

Comfort and Muscles

Rolled Into One

By Roger Witherspoon

It had only been two weeks since I left the hospital with a bionic, metal hip joint replacing the cracked and irreparably deteriorated original, and I sincerely hoped the next couple of days would not be spent bouncing around on a hard, uncomfortable set of wheels.

What I wanted was a bit of luxury. At a minimum, I craved wide, well padded, adjustable, leather seats which hopefully could be heated to soothe the muscles and tendons which were still trying to adjust to the metal and carbon fiber implants. It would help if the seats were adjustable and the steering wheel tilted and telescoped so the vehicle could adjust to me, rather than the other way around.

I wanted an automatic transmission, so I could move my right leg as little as possible and a suspension which gave the illusion of riding on a cushion of air, regardless of the terrain. I needed enough room in the rear to hold a walker and load of groceries. And to round out the package, it would really help if there was an entertainment system which could do justice to any music I wanted and take my mind off of my unsteady, synthetic leg.

I also wanted a truck, since the advent of spring means the garden requires hauling soil and plants by the ton. And while the notion of motoring luxury and working pickup trucks might seem to be a serious contradiction in terms, you could find that by having a really big two-car garage and buying both a GMC Sierra 1500 and Lincoln Mark LT 4X4.

The workhorse GMC Sierra, with its 6.0-liter, 387-horsepower, V-8 engine, is big, powerful, comfortable, and can haul 10,500 pounds while providing room on its leather, front seat table for your laptop. The Lincoln – with its 5.4-liter, 300-horsepower V-8 engine – gives you all the comforts you would expect from that brand name, while providing a pickup that can still haul 8,600 pounds.

Or you can skip the giant garage and buy an easy blend of the best elements of both pickups in the 2008 Toyota Tundra 4X4 Crew Cab Max.

At \$46,000, the Tundra is priced well above the \$38,000 Sierra and just south of the \$47,000 Lincoln, though the Tundra has a few more options than the Lincoln Mark LT.

On the working side, the Tundra with its crew cab is designed to carry four large adults comfortably over a wide range of terrain while towing 10,100 pounds; well ahead of the Lincoln, and just shy of the Sierra. It is powered by a 5.7-liter V-8 engine pumping out 381 horsepower – enough to haul heavy cargo or enable the Tundra to jump into fast moving traffic. An engine that size is not known for fuel efficiency, and the Tundra carries an EPA estimate of just 14 miles per gallon in city driving and 18 miles per gallon on the open road.

In the rear, the lighted cargo bed comes with a deck rail systems and tailgate assist for easy use. As an added bonus, the rear glass window slides up or down with the touch

of a button – just like the powered side windows – which makes it easy to check on the cargo area or just improve the ventilation on a nice spring day.

There is also a blend in the styling. The Tundra does not have the aggressive frontal view of the Dodge Ram, which always looks like it is ready to charge, but has a bold grill one might expect of a truck designed for work rather than show. The side lines, however, are curved, flowing and trim, providing the silhouette one would expect of a truck hauling working thoroughbreds, rather than a working truck hauling farm fertilizer.

Inside, the Tundra has the feel of the Lincoln, but with a bit more room. Those riding in front have wide, power operated, Captain’s chairs separated by a leather-covered arm rest capable of holding a pair of the NFL linebacker elbows or serving as a table for a full sized computer laptop. Underneath the arm rest is a storage bay which can hold a full sized laptop computer, and a 115-volt power outlet to keep it operating.

As a working truck, the Tundra tackles rocky roads, gravel, steep grades, and mud with the aplomb you would expect from a heavy duty vehicle. The nitrogen gas shock absorbers and independent suspension makes it seem as if the huge cab is riding on its own cushion of air. Rocky terrain is not felt through the padded leather seats, and does not interfere with a passenger to keep typing away on the computer.

The interior does not have the Lincoln’s wood finish, but does not lack for amenities. There is only an AM/FM radio, but the miles fade away while listening to Sonny Rollins emanating from the four-disc, CD player via a 440-watt, JBL surround sound system with 12 speakers. In addition, the Tundra has an easy to use navigation system with a touch screen, and DVD player with an overhead screen and wireless headsets. For communications, the Tundra comes with a Bluetooth system that quickly pairs with any cell phone. All of these systems are easily accessible from the fingertip controls on the Tundra’s leather steering wheel.

With the Tundra, the designers at Toyota have come up with an all around pickup truck which lets you work or play in style, and can hold its own with any of the heavy duty work horses, and, in the evening, merit a prime parking spot in front of a swanky restaurant.

2008 Toyota Tundra 4 X 4 Crew Cab Max

MSRP:		\$46,836
EPA Mileage:	14 MPG City	18 MPG Highway
Towing Capacity:		10,100 Pounds

Performance / Safety:

5.2-Liter DOHC aluminum V-8 producing 381 horsepower and 313 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission; rack & pinion hydraulic power steering; 18-inch aluminum alloy wheels; independent coil front suspension with nitrogen gas shocks; live axel leaf spring rear suspension with nitrogen gas shocks; power assisted, 4-wheel anti-lock brakes; traction control; vehicle stability control; driver & front passenger advanced airbags; roll sensing curtain airbags; 4-wheel demand 4x4; trailer brake prewired; side &

rear warning radar; power adjusted, heated tow mirrors; fog lamps; cargo bed with deck rails; cargo light.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM JBL radio with 12 speakers, subwoofer, and 8-channel, 440-watt amplifier; 4-disc, in-dash CD changer; DVD player with rear seat audio system and wireless headsets; navigation system; Bluetooth communications system; 115-volt outlet; power side and rear window; powered, heated, leather front bucket seats; leather, fold down rear seats; leather, tilt and telescope steering wheel with fingertip audio controls; powered sunroof.