

Shifting Gears

[The Ford F-150 Still the Runaway Best Seller](#)

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By Roger Witherspoon

It was dark, the moon was full, and Superstorm Sandy was at its raging height pushing a record 14 foot wall of water along the New York-New Jersey coastlines and up connecting rivers. The wave rolled through New York harbor, surged around the Statue of Liberty and then rolled up the Hudson River.

In better times the Hudson both empties into and is fed by the Atlantic Ocean at the foot of Manhattan. When the ocean tide is high the Atlantic flows into and up the river, creating a 100 mile salt water estuary. At low tide, the 300-mile Hudson brings fresh water from upstate New York down to the wide Atlantic. In midwinter, diners on the river's edge can watch the ice flow one way as they order appetizers and reverse course as they finish dessert.

That's also why Rick Nestler's folk song, "*The River That Flows Both Ways*," is the anthem of Clearwater, the environmental group Pete Seeger founded to clean up the historic river. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5wnbDcZXUc>)

But the night Sandy rolled up the Hudson was not like old times. The wall of water surged

up the river, spreading out to fill in bays and streams, flowing up banks, covering riverside parks, roadways and rail yards. At the end of Peekskill Bay the water began rising over a low-lying causeway carrying the two-lane Bear Mountain Extension, which provided the shortest route to Camp Smith, an Army base, and then zigzagged up the mountainside to the Bear Mountain Bridge, about 10 miles south of West Point.

Normally, that section of the Extension was nearly even with the tufted tops of the wild phragmites grasses that hugged the shoreline. But not this night. The wild grass and the lowest portion of the roadway – a stretch of about 20 yards – were lost under about four feet of the dark rolling waters of the Hudson River. And it was still rising.

It seemed impenetrable. But then an emergency worker in a Ford F-150 Raptor pickup truck gunned his engine and barreled through the water, which was about even with the truck's hood, using the still visible guard rails to gauge where the actual roadway was. He stopped at the entrance to the causeway and began putting out flares to block the road as water cascaded out of the pickup's flooded cargo bed.



“How did you get through that?” I asked him.

“I don't know, man. I just gunned it, crossed my fingers, prayed and went. I won't try it twice. The water is still rising.”

The flares did not deter the drivers of two, huge, military trucks, who were bound for Camp Smith, from ignoring the warnings and heading so slowly into the water they barely made a ripple. At the deepest point, as the water lapped their hoods, the trucks stalled. The utility worker called for police support and raced down the roadway. In minutes, dozens of police cars drove onto the causeway, the officers piling out in an effort to help the trapped soldiers. In the end, it took a lot of police and a fleet of kayaks to get them out.

So why did the F-150 make it when the Army trucks didn't?

A series of Ford spokesmen blanched at the query, since the truck is rated at being able to ford 30 inches of water and the company emphatically does *not* recommend going through streams higher than the middle of its 17-inch aluminum wheels. As it happens, the emergency worker in the F-150 was lucky. By gunning the truck and barreling through the rising water, he created a bow wave in front of it, leaving just enough room for air to get

through the radiator. The slow moving, careful army trucks, on the other hand, essentially drowned.

But even if rolling through the storm of the century was a matter of dumb luck, it was an impressive night for the Ford F-150 Raptor, still the best-selling vehicle of any type in the nation.

“It’s been the number one selling vehicle for 30 to 35 years,” said Kelley Blue Book senior analyst Alec Gutierrez. “Nothing else comes close. They produce diehard loyalists, and someone who buys a Ford pickup tends to stick with a Ford pickup for life.

“They sold about 650,000 in 2012, and outsold the Dodge Ram – which sold just shy of 300,000 – by two to one. The GMC Sierra was close with 575,000 trucks sold. The F-series is a huge seller for small businesses or construction companies, though in terms of towing capacity, it is comparable to the bigger Dodge Ram or GMC Sierra.”

It may have trouble keeping that edge. GM is redesigning its truck lineup and will unveil the rejuvenated fleet in a few months, said Gutierrez. Ford, however, is planning to redesign the F-150 for the 2015 model year, which will begin to arrive at dealers in mid-2014 – giving GM a year-long head start. Still, the allure of the F-150 is so strong that in 2012 the truck outsold the entire car and truck fleets of Volkswagen, Volvo, Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Mazda, Mitsubishi, Kia, or Subaru. That is quite a cushion for GM to overcome. (<http://ford.wieck.com/videos/ford-f-150-raptor-svt?query=raptor>)

The F-150 Raptor is a work truck that looks good and can go anywhere and do just about anything one might want a vehicle to do. In Texas – where 20% of the nation’s pickup trucks are sold – it is common to see a line of highly polished and simonized F-150s lined up outside the venue of every high school prom. During the day, that same truck will carry a half ton of material and tow another three tons of cargo up, down and over any construction site. It comes close to being as capable as a Hummer, Toyota FJ Cruiser, or Jeep Wrangler Rubicon going up, down, or across steep slopes, fording streams, slogging through mud or crawling over tree limbs and rocks.



Under that relatively water tight hood is a 6.2 liter V-8 engine cranking out 411 horsepower and 434 pound-feet of torque. It is mated to a six speed, overdrive, automatic transmission, and there are separate hill climb and descent gears. There are four additional power switches in the center console for use with after-market items such as floodlights or

tow winches. The truck's stability control system allows power to be transferred from a wheel which is suspended in the air to an opposing wheel. As a result the F-150 can continue in a relatively straight line regardless of what the trail does.

Inside, the F-150 is more like a large SUV. It features two screens: an eight-inch color, touch screen in the center of the dash and a 4.2-inch information screen directly in front of the steering wheel next to the speedometer. This small screen shows the trip computer, fuel gauge, and the front mounted camera, which is used to let the driver see rocks and other off-road impediments. The main screen is used for everything else – the navigation system, entertainment, Bluetooth, and the backup camera. For amusement, the truck comes with a CD and DVD player, MP3, iPod and USB ports, satellite radio, and Bluetooth.



The leather steering wheel is adjustable –as are the pedals – and contains fingertip cruise and audio controls. The four, 15-volt power outlets are to be expected. But since this is a work truck, Ford added a 115-volt power outlet so you can plug in a computer or other item needing serious power.

The test vehicle had the standard Supercab, with two full doors and half doors for the rear. But even with its slanted roofline, there is leg and head room in the rear for three adults in full-sized, leather seats. A larger, four-door, crew cab is available, adding about 200 pounds to the truck's three-ton curb weight. Either way, it's a comfortable ride since the front seats are adjustable and can be heated or air cooled.

GM's trucks have been steadily gaining ground on Ford, and Dodge Ram definitely has the edgiest commercials. But for the time being, the F-150 is still the one to beat.



2013 ford F-150 SVT Raptor

MSRP: **\$50,760**

EPA Mileage: **11 MPG City** **16 MPG Highway**

Towing Capacity: **6,000 Pounds**

Performance / Safety:

6.2-Liter, SOHC, iron block, V-8 engine producing 411 horsepower and 434 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed automatic overdrive transmission with tow mode; 4-wheel drive; hydraulic rack and pinion steering; coil-on-shock, double wishbone, independent front suspension; Hotchkiss-type, non-independent rear suspension; 4-wheel vented disc brakes; roll and stability control; 17-inch cast aluminum wheels; hill descent and off-road mode; skid plates; trailer tow; front seat, mounted side impact airbags; canopy airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/XM satellite radio; CD and DVD player; iPod, MP3 and USB ports; satellite navigation with 8-inch touch screen; SYNC connectivity and voice activation; 4.2-inch information screen; front and rear cameras; 4 15-volt outlets; one 115-volt outlet; leather, adjustable, heated and air-cooled front seats; tilt and telescoping, leather wrapped steering wheel with fingertip audio and cruise controls;