

Ford Scrambles To Upgrade Overshadowed Pickups

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DETROIT (AP) — Ford Motor Co.'s 2011 heavy-duty pickups just came out in April, but already the company is boosting the power in their diesel engines and giving free upgrades to owners.

Ford said it just wants to give its Super Duty trucks all the horsepower they're capable of. But there's another motive: The Super Duty's power was recently eclipsed by General Motors Co., which started producing its heavy-duty 2011 Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra trucks in May.

Ford's F-250, F-350 and F-450 trucks equipped with its new 6.7-liter Power Stroke turbocharged diesel engine now get 390 horsepower and 735 foot-pounds of torque, which helps with acceleration and towing. By reprogramming the trucks' software, Ford will increase that to 400 horsepower and 800 foot-pounds of torque. Trucks made after Wednesday will automatically have the upgraded engines.

By comparison, GM's new 6.6-liter Duramax turbocharged diesel gets 397 horsepower and 765 foot-pounds of torque.

GM and Ford trucks also go toe-to-toe in towing capacity. Ford is upgrading future F-350s with stronger steel so they'll have a maximum towing capacity of 22,600 pounds, up from 21,600 pounds. The Chevrolet Silverado's maximum towing capacity is 21,700 pounds.

The distinctions are important for heavy-duty pickup buyers, who rely on their trucks for construction and other heavy work such as towing a horse trailer.

Ford spokeswoman Anne Marie Gattari said Ford isn't making the changes because of GM. She said Ford was conservative with the new engine because it was the first diesel truck engine produced in-house since Ford ended a 30-year relationship with its former diesel supplier, Navistar International Inc. But testing showed that the horsepower and torque could be increased without compromising the engine's durability, she said.

Marc Cross, the general manager of Jordan Ford in San Antonio, said about 75 percent of his Super Duty customers use their trucks for commercial purposes. He said none of his customers have complained about the horsepower, but Ford needs to be competitive. Heavy-duty truck buyers are less loyal than buyers of other types of trucks and will look at different brands to determine what best meets their needs, he said.

GM spokesman Brian Goebel said the company encourages drivers to try both

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trucks.

"We're very, very confident in the performance of ours," he said.

Ford's vice president of engineering, Barb Samardzich, was to announce the program Tuesday morning at an auto industry conference in Traverse City, Mich. Buyers will get a letter in the next 60 days explaining how to get the power boost.

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