

TEST DRIVE

By: Winfred B. Cross



1994 Ford Ranger Splash

photo/Calvin Ferguson

Ford has always had the better idea when it comes to putting fun into a truck.

The company found its Flareside F150 not only to be fun, but popular. So popular, the quick thinkers at Ford decided to let the redesigned Ranger in on the fun. Thus, the birth of the Splash.

The Splash is simply a Ranger with a sport or "flareside" bed. Color-keyed mirrors, sliding rear window, color-keyed bumpers and snappy graphics round out the package. It's eye catching. Lots of truck owners sneaked a peek while I was driving around town.

The Splash's interior is like that of any other Ranger - or Mazda B Series trucks (they are essentially the same as the Ford except for cosmetics). The dash is clean with a number of useful gauges displayed in an attractive way. My test truck was an extended cab version, which had lots of room. The comfortable bucket seats were separated by a useful console which had space for CDs, cassettes and other odds and ends.

The fold-away jump seats behind the bucket seats allow two extra passengers to ride in reasonable comfort for short distances. With the seats stowed, there was an abundance of space to store stuff behind the seats. A security cover was included to hide all your stuff.

Under the Splash's hood lies a 4.0 liter V6 that produced 165 horsepower, which is more than enough to move the vehicle down the road briskly. It's not very noisy for a truck, but Ford's passenger car engines have nothing to worry about.

The Splash's ride was a bit unforgiving, due in part to the four-wheel-drive configuration. On certain stretches of uneven pavement the truck bobbed and weaved like a talentless prizefighter. But most of the time the ride was comfortable and controlled.

The four-speed automatic performed very well. Shifts weren't very noticeable. The transmission did hunt for gears occasionally, especially on steep grades.

As for the four-wheel drive system, I didn't use it much. I punched the shift-on-the-fly button once and it engaged flawlessly. I didn't get a real hankering to go mud-bogging, so I didn't. Ford doesn't get many complaints so it must work well.

If I had any complaints, it was about the size of the bed. The flared wheel wells eat up a lot of space. It looks good but isn't practical. Luckily I didn't have to carry around a bunch of stuff.

But few folks will buy this truck for its ability to haul stuff. That what's regular Rangers are for. This is a feel-good vehicle that you take down to the beach and have fun with. Of course, you can do work in it if you wish. It's still a Ford.

The base price for my test vehicle was \$18,628. A preferred equipment package which includes the splash package was \$477. The 4.0 liter engine was an extra \$179. The automatic transmission was \$990; limited-slip axle \$252; flip-out windows \$49; speed control and tilt wheel \$395; air conditioning \$806; AM/FM stereo with CD \$370; bucket seats \$361 and power window/lock

group \$379.

Deducting a \$477 discount and adding \$460 for freight, the as-tested price came to \$22,869.

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