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## 2009 Ford Super Duty The latest in heavy-duty pickups.

### Overview

The Ford Super Duty line of heavy-duty pickup trucks received new styling inside and out along with a re-engineered suspension that delivers a smoother ride for 2008, so it's still a very new truck. In fact, it's the newest design among the heavy-duty pickups. Changes for 2009 are limited to trim and equipment.

A Cabela's special edition has joined the 2009 Super Duty FX4 line, a fun choice for hunters. Meanwhile, the Harley-Davidson edition has expanded to include the F-450 model, perfect for drivers who need to haul a big load of hogs. The F-450 is sort of a super Super Duty, a factory medium-duty big truck in pickup guise; Ford continues to be the only high-volume manufacturer to offer this type of truck.

Ford's Sync voice-activated hands-free communications and entertainment system is available on 2009 Super Duty models; Sync uses USB ports and Bluetooth wireless connectivity to link phones, media players, and other devices to the truck's system. Voice-activated navigation with Sirius Travel Link and an eight-inch touch-screen is available, also. For commercial and owner-operators, Ford's Work Solutions system provides facilities for GPS linking; add a laptop and printer and your truck is a rolling office.

Every model in the lineup gets more standard equipment for 2009. Even the base model now comes with air conditioning, Securilock and trailer towing mirrors, while top-line trim comes with heated seats and a rearview camera. That camera is hugely helpful when backing the truck up to a trailer coupling; no more jumping out six times to get it lined up properly.

This latest generation of Ford Super Duty trucks is more refined than the pre-2008 models. It has more of the work ability you expect from a heavy-duty pickup, yet it is more comfortable, rides better, and delivers more in the cost-benefit analysis. It's also more environmentally friendly, a lexicon not normally applied to big trucks. With realistic expectations, any faults will seem minute when compared to the ability to plow a big parking lot, pull a small car, or tow a small house.

Need a truck to work? The Super Duty line can haul from one to three tons. It can tow from three tons to more than 12 tons. It can carry three to six real-world people with room to spare. And the door pockets, glovebox, and console will hold more stuff than the entire trunk of some sports cars. If you don't need a truck to perform heavy duty work, stop reading here and look for New Car Test Drive's review of the new Ford F-150 lineup.

### Model Lineup

The 2009 Ford Super Duty comes in myriad configurations, with four trim levels, four weight divisions, two box sizes (6.75 feet, 8 feet), with the majority available in two-wheel drive or four-wheel drive. Almost every permutation is built. Exceptions: The King Ranch version is offered only on Crew Cabs, the F-450 is long-bed Crew Cab only; the FX4 trim is not offered on 2WD, F-450, or with a regular cab.

A 5.4-liter V8 with 300 horsepower and 365 pound-feet of torque is standard on all models up to the F-350 Crew Cab DRW, which has the 362-hp, 457 lb-ft 6.8-liter V10 standard. Both the V10 and 6.4-liter diesel (350 hp, 650 lb-ft) are optional across the F-250/F-350 spectrum. The F-450 only comes with the diesel. A six-speed manual is standard, a five-speed automatic is available.

All prices in parentheses ( ) for models below are for an F-350 2WD single-rear wheel (SRW). Expect to add \$2500-\$3000 for four-wheel drive, \$3000 to move up from a Regular Cab to a SuperCab, \$2000-\$2500 to upgrade from SuperCab to Crew Cab, \$200 for a long bed, and \$800-\$900 for dual rear wheels (DRW) except where standard on F-450.

The base XL (\$25,315) is commercial in nature, with vinyl seats and flooring, black painted grille and bumpers, plain trim, and AM/FM stereo, but it does include air conditioning towing mirrors, and a weight-appropriate receiver hitch. Options include mechanical upgrades (engine, limited-slip differential, larger tires, traction control, camper package, off-road package for 4WD, Tow Command, etc.), auxiliary switches, reverse sensors, and a tailgate step.

XLT trim (\$29,200) adds chrome trim and wheels, 40/20/40 cloth front seat, carpet, air conditioning, CD player, power windows/locks/mirrors, power-adjusted and heated towing mirrors, privacy glass, the integrated brake controller, remote keyless entry, tilt wheel and cruise control. Options include aluminum wheels, captain's chairs w/power and heat, Audiophile sound system, adjustable pedals, Sport trim package, moonroof, and rear-seat DVD entertainment.

FX4 (\$37,585) is the off-road model and it comes with 18-inch wheels and LT275/70R18 all-terrain tires, standard limited-slip differential, skid plates, fog lamps, power fold-and-telescoping tow mirrors, power captain's chairs seats, overhead console, Sirius radio, and leather-wrapped steering wheel. Options include 20-inch wheels and navigation/Audiophile system. FX4 models can be ordered with outdoor outfitter Cabela's package of two-tone paint scheme in five colors, cloth or leather upholstery, Paldeo plod trim, all-weather floor mats, extra lockable interior storage spaces, custom mud flaps, and badges and logos.

Lariat (\$35,480) adds polished wheels, heated leather power front seats, dual-zone climate control, backup camera, Sync, trip computer, redundant sound/climate controls on wheel, woodgrain trim, illuminated visor mirrors, privacy glass and a powered sliding rear window. Options include those offered on most Super Duty models plus captain's chairs and universal door opener.

King Ranch (\$41,290), offered only on Crew Cabs, starts with Lariat and upgrades with Chaparral leather for the four captain's chairs, the two center consoles and steering wheel, driver memory package, powered trailer tow mirrors, unique forged alloy wheels, two-tone paint, and special badging.

Harley-Davidson editions (\$45,750) are individually numbered and feature special black paint with blue flame work. The flame design is carried to the gauges and instrument panel while the seats, console and door panels are done in perforated black leather with blue leather underneath. Big chrome badges are plentiful inside and out. The Harley-Davidson edition is available for the F-450 as well as the F-350.

Safety equipment that comes standard on all models includes antilock brakes, dual front airbags, adjustable height outboard belt anchors, and child-seat LATCH anchors; a passenger airbag deactivation switch is provided on Regular Cab and SuperCab models.

## **Walkaround**

The Ford Super Duty offers an imposing presence with its big grille, deep bumper, and stacked lamps with the headlights on the bottom. Its exterior dimensions can easily be given in yards rather than inches, and the sheer vastness of the sheetmetal can seem overwhelming when it's time to wash it.

The color of the side vent gives away whether it is gasoline or diesel-powered.

Given its fender flares and dark snout, the FX4 is the most aggressive trim style, but no Super Duty will be mistaken for anything less than a full-size pickup even with nothing scalable within sight.

The towing mirrors that are available include signal repeaters that won't distract the driver. These mirrors telescope and fold, either manually or powered, a great feature. They feature large reflective elements (mirror glass) for good rearward vision when towing wide enclosed trailers.

A tailgate step is available that makes the climb up to the bed easier and safer, even for young guys. This setup features a 16.7 x 4.5-inch step with a half-ton load rating that pops downward from the open tailgate; it comes with a grab handle rated at 300 pounds that flips up. The package also includes an assist so the very heavy tailgate feels less heavy. The handle makes bed access easier but may need to be lowered again to slide a load in; also, removing the tailgate, as needed for some trailers, may become a two-person chore. Still, it's an interesting feature and a lot of people have found they like it.

A spray-in, military-grade bedliner is available as a factory option.

### **Interior Features**

With three-and-a-half feet of headroom and just shy of six feet of shoulder room, the Ford Super Duty cab is massive. Materials are job appropriate: no carpet mats for commercial or trail duty. And everything appears well assembled.

The King Ranch version brings a little Lincoln to a pickup while the base model could be cleaned out with a bucket of warm water. On upper-end models, the gear-cog-like chrome surrounds for vents and gauges can create some unwelcome reflections, and the number of textures and colors (we counted up to eight) may be too much for design minimalists.

The interior was restyled for 2008. The dash is segmented in three smaller parts for a more manageable look. The instrument pod provides engine and road speed through large dials with four smaller gauges lined up between; diesel models include a boost gauge and automatics get fluid temperature. The center stack houses a pair of large vents, radio and navigation top center where easily viewed, climate control, and most switchgear. The far side houses the passenger airbag and a sizable glovebox; where so equipped, the center console is similarly large and the huge door pockets could hold the contents of a small tool chest and will soon require their own payload rating.

Climbing in is easier than you'd think because the door opening curls under to the floor and assist handles are well-placed. Side steps are available.

Seats are well-placed and offer a superb view out. The available captain's chairs offer plenty of support and adjustability, for 600 miles without stopping in the diesel's case. The tilt wheel, memory system and adjustable pedals allow great flexibility for his-and-hers seating positions, a nice feature. With the available front bench seat, front-seat passengers may find the deep dash compromises knee and foot room, especially if the driver needs the seat forward.

Adults can fit in the rear of the SuperCab, but we recommend the Crew Cab if adult-sized back-seat riders are expected on a regular basis.

Primary controls for the driver are all easy to find and use, with few tiny buttons to complicate driving with gloves. The reverse parking sensor helps when maneuvering in tight places and can be defeated when hooking up a trailer or anytime you don't want it to beep. The short shifter for the automatic is less effort but more precise than before. The daytime running lights can be turned off for good neighborly night-time entries to campgrounds or drive-ins.

The ventilation system is capable of cooling or heating the cavernous volume and keeping forward windows and mirrors clear, and seat heaters are very effective; a supplemental cab heater is available for diesel models.

The navigation system is fairly intuitive and will be familiar to Ford family drivers.

Ford's Tow Command integrated trailer brake system is easy to set up and provides better, smoother trailer braking control than any aftermarket controller. However, it may not be compatible with all trailer disc-brake systems, and you can not modify the wiring harness so your fifth-wheel pigtail (or extension) must reach to the rear bumper.

## **Driving Impressions**

The 2008 model saw two primary improvements to the Super Duty's driving characteristics: the new diesel engine and the rear springs' forward perch moved forward eight inches. You may not care about spring location, but that eight inches gives a much better ride for the same load, so you can drive an empty dually without looking like a bobblehead doll.

While 20-inch wheels may look better, they tend to degrade ride comfort so if your driving involves marginal roads, or no roads at all, better to stick with the standard size. Regardless of hype, no heavy-duty pickup rides like a car, and the Super Duty is no different. The only instance in which a competitor might hold an advantage over the Super Duty in terms of ride quality is with GM full-size 4WD steering precision or ride comfort, a tradeoff many happily accept to get the Ford's solid front axle design often considered superior in durability.

If you're not accustomed to driving full-size pickups you may find yourself trapped in a strip mall feeling unable to escape. Otherwise you'll find the Super Duty has no obvious drawbacks in maneuverability for such a behemoth, and the cut-down front windows, mirrors, and clear bodywork edges give good indications of presence relative to surroundings. If you haven't anything heavy to carry or tow, a Super Duty's capabilities will far exceed your requirements. On the other hand, when towing a big trailer, you'll love the secure feeling it offers when wind and weather add to the challenge.

The word handling isn't ascribed to heavy-duty pickups as much as control is, and the Super Duty feels comfortable even with heavy loads. Brakes don't stand out as good or bad, and four-ton trucks never stop like cars, but the Tow Command system can't be beaten; the Super Duty does not offer a factory exhaust brake option like the Dodge Cummins, a feature equally useful on intermountain hauls.

Underway, we noted a marked absence of wind noise in the SuperCab. Better sealing around the center pillar means that big front door requires a solid yank to close with all windows up, however. The new diesel is so quiet you won't hear any of it at cruising speeds and road noise is reasonably controlled since the nearest wheel is not right under your feet.

The 6.4-liter diesel engine was all-new in 2008, with just two parts shared with the previous 6-liter diesel. It is much quieter, cleaner (in some cities the exhaust may be cleaner than the air going in). It has likely given up a few percentage points in fuel economy because of the added output and heavier trucks. Apart from the speed with which it barrels up hills and the probable 10 percent to 40 percent better fuel mileage, the diesel is not noticeably different than the gas engines. Note that on F-450, the diesel is de-rated to 325 hp and 600 lb-ft of torque, and that Ford's five-speed automatic transmission falls one gear short of the six-speed automatics from GM and Dodge.

The standard 5.4-liter V8 is the cost leader, and it's a good choice if you don't plan on towing anything more than 5,000 pounds over relatively rolling countryside. Those who might carry a full load of tools or cement and tow a trailer but not drive a lot of miles should consider the stronger V10. For maximum towing or high-mileage service, the diesel can't be beat, and neither can its price tag, around \$7000.

Changes between the F-250 and F-350 SRW (single rear-wheel) are essentially limited to the F-350's capability of carrying another 1,000 pounds. The F-350 DRW (dual rear-wheel) goes another step further in payload and frequently more important, much better trailer towing stability. The dual rear wheels also

add great stability for camper carrying. The maximum tow rating on some F-350 DRWs is more than 18,000 pounds, but remember those ratings are given with a nearly empty, low-optioned truck.

The F-450 model is a crew-cab, long-bed-only truck that takes a medium-duty chassis cab and adds a pickup box much like aftermarket firms have been doing for years for affluent trailer pullers. An F-450 can carry more than 6,000 pounds (the weight of an F-250 regular cab) and tow as much as 24,500 pounds, but still enjoy pickup perks like a usable bed, no stops at roadside scales, and a factory warranty. Just make sure your driver's license can handle that load, too. You can spot an F-450 by the 10-lug, 19.5-inch wheels and huge rear differential. The tires alone contribute to a firmer ride, and the added rolling resistance and fixed mass bring increases in acceleration times and stopping distances. If you have a big, heavy trailer this is the way to go; if not, you really don't want an F-450.

### **Summary**

The Ford Super Duty is the largest mass-market pickup truck you can get, offered in the widest array of configurations and powertrains, and equally able to meet recreational or commercial needs. Ordered with an honest, thoughtful appraisal of your needs and expectations in mind, it would be difficult to do better.