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The New Silverado Better Be a Grand Slam—or GM's in Trouble

by Mark Williams

Classic flare designs typically create a full arch over both front and rear of the wheel opening. The new Silverado's flare starts at the front headlights, then dives over the opening. The look is rugged and, some might say, a bit odd. GMC front flares are softer and more traditional.

Even SUVs and pickups will have distinct characteristics and grilles. Headlights will be independent units, different for GMC, Chevrolet, Denali, and Cadillac.



Unlike its familial SUV bumpers, the Silverado has kept a more traditional-looking bumper setup. With gaps significantly reduced in size and a low-hanging air dam pushing air down and around the front of the truck, the new front end not only channels more cool air into the engine, but also gets rid of extraneous air around the sides of the tires for increased aerodynamics.

The front suspension was originally developed for the pickup truck but worked well for the SUV engineers. The new coil-over-shock setup allows for a great range of control, yet still keeps the necessary strength for carrying heavy loads.

Expectations

Look for more headroom, legroom, and hip-room from all three cab configurations (regular, extended, crew). Extended-cab models will have rear doors that open 170 degrees to allow for full pass-through loading. Likewise, rear seats flip up to allow for substantial loading volume. All rear-seat hardware is out of sight.

Continuing the squared-off design, the Chevy's rear flares bulge into the bed body, creating a look akin to that of the Silverado HD 3/4- and one-ton dualies.

GM engineers started from a blank sheet of paper that helped them design the exact frame they needed. Hydroformed to precise specs, the frame allows for chassis-tuning data not previously utilized.

Silverados will come standard with 17-inch steel rims, but offer 18- and 20-inch aluminum wheels as options. GM tells us it expects the new Silverado to offer more options than any other vehicle sold in the U.S.

The new Silverado's NHT Max Trailer package uses a heavy-duty version of the four-speed automatic, the L76 6.0-liter V-8, 4.10:1 ring-and-pinion gears, and unique rear leaf springs. In extended-cab 4x4 configuration, the half-ton is reported to be capable of towing 10,500 pounds comfortably. Maximum payload capability is reported to be over 2000 pounds in regular-cab configuration.



It's no secret our two American car companies are in dire straights. Neither Ford nor GM can afford any product mistakes, especially with their high-volume, solid-profit half-ton pickup trucks. To say there's a lot riding on the new GMT900 Chevy Silverado and GMC Sierra would be a gargantuan understatement. And although GM won't tell you this, we suspect this truck has to be a hit to keep things afloat. Ford, Toyota, and Dodge have come to market with vastly improved products since the last Silverado came out in 1999—Nissan even put a brand-new truck in the corral. And Toyota's about to come out with another Tundra, on sale just months after the new Silverado makes its debut. The competition has gotten stiffer, and a miss here—in the most profitable, highest-volume segment in the largest automotive market in the world—could stop General Motors in its tracks.

We got an early look at the new platform and spoke to some of the engineers who've spent the last five years developing the new GMT900 trucks. Much of the technology that went into the currently popular full-size SUVs (Tahoe, Yukon, Suburban, Avalanche, Escalade, Denali) came from the work they were doing on the GMT900 pickup trucks. But the engineers aren't regretful—they're happy the Tahoe, Escalade, and Yukon are selling well (all three sales numbers are far above last year's), mostly because they feel it could be a predictor of what happens when their truck gets to market. As with the SUVs, there's little carryover on this new platform. The foundation starts with an entirely new frame, with most of the engineering effort going into the all-new front coilover frontend and recalibrated rear-leaf suspension. Dynamics engineers were tasked with making the unloaded ride and handling far superior

to the previous torsion-bar setup, while increasing payload and towing stability at or near maximum load and carrying weights. To achieve this goal, they widened the track and incorporated a new rack-and-pinion steering unit. They also used advanced computer software to more accurately tune leaf-spring ratings, shock valving, and frame harmonics, and matched those to various load scenarios.

The maximum towing numbers for the new pickup are said to be a class-leading 10,500 pounds, with a maximum payload rating of 2070 pounds, which also is best in its class. However, that might not be the most impressive detail about the new Silverado and Sierra, especially now that we can see what they look like.

Typically conservative to a fault (the HHR and SSR the exceptions), GM has never taken many styling risks with its trucks. In fact, several people have complained that the Chevy and GMC looked





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more like identical twins than cousins. Not any more. From the unique hood lines and fender flares to dramatic headlight and grille treatments, the distinctiveness of the two family members will be more apparent. Further, to its credit, GM didn't allow the pickup-truck grilles to be simple clones from those on the SUVs. The GMC unit is like a large, open mouth, while the Chevy's offers the more familiar three-bar slats, with a prominent Bow Tie in the center. Although huge improvements have been made in aerodynamics (thanks to increased tilt to the windshield, significantly decreased body gaps, and pronounced lower wind dams), GM truck designers fought to keep the distinct bumper, which is visually separate from the body. The SUVs, for the sake of pushing more air over and around the front face, have practically molded the front bumper into the rest of the body.

In addition, each of the GMT900 trucks will have unique hood designs—the GMC

2007 Silverado HD Coming Soon

Not long after the all-new Silverado/Sierra goes on sale, the Silverado and Sierra Heavy Duty trucks will get a makeover. Although not a lot is known at this

stage, expect improvements with the chassis and frame, and significant upgrades to the interior. Five wheelbases, three cab configurations, and two bed lengths will be offered.

Expect the 6.0-liter V-8 and 6.6-liter Duramax V-8 to be the only engines offered for next year, but there may be a big change coming for the next model year. Likewise, expect Chassis Cab models to only use regular and extended cabs. We'll have more to report in the coming months.—M.W.



with a single pronounced bulge, the Chevy with a wide double-crease look. Chevy will get the more chiseled, concrete-block-looking flares and more defined cuts, whereas the GMC will have smoother, almost polished humps over the wheel arches.

Silverados will come in LS, LT, and LTZ configurations with five different engines available—a 4.3-liter V-6 (195 horsepower/260 pound-feet of torque); a 4.8-liter V-8 (285/295), two 5.3-liter V-8s (310/335), one of which is E85 capable, and a 6.0-liter V-8 (345/380). All pickups get the carryover four-speed automatic (albeit a heavier-duty version for the 6.0-liter V-8), except for the new GMC Sierra Denali—that not only gets the Escalade's 403-horsepower (detuned for the GMC), 6.2-liter V-8, but also the all-new six-speed transmission. The 5.3- and 6.0-liter will offer Active Fuel Management for fuel savings. GM reports fuel savings over similarly equipped non-AFM models is over 10 percent. Current predictions have the EPA estimates for the 5.3-liter hovering around 16 mpg in the city, 21 highway. Expect that number to improve when the six-speed trans-





mission replaces the four-speed (both column shifters with an improved hand-contoured grip) in the SUVs and pickups in the next model year.

Inside, the GMT900s are bigger, longer, and taller. LTZ interiors will instantly remind drivers of the vastly improved current Tahoe and Yukon interior. Just about the only difference to the dash and gauge setup is that the four-wheel-drive dial is on the right side of the steering column on pickups (found on the left side on SUVs), and there's an added transmission-temperature gauge in the cluster. In addition, knowing that some truck buyers aren't going to want such an upscale dash and center console, the bench-seat configuration allows for a completely different dash and instrument-panel setup, keeping many of the same textures and fitment advantages, but with a flatter surface. Cool features include a 20.0-liter center console/armrest, locking underseat storage, two glove boxes, and a modular cupholder able to hold a Big Gulp. Although the models we saw were early production units, we can say both dash choices are stunning, with the Work Truck (GM calls it the "Pure American Pickup" dash) option looking light-years ahead of the GMT800 dash design.

Other standout features and options include extended-cab rear doors that swing open almost 180 degrees (the hinges are a work of art); rear seats that fold flat into the cab wall; remote start; StabiliTrak and rollover mitigation



standard on all crew cabs (an option on regular and extended cabs); available 18- and 20-inch wheels; and items like a cargo rail system for bikes, lockable trunks, dividers, and extenders.

From our preliminary look, the GM strategy is clear: Make sure this new truck has everything the competitors have, and more. Maybe that's why so many resources and man-hours were dedicated to arguably the most important new vehicle GM has produced for the U.S. market in decades. Unfortunately, the fact remains that even if this is the best truck ever made (certainly, from what we've seen, it's the best pickup GM has ever made), there are looming factors that could conspire to keep buyers away from the Chevy Silverado or GMC Sierra. If that happens, there may be nothing left in the bag of tricks to save GM from extinction. **TT**

2007 Chevrolet Silverado



Base price range	\$17,000-\$35,000
Vehicle layout	Front engine, 2WD, 4WD, 3, 4, 5, 6 pass
Engines	4.3L/195-hp V-6; 4.8L/285-hp V-8; 5.3L/310-hp V-8; 6.0L/345-hp V-8; 6.2L/385-hp V-8
Transmissions	4-speed auto; 6-speed auto
Curb weight range, lb	4700-5200
Wheelbases, in	119.0, 133.0, 133.7, 143.5, 157.5
EPA city/hwy fuel econ, mpg	16/21 (5.3L, mfr est)
On sale in U.S.	October 2006