	CHEVROLET SILVERADO 1500
<b>\$99,950</b> /Tested \$99,950	<b>\$113,990</b> /Tested \$113,990
<b>Drivetrain</b>	
Engine V8 (90°), ohv, 16v	V8 (90°), ohv, 16v
Layout front engine (north-south), 4WD	front engine (north-south), 4WD
Capacity 5654cc	6162cc
Power 291kW @ 5600rpm	313kW @ 5600rpm
Torque 556Nm @ 3950rpm	624Nm @ 4100rpm
Gearbox 8-speed automatic	10-speed automatic
<b>Chassis</b>	
Body steel, 4 doors, 5 seats	steel, 4 doors, 5 seats
L/W/H/W-B 5833/2080/1917/3569mm	5885/2063/1915/3744mm
Track [F/R] 1742/1727mm	1743/1728mm
Weight 2650kg	2588kg
Payload 800kg	712kg
Fuel/tank 91 octane/98 litres	91 octane/91 litres
Economy 14.5L/100km (test average)	13.5L/100km (test average)
Suspension <b>Front:</b> struts, A-arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar <b>Rear:</b> live axle, multi-links, coil springs	<b>Front:</b> struts, A-arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar <b>Rear:</b> live axle, leaf springs
Steering electric rack-and-pinion	electric rack-and-pinion
Turn circle 12.1m (3.5 turns lock-to-lock)	14.1m (3.1 turns lock-to-lock)
Front brakes ventilated discs (336mm)	ventilated discs (345mm)
Rear brakes solid discs (352mm)	solid discs (360mm)
Tyres Hankook Dynapro HT	Goodyear Wrangler Trailrunner AT
Tyre size 275/60R20 114T	275/60R20 115S
<b>Safety</b>	
ANCAP rating Not rated	Not rated
<b>Performance</b>	
Power-to-weight: 110kW per tonne	Power-to-weight: 121kW per tonne
Redline/cut-out: 7000/5800rpm	Redline/cut-out: 6600/6600rpm
Speed at indicated 100km/h: 98	Speed at indicated 100km/h: 96
<b>Standing-start acceleration</b>	<b>Standing-start acceleration</b>
<b>0-20km/h:</b> 0.8sec	<b>0-20km/h:</b> 0.8sec
<b>0-40km/h:</b> 1.7sec	<b>0-40km/h:</b> 1.8sec
<b>0-60km/h:</b> 3.0sec	<b>0-60km/h:</b> 3.1sec
<b>0-80km/h:</b> 4.7sec	<b>0-80km/h:</b> 4.6sec
<b>0-100km/h:</b> 6.8sec	<b>0-100km/h:</b> 6.4sec
<b>0-120km/h:</b> 9.0sec	<b>0-120km/h:</b> 8.6sec
<b>0-140km/h:</b> 13.0sec	<b>0-140km/h:</b> 11.4sec
<b>0-400m:</b> 14.8sec @ 148.5km/h	<b>0-400m:</b> 14.5sec @ 158.0km/h
<b>Rolling acceleration</b>	<b>Rolling acceleration</b>
<b>80-120km/h:</b> 4.3sec	<b>80-120km/h:</b> 4.0sec
<b>Braking distance</b>	<b>Braking distance</b>
<b>100km/h-0:</b> 40.2m	<b>100km/h-0:</b> 40.4m
<b>Verdict</b> 7.5/10	<b>7.0/10</b>
<small>Track: Heathcote Raceway, fine. Temp: 14°C. Driver: Andy Enright. Warranty: 3yr/100,000km. Service interval: 12 months/12,000km. Glass's 3-year resale: N/A. AAMI Insurance: \$3331.59 pa</small>	<small>Track: Heathcote Raceway, fine. Temp: 15°C. Driver: Andy Enright. Warranty: 3yr/100,000km. Service interval: 9 months/12,000km. Glass's 3-year resale: N/A. AAMI Insurance: \$3415.31 pa</small>



Huge trays are similar width between arches as a 'regular' dual-cab, but are 20cm longer



BE SEATED **Back-seat drivers**

Both offer limo-like legroom, with space to sit three abreast comfortably. Ram's (right) centre seat has a mystifyingly small cushion making Chev better for five-up driving. Both rear seats can be folded away, while Chev's back cushions (left) hide extra storage.

It wasn't the going that made us nervy, it was the stopping...



This is one of our best ride assessment roads. It highlighted a marked difference between these two

wheels, heated and cooled leather-trimmed electrically adjustable front seats, sunroofs, and smartphone mirroring.

While there is plenty of American chintzy plastic inside, both pick-ups are comfortable with plush seats in both rows. There are ergonomic quirks, though, like the Chev's hilariously over-sized column-mounted shifter that loves sliding straight past drive into low range, or the Ram's foot-operated hand brake which sits on the right of the footwell. Ironically given its size, the Ram's headroom is limited for anyone taller than six foot.

Even with impressive blind-spot vision and excellent rear-view cameras, extreme care is needed when parking, mostly due to sheer physical size. While initially intimidating around town, the Ram more readily shrinks around the driver thanks to the softer edges of the bonnet. The Silverado feels a sizeable beast at all times and side-steps are a must for entering the cabin.

Both conversions are expertly done and we didn't experience any squeaks or rattles. Despite high bonnets, and large wing mirrors, neither generates significant wind noise. The exterior noise suppression is top notch.

From the driver's seat, the biggest difference is the way these two pick-ups travel down the road. If you only ever traversed smooth highways, the Silverado and its floating waftiness would be quite pleasant. However, on bumpy roads the ride feels underdone. There's a disconnect between how the front coils and rear leafs deal with imperfections, resulting in a jostling pitch-and-roll that can be quite unsettling. HSV is working on a local suspension tune, but our tester was running the stock US set-up. Experience with this car tells us that adding weight to the tray settles its leaf-sprung rear-end substantially.

The Ram's suspension is much more modern and is fitted with an independent coil-sprung rear-end. As a result, it has a clear advantage in terms of refinement, while still matching the

Silverado's claimed towing ability (and besting it for payload). The Laramie sits confidently on the road and it feels well suited to the pockmarked bitumen of rural Australia.

Neither are what you'd call great handlers. The Ram's steering is vague off centre and while the Silverado's tiller is confident and well-weighted at the straight-ahead position, it lacks feel as you progress through a corner.

Then there is the sticky issue of value. Even the more affordable Ram is almost \$30,000 more than the most expensive dual-cab on the market. That premium can be justified to an extent given the Ram's notable increase in hauling ability, luxury, and road presence. But adding almost \$14,000 to the equation for the extra few tenths of acceleration in the Silverado is harder to justify. You'll also need to set aside \$3000 each year for insurance, and then there's the fuel bill to consider...

While it might not make your accountant happy, there is an undeniable coolness about the Silverado. It encapsulates the pulling-power of a large American pick-up with giant globs of grunt and a luxurious interior. However, its queasy ride and high price tag means it falls shy of the top spot.

The Ram can't match HSV's hero product for tech, but the cheaper pick-up offers better value for money without sacrificing spec levels. It also slightly better to drive, rides more comfortably and has, perhaps most importantly, a more characterful engine. The Hemi pulls your face into a wry smile with every throttle application, while the Chev's 6.2-litre is more subdued. You don't buy a monstrous V8 ute to be subdued.

These brutes are clearly not a like-for-like replacement for the Falcon and Commodore utes, but push your right boot to the firewall and it's clear they share a part of that same special V8 workman spirit. The fact they are prepared for Aussie customers by Aussie workers sounds pretty fair dinkum to us. 🇺🇸



# Testing the RAM at the strip

AMERICAN PICK-UP TRUCKS ARE SLOW TO TAKE OFF, AND EVEN SLOWER TO STOP, RIGHT? THE DATA DISAGREES.

**A**MERICAN PICK-UP trucks get a bad rap in Australia in certain circles. Derided for being too expensive and too big, one of the harshest criticisms the public lay at their feet is that they are slow to both accelerate and stop.

Thing is, that just isn't true. *Wheels* has conducted independent testing using GPS data that proves that a

pick-up like the Ram 1500 Laramie has the same braking performance as some of the lightest hatches on sale.

Powered by a 5.7-litre naturally aspirated petrol V8, the 2650kg Ram 1500 has plenty of go. An eight-speed automatic transmission sends 291kW/556Nm to all four wheels, allowing it to crack 100km/h in 6.8 seconds. Keep your foot in the throttle, and the speedo will click over 150km/h in 15.2 seconds, and



on to 170km/h in 21.0 seconds flat. During testing we completed a 400 metre pass in 14.8 seconds, with a trap speed of 148.5km/h.

Putting on speed is one thing, but you also need to be able to come to a stop in a prompt, controlled manner. Thankfully, the Ram performs admirably in this area, stopping from 100km/h in 40.2 metres.

The RAM's tyres are worth a mention. At 275/60 R20 each Hankook tyre provides a wide footprint.

To give you some context, and an indication of what excellent braking performance looks like, Porsche has some of the best stopping cars on the market. The Porsche 992 911 Carrera can stop from 100km/h in 32.5 metres, while the Porsche Cayman GT4 takes 34.5 metres.

At our Car of the Year testing last year the Peugeot 508 wagon had the best stopping performance on a dry surface, needing only 35.3 metres to

come to a standstill from 100km/h. A drag strip isn't a big ute's regular hunting ground, but our independent data was enlightening. For a big unit, the Ram 1500 is surprisingly light on its feet.

Clearly, two sports cars and a lightweight wagon are not comparable to the big American pick-up, but they give a clearer idea of what the market benchmark is when it comes to hauling a car to a standstill from 100km/h.

Really, anything that can be brought to a stop from highway speeds in less than 38 metres is performing above average. While the Ram couldn't get under that benchmark, it was able to stop in a distance that is comparable with cars less than half its weight.

These include the 945kg Suzuki Swift GLX (39.6 metres), and 1070kg Mazda 2 G15 Evolve (40.4 metres) – both small, lightweight hatches. A Mitsubishi ASX ES will take 41.3 metres to stop from 100km/h.

When it comes to dual-cab utes, we had a VW Amarok 580 Ultimate on the same test as the Ram, and it was able to complete our braking manoeuvre in 37.5 metres.

Despite being lighter by a 100kg, the similarly sized Chevrolet Silverado 1500 took an extra 20cm over the Ram to come to a stop.

So, what does all this mean? Well, while the Ram isn't the sharpest braking model on the market (it was never going to be), it controls its mass and comes to a stop much better than you may initially expect.

Despite some initial nervousness from our testing team ahead of the braking exercises, both the Ram and Silverado proved themselves to be confident stoppers, with little fuss or bother from behind the wheel.

There you have it! Hard data that proves you shouldn't judge a book by its very, very large cover.

CAMERON KIRBY

100 TO ZERO

How the RAM's braking compares

32.5 metres PORSCHE 911



35.3 metres PEUGEOT 508



40.2 metres RAM 1500



40.4 metres MAZDA 2



41.3 metres MITSUBISHI ASX



**WARLOCK**

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MAX BRAKED TOWING | **V8** HEMI



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