

pickup trucks

Grandpa left some sorely needed tools at the other end of his vast farm, but he needed to finish bailing the hay before he could get them. Rather than wait, he turned to me and said, "Mark, take the truck, go down there and get my tools." I was 10 years old.

I'm still not sure how I made it down there without driving into the ditch, but I did. While riding in that truck with the AM radio playing bad songs, the engine growling and the wind whipping across my barely over-the-dashboard head, I fell in love with pickup trucks.

Every time I have the opportunity, I twist arms to drive my friends' trucks, whether they're under-sized imports, old clunkers or the new breeds of king-cab diesel behemoths that somehow ride as smoothly as compact cars.

Superintendents, however, need power, bed space and hitches to load, haul and pull everything from fertilizer to lumber. Randy Van Fleet, the superintendent at Merrill Hills CC in Waukesha, Wis., uses a Ford F-150 Lariat SuperCrew for work and pleasure.

"Pickups used to be cumbersome, loud and only used for construction because of their bumpy rides," Van Fleet says. "In the past five years, trucks became streamlined with smooth rides and functions for everyday use."

Van Fleet's choice, the Ford F-150

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has the power to get the job done. However, the truck isn't as stylish as the other models, and it doesn't sell as well as the Ford F-150.

Toyota Tundra – Yes, it's an import, but the Tundra received an upgrade and now comes with a V-8. Its king-cab version isn't as large as the others, but it's a stylish truck that's also a workhorse.

Chevy Avalanche (SUV/Pickup) –

You've seen the funny commercials about how easy it is to switch from an SUV to a pickup, but the question remains: Why would you want to? As an SUV, the Avalanche bed is small (513 square inches). As a pickup, however, the bed is 811 square inches. I just can't figure out why you would want something nearly as ugly as the Pontiac Aztek, the angular SUV that doubles as a camper.

Remember, we're not buying the truck for you, so determine your needs (both for work and personal use) and take them for test drives. All these models come with various configurations and sizes, so make sure you find exactly what you need.

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(supercab or not) leads JD Power and Associates polls for customer satisfaction, is the best-selling truck in America and is hailed as the "Honda Accord of pickups" by the auto editors of Edmunds.com. That said, there are other viable options for trucks that can do the dirty work during the day and hit the town in style at night. Among them:

Dodge Ram – The heavyweight of the bunch. Big, burly, strong and manly. Most powerful of normal full-size pickups, but not the smoothest ride. These will pull just about anything and just look ... well ... "bad ass" is probably the best term.

Chevrolet Silverado – Chevy lovers can't stop telling you that Ford stands for "Fix Or Repair Daily." Needless to say, their favorite full-size pickup, the Silverado,

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