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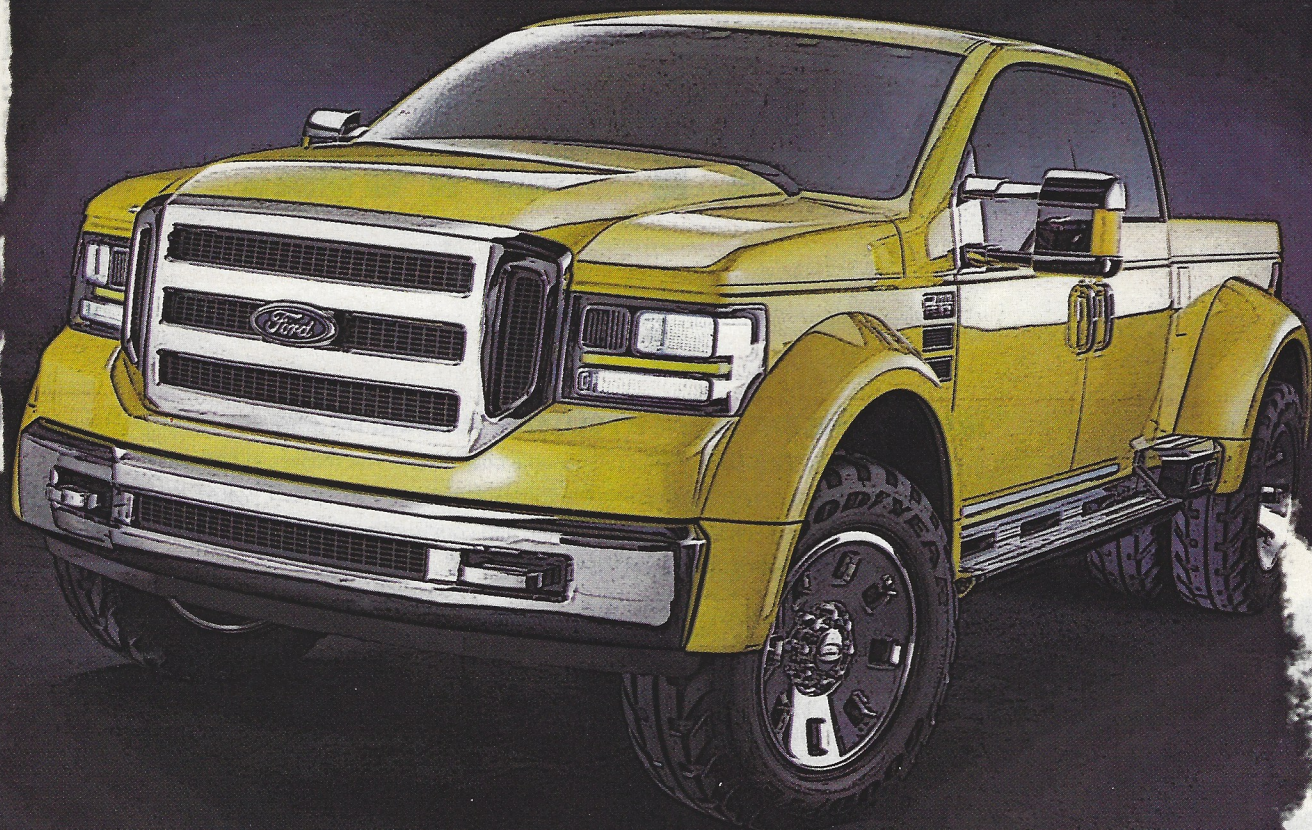
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Full-Size Pickup Design

Why American Pickups
Look the Way They Do,
and What's Next

by **gary witzenburg**

Everyone obsesses about automotive styling. Just look at auto shows, where the aisles overflow with sexy concepts pointing to the direction car design is heading. But how much attention is paid to pickup-truck styling?

We can't help but wonder how, as each new truck is conceived and born, designers are working and scheming to one-up their competitors. We chatted with designers of all the full-size pickups (GM, Ford, Dodge, Nissan, and Toyota) about today's North American market to learn what they're thinking, and where they're going next.

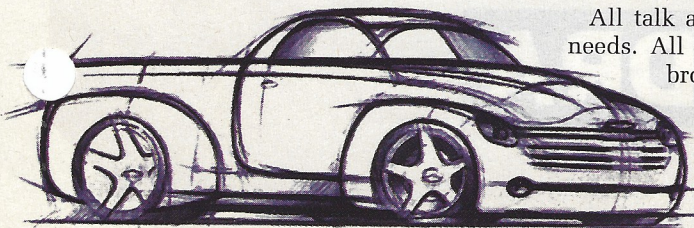
All talk about customer tastes and needs. All emphasize tough, strong, broad-shouldered looks, especially with front ends. However, what buyers need often comes down to capability. So how does one effectively dif-

ferentiate itself to steal (in many cases) brand-loyal customers away from the rest?

Ford truck design director Pat Schiavone puts the design dilemma into perspective: "Truck customers are an interesting breed," he says. "They love their trucks, and they always dislike whatever it is you just did: 'What are you doing to my truck? You're ruining it!' But I believe in my heart that if it feels right to us, ultimately it's going to feel right to the customers.

"You design trucks differently from cars," Schiavone adds. "You start with their capability and functionality and use that as a springboard for their design."

Because GM's pickups are the newer trucks this year, and there are two of them, we talked to the exterior and interior designers who worked on both. Our other four interviewees spoke on both topics.



Approach

CHEVY SILVERADO/GMC SIERRA EXTERIOR



John Cafaro is GM's full-size truck exterior-design director. Prior to this assignment, he honed his talents on Corvettes, Camaros, Firebirds, and Fiero sports cars, among others.

TT: What were your vision and objectives going into this project?

JC: One goal was to create trucks that were as tough-looking as any out there. With the Sierra, we wanted to communicate a sense of power with a tall, vertical grille and a powerful center section through the hood. The Silverado focuses on width—headlamp to headlamp, corner to corner—a more lateral look. One big advantage was that we were allocated money to do specific

sheetmetal for the Chevy and GMC. First time that's happened.

TT: What was your biggest challenge?

JC: Bringing the tight gaps that you see on the best cars in the world into a large body-on-frame vehicle. Getting everything tight, smooth, and consistent. We wanted the stance and toughness but also to raise the bar in quality and refinement. That enabled things like world-class aero numbers. We closed the gaps and tightened the surfaces, and in the wind tunnel, its numbers approached those of the C4 Corvette.

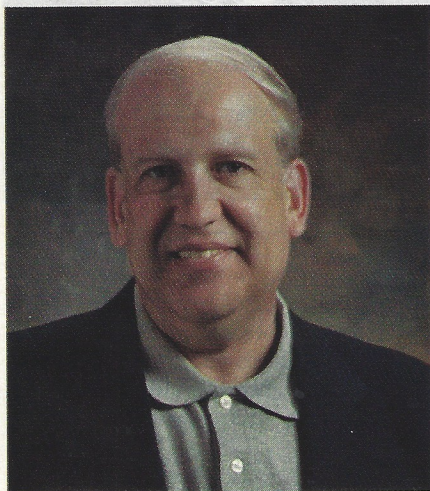
TT: Any major changes in direction?

JC: At one time we were trying some softer shapes, thinking that might be

more modern. We took those to customer clinics, and they didn't want a soft truck. They wanted definition, some muscle in the shape, like a body-builder. There's a distinct style and proportion to an American pickup, and if you stray very far beyond that, you can get into trouble. These trucks push the boundaries—quicker windshield, flush glass, wrap-under doors, beautiful door handles, sculpted shapes in the fenders—yet have real American-truck cues: powerful front, aggressive, wide, stable stance. Then we put another layer of refinement in the lamps and grille. They have dual roles: rugged work partners and beautiful pieces of design.



CHEVY SILVERADO/GMC SIERRA INTERIOR



Dennis Burke is GM's full-size truck interior design director. Before taking on the challenge of redesigning GM's full-size truck interiors, he worked on numerous concept- and production-vehicle exteriors.

TT: What were your vision and objectives going into this project?

DB: To vastly improve every aspect of interior quality: fits, materials, gloss

levels, grains. After that came improved spaciousness, interior storage, and usability. One of the most significant gains was to get the instrument panel down and away from the occupants, which contributes to a more open environment, without sacrificing packaging or storage space.

TT: What was your biggest challenge?

DB: Getting gaps down to equal or better than those of the competition. That required a paradigm shift in thinking in the corporation, and it does add some cost. That Bob Lutz mandated from the top that we were going to be as good as the competition, with no excuses, had a huge effect. Gary White, our VLE, said, "We're going to do the highest-quality interiors," and he opened up his budget to allow that to happen. We have a PQ [perceived quality] team that comes in at every phase and gives an assessment of where we are relative to the competition.

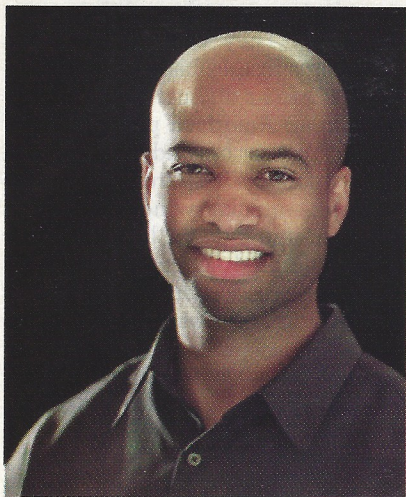
TT: What else is special about these interiors?

DB: We offer two completely different interiors. The work-truck interior is a little more robust, which you expect

in a work truck, and accommodates a bench seat. The premium interior, shared with our new SUVs, has every amenity you get in a Yukon Denali. We use wood accents in the Chevy and metallic accents in the GMC interior, which is called professional grade. By professional grade, we mean an upscale look and a feeling of precision. You can buy a cheap blender or power drill, or you can buy a name-brand professional grade—one that looks more robust, its controls feel more solid. That's the feeling we're trying to convey with GMC.



DODGE RAM



Ralph Gilles is Chrysler Group design vice president for Dodge and Jeep trucks. In previous assignments, he penned numerous concept ve-

hicles and production cars including the Dodge Viper and the highly acclaimed Chrysler 300C and Dodge Magnum.

TT: What were the team's objectives for the current Ram?

RG: When it came to the front end, trying to create this undeniably Dodge face. It's become somewhat of an icon in the last decade, a timeless aesthetic, not overbaked, not trying too hard. Compared with the previous generation, this is much slicker, with cleaner lines and better attention to fit and finish. And that'll keep improving as time goes on.

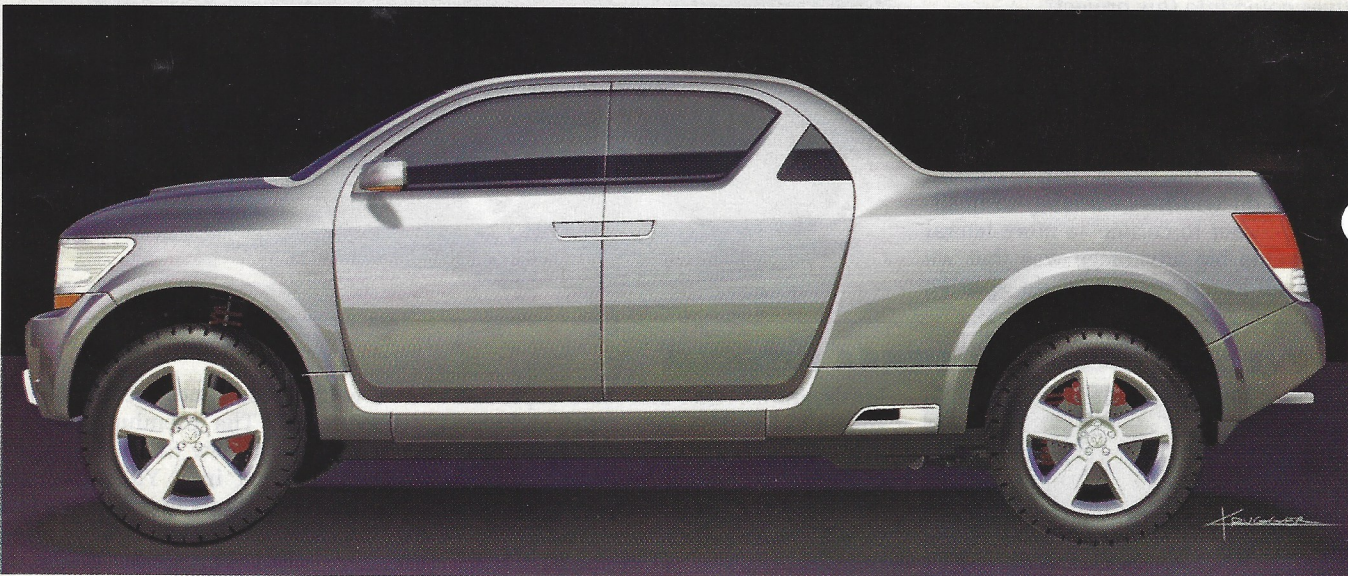
TT: And the interior?

RG: Trying to increase space. For example, people use it as a three-front-passenger vehicle, so we had to come up with some innovations to create a cupholder and storage area that would go up out of the way and allow the maximum amount of legroom. Also, simple

ergonomics. We didn't want to get tricky with a lot of buttons and switches, so we stuck with simple circular knobs and ditched the 4WD lever.

TT: Can you give us a clue on the soon-to-come next generation?

RG: Every time we do a new truck, we fight the icon factor. People want the Ram to look like a Ram, so you don't want something that's so different you alienate your loyalists. It's probably going to be a little bolder than today's Ram, and I think you're going to see a path to premium; everyone is making their trucks more luxurious. Also, fragmenting markets create a pool of more diverse customers, which means a dramatic variety of people you have to satisfy. One thing we'll focus on is the ability to make the truck a chameleon, to change personalities. One word for it is "sweet," in the sense of, "gotta have it!" Stay tuned.



NISSAN TITAN



Diane Allen is a design manager at Nissan Design America, Inc. In addition to her leadership of the design of Nissan's first full-size trucks, she led the NDA team in global design development of the 350Z sports car and the Infiniti M45 luxury sedan.

TT: What were your objectives for the Titan?

DA: Our key guiding words were "massive precision through vanguard design" and "bold and thoughtful." We felt there was a lot of conventional design in the truck world, and our research showed there's a large body of truck buyers open to more progressive design. One umbrella concept was, be-

cause of the success of Xterra, rather than going where a lot of the domestics went, to the farm and the cowboy tradition, we pushed the other side of the spectrum, to this modern adventure lifestyle.

TT: Was there any change in direction during the program?

DA: No, never. Because it shares so much sheetmetal with the Armada, we had to develop both a full-size truck and a full-size SUV. We boiled it down to two sets of designs, and the one that didn't get selected was very handsome, almost pretty. We thought this one had a little more teeth to it, more guts. It fit our product concept of this adventure lifestyle.



TT: How might the Titan design evolve with the next restyle?

DA: Right now it's known as the stylish truck. People have said they're afraid to get it dirty because it looks so stylish. I think we need to move it in a direction where the capability part of the truck is loud and where the styling addresses that capability. Fashion and progressive attitude will stay in it, but we're going to add to the character by making it tougher, with more surface dimension in front and a bigger grille. The way the front is put together, it's a flush quality. We're looking at making the design statement much more dimensional.

FORD F-150



Pat Schiavone is design director for Ford's North American trucks, including Mercury and Lincoln SUVs and crossovers. Prior to this assignment, he directed design of the next generation of Ford cars, and before that led design of the current F-150.

TT: What were your objectives in designing today's F-150?

PS: One thing about the previous F-150 was that some thought it was too soft and aerodynamic. It ended up doing well, but we felt the next one could be just as aerodynamic and a little more trucky. Ford F-150 customers like a big, strong, bold truck, so the Super Duty had a lot of influence on it. We knew we could be bolder with the front end especially, because that's what this customer wants. Fit and finish was another big part of it. A lot of the design development we did was around the fit and finish.

Then, once we got into it, we found something even more dramatic. Working with the marketing group, we came up with what ended up being the most important part of the whole program: the defining of each model of the series, where the XL is a completely different vehicle from the XLT, and the FX4, the Lariat, and the King Ranch. That put the

whole design into hyperspace, because it allowed us to really clarify each one of those products.

TT: And the interior?

PS: We wanted to invent something called tough luxury. We felt truck interiors have been stagnant, so that was a great opportunity to completely redefine the pickup interior. Just because you're driving a truck doesn't mean you don't want a nice interior around you.

TT: Can you give us a clue about the next generation?

PS: You'll see us being a little more dramatic in our future trucks. We're going to have to push the design envelope out as far as we can. The Tonka [concept] was to the current F-150 what the Super Chief is to the next generation. Not every element will reach production, but the Super Chief will influence those products just like the Tonka influenced the current ones.



Full-Size Pickup Design

TOYOTA TUNDRA



Kevin Hunter is vice president, design and studio operations, for Calty Design Research, Inc., Toyota's North American studio. Before that, he was chief designer for the 1996 Tacoma, 2000 Avalon, 2001 RAV4, 2002 Matrix, and 2001 Tokyo Motor Show RSC concept.

TT: *What were your objectives for this new Tundra?*

KH: First, we needed to do an actual full-size truck, to scale it up and make it feel big. On our first few tries, we were deficient in that area—this was the no-excuses truck. The term we coined during the process was, "work hard, play hard." It should look like it can get a job done and function well and should have some fun doing it.

The styling phrase was "power of the fist," which you can see in the profile. It's the blunt, upright front end and the energy that emanates from the rear quarter, thrusting forward in a powerful motion. We wanted to create a bold front identity, so we arrived at this re-

verse trapezoid grille and the double slot. The hard part was appealing to the core American truck buyers' values, but doing it in our own Toyota way. We didn't want to copy what the domestics are doing, but there are core attributes we needed to have to compete in this segment.

TT: *What was your toughest challenge?*

KH: Trying to get the FTX concept into our production engineering package. We spent a lot of time in full-size clay going back and forth between engineering and styling criteria to arrive at the final solution. Everyone understood the importance styling played, so we really had to go after that. We couldn't allow engineering to dictate too much. One area where we struggled was beltline height. The FTX had a very high belt and a compressed cabin to give it some character. But to create a useful truck, we had to lower the beltline quite a bit. From a styling standpoint, I wish we could've raised it up slightly to give it more attitude. **TT**



Future Truck?

The final question was fully intended to throw our designers a curve. We asked each, independent of brand, what the future of pickup design might be. For space reasons, we edited each down to a key sentence or two.

HUNTER—Truck buyers tend to be conservative, so we have to be careful how far forward we look in evolving the traditional truck proportion and purpose.

ALLEN—You're going to see a lot more variety, more adventure, more military character, more progressive design, and a lot more expression.

CAFARO—The role of the truck as a work vehicle won't change, but

it could be constructed differently. Electronic features and innovative materials will be key.

BURKE—You'll see the interior evolve, with more configurability and much greater flexibility to let the customer tailor the space to his or her needs.

SCHIAVONE—It's not a question of size, it's a question of efficiency. I'd love to see a truck as capable as what we have now able to get 35 or 40 mpg.

GILLES—You'll see a redefinition of the light truck as it becomes an alternative to other forms of transportation, with aerodynamics playing a much bigger role.—G.W.