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2011 Chevrolet Silverado HD

The Chevrolet Silverado HD is being thoroughly revised for the 2011 model year. Apart from a couple of nuts, bolts and badges, everything on this lineup of heavy-duty pickups has been changed. As usual the GMC Sierra HD is essentially the same vehicle with different labels.

There will be 11 different 2500 models (sometimes called 3/4 ton) and eight 3500 models (sometimes called 1-ton). Vinyl-floor WT (Work Truck) to luxury LTZ trim levels are offered, and a new Crew Cab 3500 short bed (6.5 foot) model will be available.

The 2011 Chevy Silverado HD and GMC Sierra HD pickups get fully-boxed frames for additional stiffness. This may present issues attaching aftermarket parts like certain hitches, additional fuel tanks or swapping the box for a service bed, but a more rigid frame should translate into a smoother ride and crisper handling responses.

Perhaps inspired by the medium-duty Kodiak/TopKick truck, the 2010 Silverado HD has a larger, higher hood and greater air inlets in the grille and bumper for added cooling.

The new trucks come with a bit more refinement: The cabs use fluid-filled mounts (like 2009 GM 1500 and 2010 Ram HD) for better ride. Extended-cab rear doors swing 170 degrees. Seat pelvic/thorax airbags and side curtain airbags are available on 2500HD. And most models will offer mobile Wi-Fi, USB port, Bluetooth and OnStar.

Wheels are larger because the brake size has been substantially increased (from 12.8 to 14 inches in diameter), and while the suspension design is similar to past models the components have been strengthened using forged steel and cast iron. Axle shafts, bearings and other bits receive the same sort of upgrades. Trailer sway control, and electronic stability control on single-rear wheel pickups, is standard.

Power comes from two new engines that sound the same as before, a 6-liter Vortec gasoline V8 and a 6.6-liter Duramax V8 turbodiesel. The 6-liter has been refined and should equal or better previous ratings of 353 horsepower and 383 pound-feet of torque to keep up with Ram's 383-hp Hemi and Ford's new 6.2-liter. GM's gas engine comes with a stouter 6L90 six-speed automatic.

The Duramax, now generation LML, is B20 biodiesel capable (though GM did not specify whether this is fleet-only) and is expected to produce more than the 365 hp and 665 lb.-ft. of torque of last year's Duramax. Cold-start ability is quoted as no more than a three-second wait at -20 degrees F, and a tank of diesel fluid additive should last 5000 miles.

The diesel is backed by an Allison 1000-series six-speed automatic redesigned to handle 30 percent more torque than the previous iteration. The Allison transmission also controls a new exhaust brake system that works with cruise control. We do not expect GM to offer a manual transmission in the HD.

Specifications rule in heavy-duty pickups, an ongoing war no one permanently wins. And the 2011 Silverado has been considerably muscled in that regard, with maximum payload up by

about half a ton to 6,335 pounds, maximum gross combined (truck, trailer, occupants, cargo) at 27,500 pounds, maximum gross vehicle weight (everything but a trailer) of 13,000 pounds, maximum fifth-wheel or gooseneck trailer of 20,000 pounds, and an integrated tow hitch brings tow-behind ratings to 16,000 pounds.

These numbers are typically higher than the Ram Heavy-Duty. But it's worth noting that some hardware (like a 16,000-pound tow ball) might be hard to find and that the load ratings if used may require a driver's license endorsement or class upgrade in some states.

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