

What's big in 2004 vehicles: Trucks, for one

BY ANN JOB
The Associated Press

It's a big year for trucks, especially big trucks, as Ford's redesigned 2004 F-150 takes on competition and Toyota bulks up its Tundra with a new 2004 Tundra Double Cab.

Even smaller trucks get the spotlight as Chevrolet and GMC launch replacements for their S-10 and Sonoma com-

pact pickups, and GMC's innovative 2004 Envoy XUV meshes sport utility vehicle and pickup capabilities.

Several new SUVs arrive in showrooms, including the 2004 Cadillac SRX and new Buick Ranier.

Here are highlights of the new models:

BMW

A fifth-generation 5-Series arrives in the fall, and it's restyled, bigger than its pre-

decessor and yet a bit lighter, thanks to extensive use of aluminum in the suspension.

Six- and eight-cylinder engines power these sedans, and six-speed transmissions — including a manual, a sequential manual gearbox (SMG) and an automatic — are available.

Active Steering is a new 5-Series feature, allowing changes to the steering ratio via column-mounted gears.

The BMW X5 SUV is restyled for 2004 and has a new all-wheel-drive system.

Early in 2004, BMW adds two new models to its lineup — the 6-Series coupe and convertible that's based on the new 5-Series and the X3 sports activity vehicle that's based on the 3-Series.

Buick

A new truck-based SUV arrives in Buick showrooms this fall. The 2004 Ranier, based on the Chevrolet TrailBlazer, is the only short-wheelbase, mid-size SUV in General Motors Corp. that is offered with a V-8.

In the case of the Ranier, it's an optional, 290-horsepower, 5.3-liter, Vortec 5300 V-8. The standard Ranier engine is a 275-horsepower, 4.2-liter, Vortec 4200 inline six.

Cadillac

The 8 VVT is one of two engines offered in Cadillac's 2004 SRX sport wagon. Available in rear-wheel- and all-wheel-drive, the 2004 SRX has bold, edgy styling up front and can carry up to seven riders in a luxurious interior.

Cadillac's entry-level CTS gets a high-performance version in the 2004 model year, but even the regular, automatic-transmission CTS gets more power. The new engine for CTS is a 255-horsepower, 3.6-liter V-6 VVT. There also is a sportier tuned suspension.

But the performance CTS-V really kicks it up a notch, with its 400-horsepower, 5.7-liter V-8 that's similar to the engine in the Chevrolet Corvette Z06.

Chevrolet

Chevy's innovative convertible-pickup truck, the 2004



AP Photo

GMC's Canyon sport utility vehicle, replacing the Sonoma, is due for a mid-year debut.

SSR, began arriving in showrooms in late summer.

In early fall, the 2004 Malibu bows with a new design, riding on a more modern platform that's also used in the Saab 9-3. Malibu passengers get a smoother, quieter ride and more interior room even though the wheelbase on the new sedan is shorter than its predecessors.

The Malibu line also expands this year as a new Malibu Maxx five-door hatchback arrives. Among its amenities are rear seats that slide forward and back on tracks, a cargo floor that can double as a picnic table and a fixed skylight for rear passengers.

Malibu engines include a 145-horsepower, 2.2-liter, Ecotec four-cylinder and a 200-horsepower, 3.5-liter V-6.

In November, Chevy's replacement for the S-10 compact pickup arrives. The 2004 Colorado is larger than the long-running S-10. Offered in two- and four-wheel drive, Colorado is available with a 175-horsepower, 2.8-liter, Vortec 2800 four-cylinder and a 220-horsepower, 3.5-liter, Vortec 3500 five-cylinder engine.

Early in 2004, Chevy introduces a new small car, the Aveo, which comes courtesy of parent company GM's purchase of Daewoo of South Korea.

Sold as a sedan and five-door hatchback and powered by a 105-horsepower, 1.6-liter four-

cylinder engine, the 2004 Aveo slots below the Cavalier, sort of where the old Chevy Metro used to be.

In mid-model 2004, the Silverado 1500 adds a Crew Cab model with four front-hinged doors and a new pickup bed size — 5 feet 8 inches long.

Chrysler

Chrysler's big product news came earlier this year, when the sleek 2004 Crossfire two-seat coupe and six-passenger 2004 Pacifica wagon debuted.

The newest limited edition PT Cruiser is available as the 2004 Chrysler PT Dream Cruiser Series 3. Based on the PT Turbo model, it has three firsts for the PT Cruiser: midnight blue and bright silver two-tone paint, blue-tinted window glass, and 17-inch chrome-plated Empire cast-aluminum wheels.

November marks the 20th anniversary of the introduction of the minivan in America, so Chrysler plans a limited edition Town & Country Platinum Series. Based on the Town & Country Touring model, it has 16-inch chrome wheels, two-tone leather seats and body-color cladding among its many amenities. Chrysler plans five other Platinum Series models in 2004, including the Sebring Coupe. All include upgraded features and trim.

The Chrysler 300C large

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