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## 2009 Toyota Tundra A Genuine Player among full-size pickups.

### Overview

The current generation Toyota Tundra is Toyota's third version of a full-size pickup. The first iteration, called T100 and more the size of a Dodge Dakota, taught them you have to have a V8. The second generation and first carrying the Tundra badge, showed them that 15/16 doesn't equal full-size. The current generation, launched as a 2007 model, shows they learned their lessons.

The 2009 Toyota Tundra carries forward relatively unchanged. New for 2009: A bench seat is available on SR5 trim at no charge, four-door cabs receive a chrome front bumper and grille, the regular cab Cold kit adds wiper deicing, the Power memory Package is optional rather than standard on Limited, and in non-California emissions regions 5.7-powered four-wheel drives will be flex-fuel capable of running on E85.

Two new TRD packages are available for 2009: Rock Warrior and Sport Edition. Toyota Racing Development also offers supercharger systems that deliver near 500 hp from the 5.7.

Tundra trim levels range from the basic Tundra Grade to Limited models with leather upholstery. Even the base models are loaded with useful features, including tons of interior storage options, an easy-lift assisted tailgate and four-wheel disc brakes. The high-end Limited models offer features such as GPS-linked navigation with a backup camera and a state-of-the-art rear-seat entertainment with a nine-inch LCD screen. Tundra covers nearly all the half-ton pickup bases.

The high-torque, 381-hp 5.7-liter V8 and its standard six-speed automatic transmission make one of the strongest, most responsive powertrains in the class. It's an excellent choice for towing trailers. A 4.0-liter V6 engine is the most economical, with enough power for basic work-truck duty. There's also an intermediate 4.7-liter V8.

Safety equipment is comprehensive, including front side-impact airbags, curtain-type head protection airbags, advanced anti-lock brakes (ABS) with electronic brake force distribution (EBD) and brake assist, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) and traction control.

Towing capacity reaches 10,800 pounds; a fully loaded CrewMax 4x4 is rated at about 8800 pounds. We've found the Tundra a stable, comfortable truck for towing a 20-foot enclosed car trailer. Maximum payload ratings range from 1350 pounds to 1990 pounds. An available deck rail system in the bed anchors moveable tie-down cleats rated at 220 pounds each.

The Tundra comes in three body styles: two-door Regular Cab; Double Cab with conventional front-hinged, secondary rear side doors; and four-door CrewMax. Tundra is available with three bed lengths and three different wheelbases. Rear-wheel drive is standard, four-wheel drive



optional, with seating for two, three, five or six in three trim levels. In all, the 2009 Tundra is available in 45 different build configurations. That's fewer than a Ford F-150 or Chevy Silverado, believe it or not.

Moreover, those veteran pickups offer more options than Tundra, including things like different rear-end ratios and towing aids that allow a buyer to more specifically tailor a pickup to personal needs. And Dodge, Chevy and Ford have a database of valuable customer feedback that goes back decades beyond Toyota's.

It's difficult to convince a longtime pickup owner to switch brands, and each make has relative strengths and weaknesses. But there's no arguing the Tundra is a viable alternative to any half-ton pickup. Shoppers without a particular brand affinity, or those new to the light-duty truck market, should take a look at the Toyota Tundra.

Tundra shoppers buying as a second car should first consider cab style and seating space. Those buying for truck use will first consider payload and cost. The next choice is either the V6 or one of two V8 engines, and finally the trim package or level of standard equipment.

### **Model Lineup**

The Tundra Regular Cab 4x2 (\$22,490) is powered by a 236-hp 4.0-liter V6, with 266 pound-feet of torque, a five-speed automatic transmission and the 6.5-foot, standard-length bed. The eight-foot long-bed (\$330) is optional. Also optional is the 4.7-liter V8 or 5.7-liter V8. (All NewCarTestDrive.com prices are manufacturer's suggested retail prices, which may change at any time without notice; prices do not include destination charges.)

The Regular Cab 4x4 (\$27,010) comes standard with the 4.7-liter V8 and an electronically controlled, part-time four-wheel-drive system with a two-speed transfer case. The Regular Cab is the workhorse edition Tundra, with a fabric-upholstered, 40/20/40-split bench seat, vinyl floor covering, column shift and manual-crank windows. Standard equipment includes a four-speaker, AM/FM/CD stereo with auxiliary audio input, manual dual-zone air conditioning, tilt steering and Toyota's gas-boosted, tailgate-assist system. The standard wheels are 18-inch steel.

Double Cab Tundra Grade 4x2 (\$25,090) comes with the 4.0-liter V6 and standard bed. The Tundra Double Cab features rear side door like on an SUV, and seats for as many as six. The 4.7-liter V8 (\$145), 5.7-liter V8 (\$1,445), and long bed are optional on Double Cab models. The Tundra Grade equipment basically matches the Regular Cab, adding carpet in place of the vinyl flooring, a tachometer and outside temperature indicator. The Double Cab Tundra Grade 4x4 (\$28,140) adds four-wheel-drive and the 4.7-liter V8.

The Double Cab SR5 4x2 (\$27,050) and 4x4 (\$30,100) add lots of standard equipment, including power front bucket seats, a floor-mounted shifter and center console, power windows and heated mirrors, central locking, cruise control, a stereo with six speakers and an in-dash six-CD changer, heavy duty starter and battery, and mud guards.



The Double Cab Limited 4X2 (\$36,010) and 4x4 (\$39,070) feature the most luxurious trim package. Both come standard with the 4.7-liter V8, the 5.7-liter V8 is optional. They are only offered with the standard bed. Standard equipment includes heated, leather-trimmed front buckets, JBL audio with 12 speakers, sliding rear glass, an auto-dimming rearview mirror with compass and programmable garage-door opener and front and rear park-assist.

The CrewMax Tundra Grade 4x2 (\$27,915) and 4x4 (\$30,965) feature full-size rear side doors and more rear-cab space, with a sliding, fold-flat rear bench seat. They come standard with the 4.7-liter V8, but are only offered with a 5.5-foot short bed. The 5.7-liter V8 and six-speed automatic are optional (\$1,190). A CrewMax SR5 4x2 (\$29,875) and 4x4 (\$38,545), and CrewMax Limited 4x2 (\$37,760) and 4x4 (\$41,605) are also available. Standard equipment on each trim level basically matches that on the Double Cab models, though the CrewMax adds an overhead console and a vertical sliding power rear window.

Options vary in price and exact content depending on model and region, and include things like a navigation system with back-up camera, rear-seat DVD player, cold-weather features, off-road packages and 20-inch aluminum wheels. There are few factory-installed stand-alone options, but dozens of dealer-installed accessories, such as bed liners.

TRD's Rock Warrior package (\$3,177) adds color-keyed body trim on the front and a flat-black bumper on the back, fog lamps, black cloth manual seats, Bilstein shock absorbers, and 17-inch forged aluminum wheels with BFGoodrich All-Terrains for traction, ride and rim protection. It's available on 5.7 V8 4x4 Double Cab standard bed or CrewMax.

The TRD Sport package (\$2,408-\$3,813) adds color-coordinated trim including bumpers, grille, mirrors and door handles, fog lamps, manual cloth bucket seats, and 20-inch 5-spoke machined-face alloy wheels. Available on 5.7-liter 2WD Regular Cab and Double Cab standard bed.

Safety features that come standard on every model include front- and side-impact airbags for driver and front passenger (the latter with an off switch in Regular Cab models), side curtain airbags with rollover sensor, four-wheel disc brakes with ABS, brake assist and electronic brake-force distribution, electronic stability control with traction control and a limited slip differential.

Safety features include six air bags, ABS, traction control and electronic stability control.

## **Walkaround**

The Toyota Tundra is no longer a 7/8-scale truck as the previous-generation pickup was sometimes called. It's an honest-to-goodness, full-size pickup, whether you measure by load, dimension, or work capacity.

In the stylistic sense, the Tundra is big and burly by design. To that end, it abandons the high-stepping, nose-in-the-air look of Tundras built before 2007 in favor of a more down-to-earth but very large grille, boldly framed in black or chrome, depending on trim level. The grille pulls lines from the deeply sculpted hood into the front end. Some like the black piece of trim

designed to look like an air inlet at the top of the grille, some don't; likewise some like the rounded lines and others call them inflated. In any case, it has presence, and we think it looks good.

In side view, the Tundra is blander, and Toyota-like, with understated fender flares tied together by a gentle indent along the lower door panels. Body proportions comfortably accommodate the three bed lengths and wheelbases. Interestingly, gaps between body panels are deliberately wider than contemporary robotic assembly might allow. Toyota's stylists decided that slightly wider gaps better suggest the rugged first impression they wanted the Tundra to make.

Some of the details on Tundra's body add interest, and function. Deep recesses underneath make the beefy door handles easy to grip. The Tundra CrewMax has these big handles on all four doors, while the Double Cab uses vertical grabs on the back doors that are a bit snug for large hands. The optional larger towing mirrors look a little too big on the regular and Double Cab models but function trumps form here.

The rear view is traditional pickup. There are no stand-out styling cues here, save maybe for the backup lights, which are dimensionally almost the equal of the taillights. The tailgate is damped, making lowering and raising it easier and quieter.

The wheels vary with the model, too, but they're all very truckish. The standard 18-inch, drilled steel discs on base Tundras are actually quite attractive in their basic, functional look. SR5's get styled steel, stamped more expressively to resemble mags. The aluminum alloy wheels on the Limited models feature thick, monolithic spokes. The optional 20-inch alloys satisfy the current trend toward lots of wheel, not much tire.

Opening and closing the tailgate is dramatically eased by the tailgate assist (standard). The mechanism starts with a torsion bar in the hinge assembly to make the tailgate feel lighter, and includes a gas-pressurized strut, concealed behind the left taillight, to damp the lowering and assist in raising the lockable tailgate.

## **Interior Features**

When it was launched for 2007, the full-size Toyota Tundra raised the bar on working truck interiors. Little has changed for 2009, save the choice of a bench front seat on Double Cabs. The Tundra remains a comfortable, well outfitted pickup.

Visibility from the driver's seat is excellent. The standard mirrors are large, and can be adjusted to deliver a panoramic view all the way around the truck. The optional tow mirrors are also superb. They feature a large traditional mirror that's power operated, with a small convex mirror at the bottom that's manually adjustable. They can be adjusted to cover all blind spots. The tow mirrors can be manually extended outward to help the driver see around enclosed car trailers and other big trailers. They can be folded inward when parked to reduce the chance of damage.

The optional navigation system includes a back-up camera. It's particularly useful on 4x4 models, as the top of the tailgate towers well above the height of small children, making it

possibly a critical safety feature. Plus it's extremely useful when hitching a trailer, allowing the driver to position the ball directly below the trailer coupling without having to jump out of the truck 27 times while jockeying into position. The rearview camera is handy when parallel parking, easing and speeding the task.

Headrests on the back seats can block the view rearward if not in their lowest position. Removing them or flipping the back seat down affords the best view. The rear-seat entertainment system's drop-down LCD screen is only barely noticeable with the rear view mirror adjusted to its lowest position, a nice feature. An sonar system with an audible warning and an indicator on the dash helps the driver determine the proximity of the front corners to objects when maneuvering in tight quarters, another useful feature when parking this big truck.

The cabs are roomy. In occupant measurements, the Tundra generally gives up little or nothing to the competition. The Toyota Tundra CrewMax is the current leader in rear-seat legroom, offering more of it than it does front seat legroom.

The seats are comfortably cushioned but not too soft, with modest side bolsters in front. Deep seat bottoms provide ample thigh support. The fabric upholstery feels durable and the leather does, too. It's more a heavy-duty grade than luxurious, and probably appropriate for a truck. We've found them comfortable in daylong towing trips.

The passenger seatback in the Regular Cab folds forward to present a flat area for writing up jobs, and there's room behind the seat for a small generator and a five-gallon bucket. This is in addition to bins, both open and capped, for tools and such, and it emphasizes an area where Tundra stands out among full-size pickups: interior storage and conveniences.

The seat bottom in the center section of the front bench seat pivots forward to reveal an otherwise fully concealed storage compartment. There's a bi-level glove box, with an upper compartment big enough to hold a Thermos bottle. The lower compartment, more than twice the size of the upper, is lighted and fitted with a damped door. The front-door armrests house flip-out compartments beneath the power window switch plates, though models with manual windows forgo this storage. Front-door map pockets are molded to hold two 22-ounce water bottles, and so are the rear-door map pockets on the CrewMax. The Double Cab rear doors hold one bottle.

Both the Double Cab and the CrewMax incorporate storage bins and compartments beneath and behind their rear seats, though in the Double cab, a subwoofer replaces the lockable under-seat bin when the up-level stereo is ordered.

Column-shift Tundras have two, flexible-sized cup holders in a slide-out tray beneath the climate control panel, and two more in the backside of the fold-down center section of the bench seat. In the Double Cab, two more cup holders fold out of the backside of the front-seat center section, while in the CrewMax, there are two more still in the rear seat's fold-down center armrest. The console in floor-shift models contains three cup holders, with two in a lift-out plate covering a large compartment. Between this compartment and the shift gate sits a narrow slot, concealed beneath a snap-out cover.

The crowning touch inside the Tundra might be the center console compartment in models equipped with front bucket seats. This compartment transforms the cabin, for all intents, into a road-going office, to a greater extent than any of the competition. The middle third of the compartment can hold either a removable bin good for stowing CDs or letter-size, hanging file folders, ideal for stowing contracts, permits and other work papers. There's room for a laptop computer on either side of the middle section, and the side nearest the driver has a power point to keep the gear charged up and ready.

Generally, the CrewMax is the more comfortable of the two stretched-cab Tundras for rear passengers. It starts with the doors, which are full length and make climbing in easier. The back seat in the CrewMax is closer to the 40/20/40 front bench seat in shape and contours, with deep seat bottoms and a slide-and-recline feature that allows a more comfortable rake to the seatback. The Double Cab rear seat is the more bench-like, and legroom is less expansive (though still decent). Dogs may prefer the Double Cab, however. With the seats folded for cargo, the Double Cab has a significantly lower load height, which should make it easier for canines to get in and out.

Ergonomics inside the Tundra are generally good, though if we have a complaint, it's here. The dash-mounted controls, and especially more critical and frequently used knobs for fan, temperature and airflow, are extra large, with solid detents and a nice positive feel that lets the operator know how far they've turned. They're tuned more for work gloves than polished fingernails, and that's good. The steering wheel is large, but properly scaled for the largest Toyota pickup. The floor-mounted shift lever has a manual-shift slot on the driver's side of the gate. It feels more natural and more precise than the column-shift, but neither transmit any sloppiness.

The problem lies more in design than execution. The Tundra's basic dash layout is different, almost avant-garde as pickups go, with the instruments and left third of the center stack (the switch panel dropping in the middle toward the floor or center console) split from the navigation/audio/climate and operating controls on the right side of the stack. The narrower left portion, toward the driver, is finished in the same silver-metallic plastic as the gauge package, and rises up around the steering column and into the gauges to create a cockpit-type effect for the driver, but this is compromised by instruments and warning lamps placed in numerous nacelles. Gauges themselves are adequate, and especially easy-to-read on upper-grade models, but compared to more integrated designs from the Big Three the information seems scattered. The slightly wider right half of the center stack is finished with the trim material on that particular Tundra model, either wood-grain or dark plastic. It looks good, but it creates some operational issues.

Most of the knobs and buttons, including the audio cluster, frequently adjusted climate controls and navigation screen, are located in the passenger half of the center stack. In the psychological sense, this moves these controls out of the driver's domain and gives control to the passenger. In a very practical sense, it moves them to the edge of the driver's reach. The Tundra is a wide vehicle, and while drivers below average height will have no trouble getting comfortable to operate this pickup, they might have a harder time operating some of the controls. When the seat is comfortable for driving, they may have to literally lift up from the seat back and lean toward

the center of the truck to adjust airflow direction. They'll do the same to get a clear view of the navigation screen.

## Driving Impressions

Pick-up buyers can be like beer drinkers. No one will convince them that another brand is better than their own, and their loyalty can rest as much in image as taste (or performance). We won't even try to convince anyone that the Toyota Tundra is better than any other half-ton pickup on the market. We'll simply observe that by objective measure it is clearly competitive.



Pickup manufacturers, on the other hand, like to tout their different tacks on frame design, materials and construction. There's hydro-formed this, C-channel that, fully boxed the other, welded versus one-piece, high-tensile steel versus quiet steel and so on. For the record, the Tundra is a unibody-on-frame, which is fully boxed in the front half, rolled C-channel in back.

Truth, though, is that what a driver really cares about is how it all comes together under the right foot, at the seat of the pants and at the hitch. And with all six full-size, light-duty trucks in play (counting the GMC Sierra), the Toyota Tundra sits near the front of the bench. In some ways it's tops, and in others it falls a bit short. It lacks some features such as optional rear-end ratios that allow owners to tailor a truck more specifically to their needs. In basic technology and overall refinement, the competitors are catching up.

Examples from the powertrain department make the point. The V6 and 5.7-liter V8 are what have been state of the art for a number of years, as are some of the competition's engines, with features such as variable intake valve timing, sequential fuel injection, knock sensors (allowing in most cases use of Regular 87 octane gas), electronically managed throttle-by-wire and dual-length intake manifolds.

The 4.7 is no slouch either, originally stemming from the V8 used in the first Lexus flagships and having been updated a few years back, it matches GM's 4.8-liter overall but Dodge's same-size V8 bests it by 34 hp and 17 lb-ft.

Despite the engines' overhead-camshaft, four-valve-per-cylinder architectures, the Toyota engines tend to make their peak power earlier at lower rpm, where you want it in a truck, than most competitor engines like Dodge's 4.7 and Ford's 4.6 overhead cam and the older-design pushrod setups in GM's V8s and Dodge's Hemi.

On the road, power delivery in the two V8 engines is linear, and commendably strong at low engine speed. This is especially so in the 5.7-liter, where 90 percent of the torque is on tap from 2400 revolutions per minute to 5500 rpm. Very impressive is the absence of any discernible surge sometimes associated with overhead-cam, multi-valve engines. We find the 5.7-liter V8 a

delightful engine, very responsive when quick acceleration is needed, smooth and powerful when cruising.

TRD markets a supercharger package that raises the stock 381 horsepower to around 500 hp. This emissions-compliant system can not be financed with a new vehicle purchase but if bought and installed by the dealer at the time the vehicle is purchased, it is warranted for the balance of the factory warranty.

Fuel economy is competitive, though EPA ratings are not best in class.

Maximum towing capacity of 10,800 pounds applies to an unloaded Tundra regular cab with the 5.7-liter V8. Ford has a regular cab rated slightly higher, GM crew cabs tend to have the advantage in that division, while the Nissan Titan (which offers no regular cab) stays near 9500 max and Dodge's 2009 Ram runs to around 9000. We'd tow such loads only infrequently. We've found the Tundra does a superb job of towing an enclosed car trailer, about a 4,000-pound load. We recommend considering a heavy-duty pickup for towing trailers of more than 5,000 pounds. Overkill with tow rigs is nice on long nights or in inclement weather or strong winds.

Based on towing a variety of trailers from sea level to 5000 feet, we're here to tell you the 5.7-liter has more than enough pulling power and appropriate gearing; it frequently outruns the competition while getting better fuel economy, too. Unlike some pickups, the Tundra does not offer an integrated trailer brake controller, but a host of aftermarket controllers do the job.

Overall, both the five-speed and six-speed automatic transmissions work well. Gear changes are smooth, though more apparent when trailering. Downshifts during braking on downhill grades are well managed, properly timed and helpful. In sum the Tundra's transmissions are unobtrusive, which in a truck is usually the best compliment, because in a truck if you frequently notice how the transmission is doing it's job, it probably isn't doing it as well as it could. A Tow/Haul mode is available for increased trailer towing performance and improved transmission durability, and should be used when combined weight of truck and trailer exceeds 12,000 pounds. We use it whenever towing.

Ride and handling in the Tundra might be the best in class. Steering response is sure and certain. Somehow, Toyota's suspension engineers have delivered a setup that leaves no doubt the driver is operating a truck, and yet by virtually every measure suggests the Tundra is anything but. Over severely uneven pavement, the solid rear axle makes its presence known with a slightly skippy feeling, but the Tundra's unladen rear end feels less skittish than some other pickups, and there is rarely any disruption that even instantaneously moves it off the driver's intended path. As with most pickups, the ride gets bouncy on bumpy freeways with an empty bed.

Braking is solid, with firm pedal feel. The Tundra's standard four-wheel discs are a first for a Toyota pickup and push the technological envelope in light trucks. The ABS system has all the control features, including electronic balancing of brake force, that one expects in a luxury car.

The TRD Off-Road Package delivers excellent handling on pavement, and it's especially noticeable when Tundras so equipped are driven quickly on winding, two-lane roads; the TRD Sport package does even better if the roads aren't too rough.

For more severe four-wheel drive use the Tundra offers decent articulation and good low-range gearing; when enabled the traction control can be intrusive. Unlike most pickups, the Tundra 4WD also has an RSCA switch that backs off the thresholds for deploying the side-curtain airbags. This can be helpful on side-angle trails and ditches that might otherwise trigger a side curtain deployment.

## **Summary**

The Toyota Tundra is a full-size pickup in every sense of the term, and it gives up nothing to the full-size trucks from Chevy, Ford, Dodge, Nissan, and GMC. The Toyota delivers power, payload and tow ratings that meet or beat the best, it's exceptionally comfortable, and it's easy to drive.



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