

Nissan Titan gets more muscle to take on the heavies in the pickup market

But dealers need to do some heavy lifting when it comes to sales and service



The 2016 Nissan TITAN XD, which made its world debut at the 2015 North American International Auto Show in Detroit, is set to go on sale in the United States and Canada beginning in late 2015.

BY LAWRENCE PAPOFF

Nissan says it's serious about selling more pickup trucks. To prove it, the automaker is coming to market with the redesigned Titan. The first member of the Titan family, the XD Crew Cab with an optional 5.0L V8 diesel engine, will debut this spring.

Nissan reps stress that this is not just any diesel engine; it's a Cummins diesel engine.

The automaker believes that any truck equipped with a Cummins engine will turn heads, gain instant credibility and, most important of all, conquer in the brutally competitive pickup market.

Canadian pickup truck sales for 2014 saw Ford's F-Series top 126,000 units with General Motors' Sierra/Silverado at over 90,000. FCA's Ram was roughly 3,400 behind with 86,590 units sold. Lagging way behind in a distant fifth was Titan with only 3,022 sold. So the Titan with a 310 hp/555lb.ft torque and maximum towing capacity of 12,000-lb./5443 kg has its work cut out for it.

Nissan reps are confident the 2016 Titan is up to the task and may have carved out a niche in the market already.

"No one is offering a light-duty pickup with a V8 diesel engine and the towing capabilities this one has," explains Bert Brooks, Nissan Canada's senior product planning manager.

"It really is without direct competition unless you compare it to the three-quarter ton offerings that are out there right now. But they will be much higher up price-wise than we intend to go and we have a V8 diesel you can't find in any other one-half ton truck."

Brooks says Nissan studied the truck market carefully. It found that the three-quarter ton pickups were growing more muscular and more expensive over the last decade.

"Upwards of 20,000 pounds of towing capability is really beyond the requirements of many of the consumers in the marketplace.

"We've studied the market and we see customers bouncing back and forth, buying the 1/2 ton then buying the 3/4 ton."

He says the automaker's studies showed that truck owners would be content with around 10 to 12,000 lb. of tow-

ing capacity.

"Which is where we've positioned this vehicle. It's more than a 1/2 ton but not a 3/4 ton in terms of how we're going to bring it to market."

While he won't disclose MSRP, he assures that the XD Crew Cab will sport a lower-price tag than the competition.

Nissan reckons that increasing sales means more of its dealers will have to start selling trucks. But first, they have to grasp the business opportunity.

"It's tremendous! None of our competitors has a 1/2 ton V8 diesel with a towing capability between 1/2 and 3/4 tons. I think they will recognize this as a way to get a foothold in the market as we move forward and offer the full line of vehicles that will be there for them."

Tomohiko Yao, Nissan's chief marketing manager for trucks and SUVs, argues that there is a solid business case

for investing in the Titan.

"Dealers need to understand the market is quite significant. It is 17 per cent of TIV (total industry volume). That's a significant market we are missing out on right now."

He says Nissan field staff will be going out to "reengage" the dealer body, at least in the 60 key truck markets.

To compete, dealers will have to train sales staff to deal with sophisticated customers and train service department staff to service diesel engines as well as equip and expand service departments to cope with the larger-sized vehicles. Then there's the need to devote Titan-sized showroom space as well.

Nissan knows that.

"I can't give you details, but we will be coming up with a program that will help the dealers sell more trucks," Yao says.

Pickup Battleground

One of the hottest – and toughest – segments in Canada is large, light-duty pickups. Notorious for deep customer loyalty, any conquest sale is a boon for automakers competing in this space.

With a totally redesigned offering in Titan, Nissan hopes to improve upon its 2014 performance when it hits showrooms later this year.

	2014	2013	% CHANGE
Ford F-Series	126,277	120,219	5.0
GM Silverado/Sierra	90,005	84,398	6.6
Ram Truck	86,590	78,793	9.9
Toyota Tundra	9,769	7,536	29.6
Nissan Titan	3,022	3,410	-11.4
Honda Ridgeline	1,803	2,122	-15.0
Chevrolet Avalanche	11	2,546	-99.6
Cadillac Escalade EXT	6	219	-97.3
TOTAL LARGE PICKUP	317,483	299,243	6.1