

# RAM STYLE

*It's fast becoming the ute at the top of the wish list. Find out how the RAM 1500 compares with the 2500 in the choice of petrol V8 versus diesel straight six*

When it comes to making a decision to purchase a new top spec' ute the market has been redefined recently by the arrival of RAM Trucks to Australia. Those looking for something special have seen the price of a typical Japanese-style ute rise to equal that of a luxury car, while the ride and handling and interior standards of luxury have not matched the escalating cost.

The long-standing king of the upper echelon, the Land Cruiser dual-cab tray back now has a price tag that by adding a bit of bling can top the \$100,000 mark, and yet the interior is extremely basic and nothing much to get excited about.

Ford's 2.0-litre twin-turbocharged Ranger and its running mate the Raptor are similarly expensive at the top end of the pricing structure, hotly pursued by the up-market HiLux models and those of the Colorado from Holden.

The appeal of the RAM models is twofold. For those that want something special and don't aim to go severely offroad and climb the rockiest mountain slope it's the comfort and high specification that draws the praise. The other factor to take into consideration is that of towing high-weight trailers legally and safely. RAM offers that solution - the Japanese styled utes don't.

The Ateco Group is the sole authorised importer and distributor of RAM Trucks for the Australian and New Zealand markets, with each model imported directly in left-hand-drive and then remanufactured to right-hand-drive on a purpose-built production line in Melbourne. These RAM models are produced with full volume import approval, meaning they are fully compliant with all Australian Design Rules and benefit from being sold and supported by an Australian and New Zealand-wide dealer network.

Until the creation of RAM Trucks Australia, private buyers could only purchase vehicles through independent importers controlled by stringent quotas, who subsequently undertook a conversion to right-hand-drive either in Australia, or in some instances the Philippines or New Zealand. In our experience, the conversion quality was often limited by a restricted cost on development, with subsequent quality control and durability issues in the finished product.

The difference with the RAM Trucks Australia product is well illustrated by the use of the term "remanufacturing" rather than "conversion". Everything involved in the remanufacturing process has been developed by a highly qualified engineering team and then validated to the same standards as those of a typical research and development group working within the confines of the vehicle manufacturer.

Each RAM model remanufactured to suit the Australian market features between 350 and 400 new parts, the majority of which are Australian-produced. Local companies involved in parts supply for RAM Trucks include Socobell, which produces the all-new dashboard, and Hi-Spec Australia for brake line components, air conditioning lines and high- and low-pressure fluid transfer hoses and tubing. Fiat Chrysler Automobiles



RAM 1500 Laramie with 5.7 litre V8 Hemi engine



LLC and, in particular, the RAM International team, have also provided invaluable support and assistance, as has AusIndustry in its programme to assist companies and staff as other car makers ceased Australian production.

Alex Stewart, General Manager of RAM Trucks Australia, explains: "The entire RAM Trucks project was set up, engineered, designed and developed in Australia by Australian experts. It shows what this country is capable of and how we can produce a world-class product.

"In short, it is clearly something of which everyone involved should be extremely proud and which, in the form of the RAM 1500, 2500 and 3500, has provided Australians with a new and unique choice when it comes to vehicle buying."

The introduction of volume production and on-line manufacturing techniques has brought down the cost of owning an American-styled ute quite substantially. At the same time, the rise in the pricing of highly specified Japanese-styled utes to levels around \$75,000 to \$85,000, has reduced the gap, with the pricing structure increasing some examples to well over \$100,000.

A major factor in favour of optioning up to a RAM is the ability to tow 4500 kg trailers. This legalises the towing of caravans, boats and horse floats that collectively exceed the standard ute manufacturers' average weight limits of 3000 kg to 3500 kg.

Police forces and state motor vehicle registration authorities are increasingly concerned over the number of motorists towing trailers that exceed the legal limit for the towing vehicle. It becomes a matter of safety, not only for the driver and passengers of the towing vehicle, but for all other road users with which the illegal combination shares the road. The situation now is that on-the-spot inspections are resulting in hefty fines for those thinking the regulations don't apply to them.

Such is the rapid acceptance of the RAM brand that the production line at the company's Melbourne manufacturing facility in Clayton South is now operating 24 hours a day, five days a week.

The new production line is 130-metres long and 21 vehicles are worked on simultaneously, with less than 24 hours needed for each vehicle to run the length of the line. Total production has jumped to an expected 16 vehicles per day in order to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for an alternative to the now highly priced Japanese-styled ute.

Having experienced a RAM 2500 at first-hand through running it on our vehicle fleet for 18 months and 50,000 km, we've established the typical operating costs for the 6.7-litre Cummins-powered 2500.





## FEATURE

Rated capable of towing 3500 kg (on a 50mm towball) or 4500 kg (on a 70mm towball), the RAM 2500 and its heavier-duty RAM 3500 sibling gave the punters what they wanted in providing the perfect tow vehicle. When fitted with a pintle hook, the towing limit rises to 6.9 tonnes.

Our RAM 2500 arrived in July 2017 and from day one was used for long-haul driving that regularly clocked 3000 to 4000 km a week. In answer to the first question ever asked by a passer-by – “How thirsty is this big Yank?” – we could always show captures of the onboard diagnostics and record-keeping that indicated an initial 9.9 litres per 100 km (9.9L/100 km) for a 1200 km run from Airlie Beach down to Toowoomba.

Longer distances and higher speeds fitted in with the running-in of the engine and driveline, and with more weight on board the fuel economy settled down to average 10.4 – 10.8L/100 km, while in genuine mixed driving, fuel consumption figures of 13L/100 km were more typical.

Towing a four-wheeled close-coupled trailer of 2.0-tonne kerb weight brought fuel consumption up to 13.4L/100 km, suggesting the large-capacity 6.7-litre Cummins diesel engine that produces 1084 Nm of torque is actually very frugal when mated to a six-speed, double-overdrive automatic transmission.

The onboard engine diagnostic system monitors oil quality and oil life, fuel filter life and also the amount of engine idle time as a percentage of the overall driving time. In the tropical climate of North Queensland there's a tendency to keep engines idling for longer periods to run the air-conditioner while waiting for someone or something, and this is also logged in the data storage. The 50,000 km of total distance travelled over 18 months equated to a total engine on time of 807 hours, of which driving time was 738 hours and idle time comprised 69 hours.

As our fuel consumption figures take into account total operating hours it's interesting to note that real time economy is actually almost 10 percent better than our figures show if excluding idle time from the equation. This provides considerable justification for the increasing fitment of idle stop/start systems in modern vehicle design.

It was to be expected that as a new vehicle entering a vast country, there would be a series of vehicle upgrades completed by dealerships around the country, usually timed for completion during regular service intervals. These included a revised front-left suspension strut that provided improved adjustment for toe-in, camber and castor angle that refined the straight line and cornering ability; plus, there were several electronic upgrades that improved durability, such as a tailgate lock actuator replacement. The only non-scheduled warranty upgrade was the investigation of an airbag warning light that illuminated, together with the replacement of the original water pump as a component upgrade under warranty – not the result of a failure.

A three year/100,000 km warranty is complemented by general servicing at 12,000 km intervals including

the standard expectation of parts replacement – a fuel filter/water separator (\$273.42), sump plug (\$39.56), air filter (\$101.10) and oil filter (\$62.43). Oil drain intervals are slotted in at 24,000 km periods, and with 11 litres of engine oil, that can add a further \$143 at dealer mark-up. It's worth monitoring the extended oil drain intervals to maintain 24,000 km as dealerships are prone to replace every 12,000 km as a standard practice. Topping up the 27-litre AdBlue tank is necessary only at 12,000 km intervals and it's just like refilling a windscreen washer reservoir.

Turning to the topic of tyre life, the RAM 2500 came shod with Nexen Rodian AT PRORA8 light truck tyres sized as LT275/70R18. At the 50,000 km mark we ran our depth gauges over the tread of each tyre finding a very even wear pattern across the width of the tread area of 6 mm depth on both front tyres, and 7 mm tread depth on each of the rear tyres. These figures result from regular tyre rotation at 12,000 km intervals, together with a full wheel alignment and balancing. The original tread depth figure is 11 mm, showing that there is plenty of life left to come.

Having enjoyed the RAM 2500 tremendously, we have the opportunity to now subject its sibling, the 1500, to the same in-depth scrutiny, to report on how a petrol V8 of 5.7-litres can compare to the exceptional strength and fuel efficiency of the Cummins 6.7-litre.



RAM 1500 Ecodiesel 3.0 litre



Fresh on our vehicle fleet is a RAM 1500 Laramie supplied through Alan Mance RAM of Footscray, in Melbourne's west. There we met RAM Trucks sales specialist Leo Parisi, who provided a very effective and comprehensive handover of the vehicle before we hit the road for its first challenge, departing Melbourne for Sydney and then heading north, bound for Queensland and Airlie Beach.

The initial reaction was certainly one of familiarity, with the interior of the 1500 Laramie dual cab providing a virtual replica of the 2500 Laramie – just more compact, due to the lower overall height and 200 mm shorter overall length. At this spec' it's leather throughout, plus heated and ventilated seats, power assisted everything, sat/nav, an excellent sound system and the clever fold-flat rear floor that flips out when the rear seats are raised.

RAM Boxes, plus a tri-fold tonneau cover, are a unique part of the RAM spec and provide a genuine advantage with space for shopping, tools and emergency gear within easy reach by opening the side lockers. Another plus is the rear cargo barrier that can be used to separate

sections of the cargo area or extend the deck length out to the edge of the tailgate when opened, capturing the load and preventing it from moving.

With a tare weight of around 2650 kg, the 1500 Laramie is basically 1000 kg lighter than our 2500 Laramie, 200 mm shorter and slightly narrower through a lack of necessity for wheel arch extensions. It shows its svelte ability by being more responsive off the mark, thanks to the characteristics of its 5.7-litre petrol V8 and an overall lighter feel.

There's no commonality in chassis design between the 1500 and 2500, but the cabin is identical in the Laramie versions. The dual-cab Express option on the 1500 is shorter in depth (mainly between the 'B' and 'C' pillars) and lacks items such as leather seats and other high-end equipment inclusions. The lighter 1500 has a bed length of 1712 mm, and a height to the roof of 1917 mm. The 2500 dimensions come in at an increased bed length of 1939 mm, a width of 2009 mm and a roof height of 1974 mm.

The big appeal of the RAM comes for those wanting to take a legal and safer approach to towing. If you tow a big, and I mean BIG, boat or a plant equipment trailer then you'll probably be doing so with a pintle hook connection where you can take advantage of a towing capability of 6942 kg with the 2500, or the conventional 50 mm towball connectivity for 3500 kg or stepping up to a 70 mm ball for towing 4500 kg.








If you want to hit the 4500 kg towing mark with the 1500 you'll need to spec up for the higher (numerically) diff ratio of 3.92:1. If you are not going to tow over the 3500 kg limit you'll be opting for the 3.21:1 ratio diff that will improve fuel economy by a claimed 2.3L/100 km for the combined cycle at 9.9L/100 km versus 12.2L/100 km. In our first introduction to the 1500, we ran up the Hume Highway from Melbourne to Sydney returning 12L/100 km. The subsequent trip from Sydney to Airlie Beach returned 11.2L/100 km. The total journey distance was 2771 km with an average journey speed of 91 km/h.

At this point we need to make it clear that although the 1500 offers the same tow ball rating capability of the 2500, there's a real difference in the construction of each model. Although both feature a tow haul option to alter the shift ratio patterns through the automatic transmissions (six-speed on the 2500 and eight ratios on the 1500), only the 6.7-litre diesel can offer the benefit of an exhaust brake to control downhill speed independently of the service brake system. If you are shifting big weights, it's a great benefit to have on board. The additional tare weight of the 2500, or its larger stablemate the 3500, does enable a towing combination to sit better on the highway.

The lower GCM of the 1500 means that the higher weight capability of using a pintle hook connection as available with the 2500 and 3500 does not apply. Your options with the 1500 are strictly for use with a 50 mm tow ball at 3500 kg or a 70 mm tow ball at 4500 kg.

With the tare weight of the 2500 being around 1000 kg heavier than the 1500 there's an obvious advantage that comes with towing high weights consistently to option up to the 2500. The big Cummins B-Series diesel with its 1084 Nm of torque just accomplishes the task of towing higher weight braked trailers so easily, while offering a payload of 913 kg. The 1500 offers a payload of 800 kg and with a torque rating of 556 Nm it still creams the competition from the Japanese-styled would-be contenders for top dog in the ute stakes.

As the comparison continues, we'll supply you with all the right reasons why justifying a RAM on your fleet makes a highly sensible purchase decision. We'll also bring you an update on the next model to join the RAM raid, with the 3.0-litre diesel version of the 1500 model just starting to appear at dealerships. 



The RAM Box option is amazingly useful, whether you like to pack guns, fishing rods or toilet paper