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CONSUMER REPORTS RATES TOYOTA TUNDRA TOPS IN TESTS OF FIVE CREW-CAB PICKUPS

***Tundra outpoints Ford F-150, Nissan Titan,
Chevrolet Silverado, & Dodge Ram in CR's tests***

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YONKERS, NY — The *Toyota Tundra* has reclaimed *Consumer Reports'* top rating in the pick-up truck category following tests of five crew-cab models for the July issue.

Consumer Reports tested the *Tundra* against four other crew-cab pickups, the *Ford F-150*, *Nissan Titan*, *Chevrolet Silverado*, and *Dodge Ram*. All five vehicles had similar configurations, with four-wheel-drive and V8 engines. Sticker prices ranged from \$32,000 for the *Tundra* to \$36,000 for the *Silverado*.

The *Tundra* was *CR's* Top Pick in the pickup category in 2000, 2001, and 2002. It subsequently lost that title to the *Chevrolet Avalanche*, which was a *Consumer Reports* Top Pick in 2003. *CR* did not name a Top Pick in the pickup truck category in its Annual April Auto Issue for 2004 because it had not yet tested the latest pickups on the market. The *Avalanche* now ranks second overall in *CR's* ratings of full-sized pickups.

"The *Tundra's* strong V8, quiet cabin, and civilized ride make it the most well-rounded pickup that *Consumer Reports* has tested," said David Champion, senior director of *Consumer Reports'* Auto Test facility in East Haddam, Connecticut. "The *Tundra* also has one of the longest cargo beds in this group."

Full tests and ratings of the five tested pickups appear in the July issue of *Consumer Reports*, which goes on sale everywhere magazines are sold beginning June 8, 2004. The complete report is also available to subscribers of www.ConsumerReports.org.

The *Tundra* achieved an "Excellent" overall score in testing, while the *F-150* and *Titan* are rated "Very Good" overall. The *Silverado* and *Ram* posted "Good" overall scores, although the *Ram* barely made that grade.

Consumer Reports is recommending two of the pickups tested, the *Tundra* and the *Silverado*. To be recommended, the vehicle must have performed well in *Consumer Reports*' tests, have at least average reliability based on *CR*'s surveys of its subscribers, and have performed adequately if crash tested or included in a government rollover. The *F-150* and the *Titan* are too new for *CR* to have reliability histories. The *Ram* scored too low in *CR*'s tests.

With the introduction of the new crew-cab model, the *Tundra* emerged as the most well-rounded pickup tested by *CR*. The *Tundra SR5* (\$32,447 as tested) offers the most comfortable ride of the test group, a quiet cabin, and sound handling. The 240-hp, 4.7-liter V8 is smooth and quiet albeit not as quick as the other trucks tested. The four-speed automatic is smooth. Braking performance is impressive for a large truck. The *Tundra*'s reliability has been excellent.

The redesigned *F-150* is a significant improvement over the previous model. The *F-150 XLT* (\$35,550 as tested) rides more comfortably, handles more nimbly, and has a quieter interior with better fit and finish than its predecessor. The 300-hp, 5.4-liter V8 delivers very good acceleration, but the four-speed transmission wasn't always responsive to downshifts. Braking performance is just adequate, with long stops on wet surfaces. *CR* doesn't have reliability data on this new version yet.

The *Titan*, Nissan's first full-sized pickup, scored slightly below the *F-150*. The *Titan SE* (\$33,540 as tested) is quick, handles relatively nimbly, and rides reasonably well. The cabin is roomy. In addition, it's the only truck in this group that offers side and head-protection airbags and electronic stability control (ESC). The smooth, powerful 305-hp, 5.6-liter V8 was the quickest of the group. Its five-speed automatic transmission is responsive and smooth. Engine noise is a bit pronounced. Braking is good. *CR* doesn't have reliability data on the *Titan* yet.

Aside from a new crew-cab version, the *Silverado* hasn't changed much since its 1999 introduction. The *Silverado 1500 Z71* (\$35,585 as tested) offers a selectable four-wheel-drive system with a full-time mode and the highest payload capacity in this group. But its powertrain isn't as smooth as some of the *Tundra*'s or *Titan*'s. It's handling is ungainly and the ride is stiff. The 295-hp, 5.3-liter V8 delivers very good acceleration and the four-speed automatic shifts smoothly. Braking performance is just adequate. Reliability for the *Silverado* has been average.

The *Ram*, which was last redesigned for 2002, added a 5.7-liter "Hemi" V8 for 2004. The *Ram 1500 SLT* (\$34,415 as tested) has a jittery ride and cumbersome handling that hurt its overall score, as did the barely adequate brakes. But the *Ram* has the largest cargo bed among the pickups tested, and can tow more than 8,000 pounds. The 345-hp, 5.7-liter V8 provided strong acceleration but abysmal fuel economy at 11 mpg in *CR*'s tests. The five-speed automatic transmission wasn't as smooth or responsive as others tested. Braking performance was only adequate, with long stops. The *Ram*'s reliability has been average.

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