

FEATURE

BLACK MAGIC

Henry Ford set the trend with black paint for the Model T, with RAM continuing with the same thought process for the 1500 Black Pack



It's probably the least practical colour for any vehicle in Australia. But for those who appreciate its visual presence on the road, aligned with class-leading towing ability, the 1500 RAM Black Pack is the pick of all utes currently on the market.

Like all models in the RAM Trucks range built by ASV, the RAM 1500 has been refined and developed specifically for Australian buyers. Built in North America, each RAM model is then imported and remanufactured to suit right-hand-drive requirements on a brand-new, state-of-the-art production line in Melbourne.

The RAM Trucks production machine continues to show Australians what they have been missing out on by including trim levels and specifications that eclipse the Japanese-styled competition. Even buyers that traditionally bought the Landcruiser tray-back are realising their Tojo is extremely basic by comparison, although comparable on pricing.

RAM Trucks play in the upper echelons of the 4x4 ute world, and yet these American long-distance road haulers offer a pricing structure that makes a very convincing argument to any new vehicle buyer. Production has now increased in Australia to four units per day, and there's a waiting list for new deliveries across the 37 dealerships that carry the RAM brand.

There seems to be a definitive line appearing between RAM buyers, as although the 1500 and its cousins the 2500 and 3500 can tow 4500 kg gross weight trailers, owners looking at heavy hauling are remaining with the 2500 and 3500, thanks to the indomitable strength of the 6.7-litre Cummins turbo-diesel that lives under the bonnet.

There's no shortage of torque for the straight-six turbocharged diesel, but there is a different profile of buyer perhaps now starting to surface when comparing the different demographics of the 1500 from the 2500 and 3500. Those opting for the 1500 are enjoying the bragging rights to what's being called the black sheep of the RAM family, with the arrival of the RAM 1500 Black Pack.

Finished in brilliant black metallic paint, the RAM 1500 Black Pack lives up to its name with 20-inch black alloy wheels, black front and rear bumpers, a black grille and darkened headlights, with all the distinguishing badges also finished in black. There is, however, one exception to the all-black appearance when it comes to the engine badging, with red being the chosen colour to identify the 5.7-litre capacity of the 291 kW Hemi V8 engine that lifts its performance above its rivals.

No matter your level of personal enthusiasm and ability with the spanners, you can't make a six-pot diesel sound like a V8 petrol-fuelled Hemi. By adding the optional RAM Sport exhaust system to the RAM 1500, driving becomes an almost spiritual experience, thanks to the V8 roar that audibly announces its arrival.

Based on the RAM 1500 Express, the RAM 1500 Black Pack has the Quad Cab with an interior space of 3.3 cubic metres, bringing impressive levels of shoulder and hip room that outclasses all of the Japanese lookalikes. Add to the basic spec a huge six-foot four-inch (193 cm) tray and a standard heavy-duty towbar rated at 4.5 tonnes, and it's game over for the competition before you start rolling.

The RAM 1500 Black Pack slots in neatly between the standard RAM 1500 Express and the RAM 1500 Laramie, with its larger cabin area and higher trim levels. It's available in two versions, with pricing starting from \$84,950. Add the RamBoxes to the spec along each side of the tub body and the price rises to \$89,450 (RRP excluding statutory charges, dealer costs and delivery). The RAM 1500 Sports Exhaust System is a dealer-fit option, with a recommended retail price of \$3266.56 plus fitting.

"It's the sound of a Hemi V8 that goes to the heart of why hot utes are so popular," explains Alex Stewart, General Manager of RAM Trucks Australia. "The RAM 1500 Black Pack does everything in terms of space, towing ability and tray size expected of a class-leading ute, to which it adds dark, muscular good looks and, matching the unique performance, the soundtrack that can only be delivered by a full size V8 engine. In short, the hot V8 ute is back, and it comes in black with the RAM badge front and back."





The Hemi name comes from the hemispherical combustion chambers that give an efficient combustion chamber with an excellent surface-to-volume ratio, with minimal heat loss to the head, and allows for two large valves. The latest version includes a coil-on-plug distributor-less ignition system, variable valve timing (VVT) and two spark plugs per cylinder to shorten flame travel, leading to more consistent combustion and reduced emissions.

Modern technical smarts save fuel with the Multi-Displacement System (MDS) that can shut off two cylinders on each bank under light load to improve fuel economy. The engine bay also features active grille shutters, which allow the right amount of cool air to enter engine bay. Shutter position is determined by coolant temperature and vehicle speed, with the shutters remaining closed when less engine cooling is required, and aerodynamic drag is most significant. The shutters open when the engine requires additional airflow – for example, when on a long ascent or when hauling a trailer in high-temperature environments.

Mated to the V8 petrol engine is the TorqueFlite eight-speed transmission. Controlled by a rotary e-shift dial, the system allows quick blind-shift transitions from reverse to drive when towing or navigating out of mud, snow or busy parking lots and crowded worksites.

The Ram 1500 features electric power steering (EPS), with an electric motor powering the rack-and-pinion steering system. By removing the need to constantly turn a hydraulic pump, fuel efficiency is improved by up to 1.8 percent and it provides an additional five horsepower. Other benefits include less complexity through the deletion of hydraulic hoses and cooling apparatus. With EPS, each Ram 1500 model can be specifically calibrated to optimise steering effort and precision, regardless of body or powertrain configuration. Additionally, EPS senses constant input from the driver, for example a crown in the road, and compensates for improved comfort.

As the ultimate tow vehicle, the RAM 1500 is available with a choice of axle ratios of 3.92:1 and 3.21:1 to fine-tune performance of the vehicle for towing high weights or for maximum fuel economy. In addition to the usual electronic safety features, the RAM 1500 adds Trailer Sway Control, Ready Alert Braking and, on the Laramie, trailer brake control.



The RAM 1500 offers a class-leading maximum braked towing capacity of 4.5 tonnes with a 70 mm towball in the RAM 1500 Express, RAM 1500 Black Pack and RAM 1500 Laramie with the 3.92 axle. The maximum gross combination mass is a mighty 7.2 tonnes with the 3.92 axle, and a still hefty 6.2 tonnes with the 3.2 axle. A heavy-duty towbar is standard fitment, together with a seven-pin towing harness plug.

The RAM 1500's excellent towing ability is built on the foundations of its advanced separate chassis and sophisticated suspension. The front rails are 20 per cent stronger through using high-strength steel, while portions of the frame are hydroformed for dimensional accuracy (hydroforming reduces the amount of welding that leads to distortion), and side rails are fully boxed for both strength and durability. The front frame section incorporates advanced high-strength steel that maintains overall strength and durability. To further improve NVH, new larger body mounts are located on the front frame rails and at the C-pillar.

The front independent suspension combines upper control arms, aluminium lower control arms and retuned geometry with coil springs for improved responsiveness and handling, while robust ball joints on the front suspension yield greater durability and are engineered with improved sealing methods.

An exclusive multi-link, coil-spring rear suspension provides improved ride and handling characteristics with no loss of capability. A coil-spring design centralises and absorbs bumps and impacts, while reducing the amount of friction in the spring system and is some 20 kilos lighter than a leaf-spring configuration.

Four-wheel disc brakes with ABS are standard, with front rotors of 336 mm in diameter clamped with dual-piston callipers, while rear rotors of 352 mm utilise single-piston callipers. The RAM 1500 is backed by a three year/100,000 km warranty with roadside assistance, and requires a service every 12 months or 12,000 km.

"Buying and owning a RAM, be it the new 1500 or its heavy-duty brothers, the 2500 and 3500, should be absolutely no different from buying any other mainstream vehicle," Alex Stewart said.

"This means everything from production line quality and consistency of product, to a national dealer network, a factory-supported warranty, through to backup of full parts and accessory warehouses in Sydney and Auckland that can deliver parts to anywhere in the country within 24 hours." 