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# Updated Tacoma gets timing right

### As competition grows, so does consumers' appetite for small pickups



Toyota figures that when the 2016 Tacoma goes on sale on Sept. 10, the problem won't be selling the truck but building enough to meet demand.

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**Automotive News**  
August 17, 2015 - 3:00 am ET

SEATTLE -- Hollywood couldn't have scripted a better time for Toyota to launch its redesigned Tacoma.

The midsize-pickup market is in the middle of a comeback. Toyota can't build enough of the outgoing Tacomas to meet demand -- despite the fact that the current generation of the pickup has been around for a decade and is a dinosaur by industry standards.

Meanwhile General Motors waded back into the midsize market last fall with its Chevrolet Colorado and GMC Canyon, and has been rewarded by robust sales and the Colorado's Motor Trend Truck of the Year award.

Fueled by GM and Toyota's success, the market share for these smaller pickups quickly jumped to 2.1 percent of the light-vehicle market this year through July, according to the Automotive News Data Center, up from 1.5 percent a year earlier. Analysts expect that growth to continue at least through 2016.

So where were all these buyers hiding?



The Tacoma gets its first redesign in a decade.

"This is basically coming from the strength of the market," Bill Fay, Toyota Division general manager, told Automotive News at the press launch for the Tacoma here. Thanks to easy credit and low gasoline prices, "we've got a 10-year-old truck that's getting very little marketing support but has a huge amount of support in the marketplace," Fay said.

This means when the 2016 Tacoma goes on sale on Sept. 10, the problem won't be selling the truck, but building it. Inventories of the outgoing version dwindled to below a 15-day supply in July, and that's after Toyota added a third shift at its Baja California, Mexico, plant in April.

In addition to a favorable economy, the new models from GM and Toyota are bringing with them new levels of refinement, capability and size that smaller pickups previously didn't offer. That's helping them lure buyers out of everything from midsize sedans to full-size pickups.

Touch-screen navigation systems, quieter cabins, heated leather seats and premium sound systems are now just as common in a midsize pickup as any other segment. Toyota's 2016 Tacoma will even offer a new Limited trim level for the first time, which adds a moonroof to that list of goodies.

"The compact truck segment had gotten pretty stale and it wasn't competitive with other segments," said Ed Kim, vice president of industry analysis at AutoPacific. "All of a sudden that's no longer the case. The arrival of these trucks is really speaking to a consumer need that has been unfulfilled."



The 2016 Tacoma gets subtle styling updates inside and out. Toyota targets 165,000 annual sales of the pickup in the U.S.

Consumers' increased appetite for sophistication should also bode well for Honda's upcoming Ridgeline truck, set to debut in 2016. The original model -- on sale from 2005 to 2014 -- was derided for not being a "true truck." But consumers should have a newfound appreciation for the added refinement the Ridgeline's unibody platform offers, Kim said.

An uptick in capability and size is another plus for what were once regarded as compact pickups. At 18.7 feet, a long-bed Colorado crew cab is half an inch longer than Chevy's full-size Suburban SUV. The new Tacoma grows about four inches longer to top the Colorado by just more than a half-inch.

This added space, plus increased towing and hauling capacity, has helped GM's Colorado and Canyon in particular lure buyers out of full-size pickups from Chevy, GMC and even Ford, according to Edmunds.com's trade-in data.

Toyota's Tacoma pulls its buyers from a more varied group. The third-most traded in vehicle for a new Tacoma is a Ford F-150; just behind it are Toyota's own Camry and Corolla, according to Edmunds.com.

"There are a lot of people out there that really don't want a giant full-size truck," Kim said. "But they're willing to pay as much for a smaller truck if it means they get the tool to do what they need."

**2016 Toyota Tacoma**

After a decade of dominating the compact-pickup segment, Toyota's aging Tacoma finally gets a replacement, on sale Sept. 10. The styling is subtly updated, but under the skin is a new optional V-6 engine with 42 more horsepower than its predecessor, and a new six-speed automatic transmission. The burly TRD Off Road 4x4 model even gets a standard crawl-control feature that takes the truck up or down even the gnarliest terrain. Prices start at $25,720 for the base four-cylinder 4x2, while a new Limited trim tops the lineup at $38,770. Both prices include shipping.  
• **Powertrain:** 3.5-liter V-6, six-speed automatic transmission, optional part-time four-wheel drive  
• **Technology:** 6.1-inch touch-screen audio system standard, optional 7-inch navigation, standard GoPro camera mount, low-speed crawl control standard on TRD Off Road 4x4  
• **Safety:** 8 airbags and standard rear-vision camera  
• **U.S. sales target:** 165,000 a year  
• **Competitors:** Chevrolet Colorado, GMC Canyon, Nissan Frontier  
• **Strength:** Immense off-road capability, smooth V-6  
• **Weaknesses:** Harsh ride on the road; interior lacks refinement of GM models  
• **Bottom line:** During a press drive on and off road outside Seattle, the Tacoma proved it was happiest getting dirty. The crawl control on the TRD Off Road 4x4 model went up — and down — anything we threw at it. And all models exhibited a toughness Toyota is rightfully proud of. On road, we were less impressed with the harsh ride and noisy interior that couldn't match the refinement of the Chevrolet Colorado and GMC Canyon.

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|  | **Toyota Tacoma 4x4 Double Cab** | **Chevy Colorado 4x4 Crew cab** |
| **Wheelbase** | 140.6 in. | 140.5 in. |
| **Length** | 225.5 in. | 224.9 in. |
| **Width** | 74.4 in. | 74.3 in. |
| **Height** | 70.6 in. | 70.5 in. |
| **Curb weight** | 4,480 lbs. | 4,310 lbs. |
| **V-6 engine** | 3.5-liter V-6 | 3.6-liter V-6 |
| **Horsepower** | 278 @ 6,000 rpm | 305 @ 6,800 rpm |
| **Torque, lbs.-ft.** | 265 @ 4,600 rpm | 269 @ 4,000 rpm |
| **Towing capacity** | 3,500 lbs. | 3,500 lbs. |
| **EPA mpg** | 18 city/23 hwy. | 17 city/24 hwy. |
| **Base price\*** | $31,960 | $31,200 |
| \*Includes shipping | | |
|  |  |  |

*You can reach****David Undercoffler****at*[***undercoffler@crain.com***](mailto:undercoffler@crain.com)*.*

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