

# Curbside



## FORD F150 4X4 LARIAT REVIEW

By Anthony Barthel

While pickup sales have long been the staple of Detroit financial portfolios, the realities of people finally wanting more fuel efficient vehicles combined with their being worried about having a job in the morning means sales of these vehicles aren't as strong as they once were. In fact, most of the people I've spoken to who have them are planning to keep the ones they already have rather than trade in for the new model.

Today, to entice a pickup buyer you've got to go a long way to making something better or different. For 2009 Ford has introduced a new version of the F-Series truck, traditionally the best selling vehicle in North America. But is a new look enough to entice people to trade in their old models?

### What's Hot

The F-150's configurations seem to be limited only by the imagination of the buyer. There are seven trim levels: XL, STX, XLT, FX4, Lariat, King Ranch and Platinum. There are also two driveline configurations, three cab sizes and three bed lengths. Towing capacity, at more than 11,000 pounds when properly equipped, is impressive.

Ford also has promised some new engine

technology, which will result in better fuel mileage. In the future you'll be able to buy turbocharged, direct-injected gasoline-powered (EcoBoost) F-Series trucks which will deliver more power and better fuel economy by taking advantage of the turbocharger's ability to provide boost when needed but step back when not. This could be a game changer for many people.

For now, the big new item is the Microsoft Sync system which is purported to allow you to control all the little electronic devices that you might have with you by voice command, certainly a great idea in theory.

One of the old adages about pickups is that, if you have one, everybody's your friend at some point. Knowing the towing capability of this truck, just such a thing happened while the F-150 was visiting, but I was my own pickup mooch.

On my property was a trailer that must have been from the I Love Lucy days. I've been waiting to get something with serious towing muscle to get rid of it and the F-150 was that vehicle. With the 5.4-liter V8 and six-speed automatic I was able to easily move this monster trailer and take it to its final resting place. The F-150 made towing this thing an absolute breeze.

Funny story, we hauled this horrendous thing around a local neighborhood where the squealing tires got people out on their porches. We offered the trailer for free to any takers and most politely refused; a few were not so kind. Bringing to life the phrase that one man's trash is another's treasure; someone's new treasure means my having less trash.

One of the smarter features available on the F-150 is a tailgate step. This step pops out of the top of the tailgate and there is a handle that comes up making it really easy

to step into the commodious cargo bed. While not a new invention, it was available on Studebaker station wagons in the 1960s, that doesn't make it any less excellent today. You know you're going to want that cooler that slid all the way to the cab end of the bed, right? Step right up!

I was also really surprised that a four-door, full-size truck with 320 horsepower and 390 ft-lbs of torque could realistically achieve 21 miles per gallon on the highway with the air conditioner running. I eased on down the road in real comfort while being really pleasantly surprised by how good the fuel economy on this truck is. This truck could have easily worn the Lincoln badge for as nice as it was inside.

### What's Not

Presently one of the newest features of the 2009 F-Series is the inclusion of the Microsoft Sync system, a voice-activated technology that promises to control the various media devices that are becoming more common in vehicles. The idea is to be able to use the vehicle and voice command to control cell phones and iPods, for example, as well as using voice controls to affect some built-in features as well. I remember being really impressed the first time I used Sync in a controlled setting but it seems to choke on my 60 gigabyte iPod Classic with the polite lady in the dashboard referring me to a web site where I can learn about meta data and such.

Honestly, my new cell phone has all the features of Sync but the words it will understand are displayed on the screen, making it much easier to use. After trying to hold a polite conversation with the lady in the dashboard, I insulted her family and their procreative habits and just used the stereo

mini plug to play the audio from my phone, which also holds music and such.

And I'll get a new digital whatchagadget next year, so I won't have to upgrade my whole car just for the latest features. The problem with in-car technology is that technology moves very quickly but you're stuck with whatever is built into a car.

### In Summary

I might not be the typical pickup buyer but, like millions of other Americans, I own an F-150. Mine is an older model from back when they were still powered by an in-line six with push rods and a stick shift. It has been the most reliable vehicle I've ever owned now with almost 160,000 trouble-free miles on the clock.

For me personally it would take some dramatic improvement in fuel economy such as that provided by a smaller diesel engine to make me consider a new one. I don't really need a luxurious interior in a truck; I'd just feel bad about getting it dirty. I am looking forward to Ford's EcoBoost engines arriving in the trucks. Better mileage and more power might just be enough of a boost to get me, and millions of others like me, to buy a new truck.

Oh, and you bet I'd get mine with that tailgate step - that's a neat feature.

### Fact Sheet

- Base Price: \$34,845
- Price As Tested: \$39,935
- Major Options: 7100 Lb. GVW Pkg. \$435; Chrome Step Bar, \$495; Lariat Plus Package, \$795; Tailgate Step, \$350; 20" Aluminum Wheels, \$595; Heated/Cooled Front Seats, \$895
- Engine: 5.4 Liter V8
- Transmission: Six-Speed Automatic
- Model Year: 2009 •

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