



Getting the Most Bang for the Buck From the Used-Truck Market

The used-truck market is full of relatively inexpensive best buys from which you can build a cool sport truck.

BEST BUYS

BUDGET BUILT STREET TRUCKS

By Kevin Wilson

The increasing popularity of light trucks over the past 5 years has forced manufacturers to increase production to meet the demand. An offshoot is that there are now more used trucks for sale than ever before. Buying used has become an attractive option for sport truck enthusiasts who are on a budget and want to build a killer custom without spending their inheritance.

A true sport truck enthusiast who's shopping for a used truck will keep an eye toward customizing possibilities when scanning the classifieds or used-car lots. Certain makes, models

and years lend themselves to easy sport truck conversions, while others lack styling or aftermarket parts, or both. To make shopping easier and to give you a rough idea of what's hot on the used-truck market, we've compiled a few of the best buys for the sport truck enthusiast. The prices are the averages. They may be higher or lower in your area depending on what the market holds. And since trucks are still hot, used trucks are retaining more value than in years past.

CHEVROLET C1500/GMC SIERRA

Probably the most sought after sport truck of all time is the '88-'95 Chevy C1500. Only minor cosmetic changes differentiate the '88-'94 models, with the '95 receiving a complete interior makeover and a driver-side airbag. The base engine for the truck is the 160hp 4.3-liter that's mated to a five-speed manual. The V8 options include the 5.0- and 5.7-liter engines, with the 5.7 being the strongest of the bunch at 210 horsepower and 300 lb-ft of torque.

Among the best buys are fully loaded Silverado trim level standard- and extended-cab models fitted with the 5.7-liter engine and the four-speed automatic. Expect to pay

between \$5500 and \$7500 for '88 and '89 models, depending upon the options and the mileage. Later-model extended cabs ('92-'93) with the 5.7-liter V8 run upward of \$12,500 to \$15,500.

In 1994 Chevy offered shortbed versions of the Work Truck (W/T) equipped with the 4.3-liter V6 and either a five-speed manual or four-speed automatic. The W/T is a no-frills flier that was less than \$14,000 new. Older longbed versions with automatics run about \$12,000 (the high side) for '92-'93 models, although we found a '94 shortbed V6 Chevy for \$12,000 from a private party. Older W/T models, such as a '90, run about \$9000 or less. You'll also find standard-cab models of this age for roughly the same price.

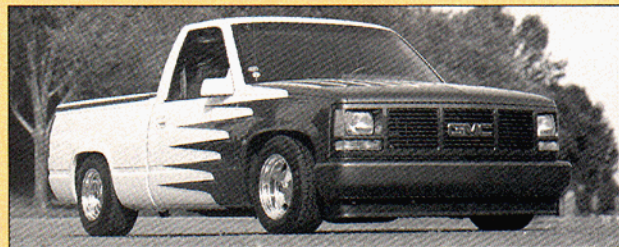
Probably the most sought after sport truck of all time is the extended-cab Chevy.



Base models, equipped with the 4.3-liter V6 and the five-speed, are fairly inexpensive and make a great starting point for a sport truck. This scalloped GMC is a perfect example.



An unlimited supply of aftermarket sources make it relatively easy to transform the extended cab into a true custom.

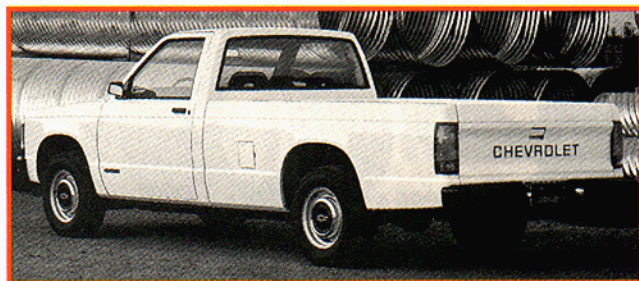


CHEVROLET S-10/GMC S-15

Introduced in 1982, the Chevy S-10 pickup is one of the most prolific models on the used-truck market and also ranks as one of the best buys. Initially the truck was offered with a 2.2-liter four-cylinder and a four-speed tranny, while the 2.8-liter V6 debuted a year later in extended-cab models. In 1985 the 2.2 was replaced with the 2.5-liter four-cylinder, with electronic fuel injection appearing on the 2.8-liter V6 a year later. In 1988 the 160hp 4.3-liter V6 was introduced as an optional engine, and in 1992 the optional 195hp version of the 4.3-liter engine—coded the L35—was introduced. The last model of the “old” body style (1993) featured the 4.3-liter as the only V6 powerplant. It was mated to an electronic four-speed automatic.

Budget buyers should opt for four-cylinder four-speed shortbed versions; '83-'85 vintages can be had for \$2000 or less. Extended-cab models of that same vintage—fitted with the carbureted 2.8-liter V6—run a little more at \$3000 to \$4500, although we found a rough '85 extended-cab model for approximately \$3550 in the *Truck Trader*. Expect to pay a bit more for 4.3-liter-equipped models and extended-cab truck's fitted with the 4.3-liter engine. Standard-cab '92-'93 models average \$10,000, while extended-cab trucks of the same vintage run upward of \$12,000.

In 1992 GMC had a limited production run of the Sonoma GT, a high-performance two-wheel-drive version fitted with the L35 195hp 4.3-liter V6 and an automatic transmission. The truck featured special body cladding, a front-end treatment and a gauge package similar to the all-wheel-drive Syclone. A few of these rare birds are still around and run in the neighborhood of \$12,000 and up. Most are fully loaded.



The Chevy S-10 remains one of the best buys on the used-truck market. Bargain basement models fitted with the 2.5-liter four-cylinder and four-speed manual tranny are easy to obtain.

In 1992 GMC produced the Sonoma GT outfitted with the 195hp 4.3-liter V6, an automatic tranny and a special body package. These rare birds are an excellent find but will cost you a few bucks.



The hot ticket for the sport truck enthusiast is a late-model shortbed 4.3-liter-equipped truck.

FORD F-150

While not as popular as Chevys are with the sport truck crowd, the F-150 has always been a good, solid pickup. In 1987 the F-150 received an overdue body freshening, with a second restyling in 1992. Multi-point fuel injection was added to all F-150 powerplants in 1988, including the 4.9-liter inline-six and the 5.0- and 5.8-liter V8s.

There are plenty of aftermarket parts available for both body styles of the F-150, including lowering kits, billet grilles, body kits and performance goodies. Budget-minded buyers should look for '88-'91 models fitted with either of the two V8s. Prices for '88-'91 standard-cab models start around \$4500, although we spotted a high-miler '88 SuperCab with the 5.0-

liter for \$4500 in Southern California. We even found an '88 standard-cab 4.9-liter six-cylinder model with an automatic tranny for a bargain basement price of \$2900.

The best buy of the bunch is the

Flareside, which was introduced in 1992. These normally come fully loaded and fitted with either the 185hp 5.0-liter V8 or the 210hp 5.8-liter V8, both mated to automatics. Used Flaresides run \$12,500 and up.



The '87-'91 F-150s are readily available on the used market for reasonable prices.



Introduced in 1992, the Ford Flareside has become a popular platform for building a killer custom.



The Ford F-150 has been America's best-selling pickup for 16 years running.



With the right parts and some lowering, the '87-'91 F-150 can be turned into a respectable sport truck.



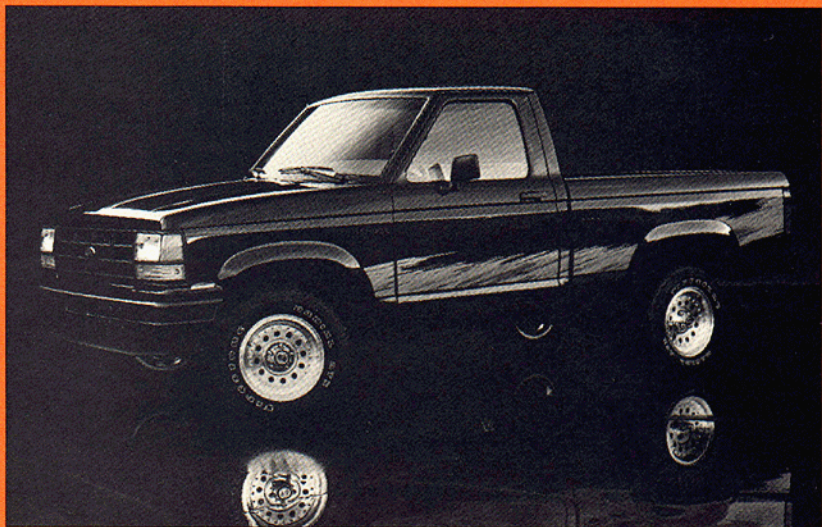
This tricked-out Flareside, sporting 17-inch billet wheels and a wild paint scheme, demonstrates what can be done with a late-model Ford.

FORD RANGER

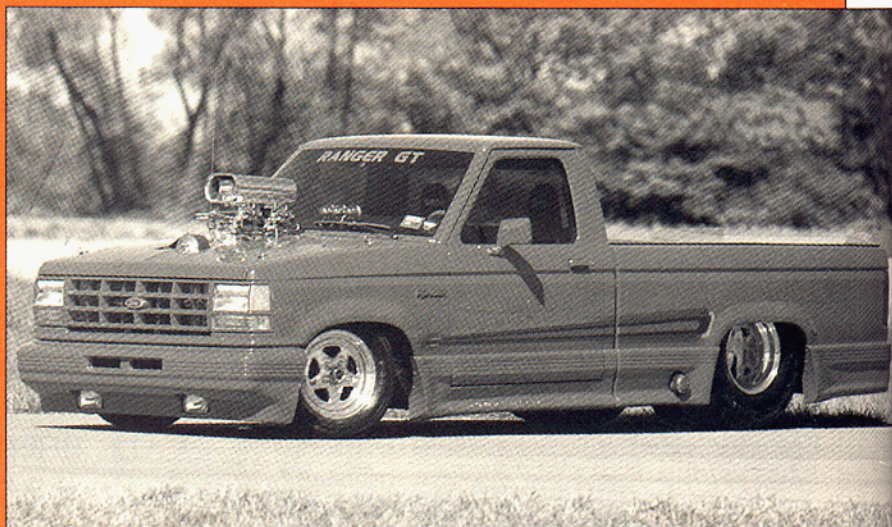
Ford also lays claim to having the best-selling compact pickup in America with the Ranger. Like the Chevy S-10, the Ranger was introduced in the fall of 1982 as an '83 model with a 2.3-liter four-banger and an optional 2.8-liter V6. In 1985 the four-banger received electronic fuel injection, and a year later the 2.8-liter V6 was replaced with the fuel-injected 2.9-liter V6. In 1989 the truck's front end received an aerodynamic makeover, and the 2.3-liter twin-plug four-cylinder was introduced. A 160hp 4.0-liter V6 was added in 1990, and a year later the

3.0-liter V6 replaced the 2.9-liter V6. In 1993 the current body style and the Splash made their debuts.

Like the S-10, there are plenty of low-buck four-banger five-speed Rangers on the used-truck market. For example, an '85 four-cylinder five-speed runs about \$2500 in Southern California, while '87 models are listed for around \$3300. A SuperCab Ranger fitted with the V6 of the '88 vintage lists for around \$5500, with new models such as the '90 and '91 running in the neighborhood of \$8000 to \$9500. The best buy for the performance-oriented enthusiast is a standard or SuperCab model fitted with the 4.0-liter V6.



The Ford Ranger is the best-selling compact pickups on the market. The standard-cab four-cylinder five-speed model is also a great buy for the budget-minded.



While a little more radical than most customs, this late-model Ranger—sporting a blown small-block and Pro Street suspension—is a good example of why the Ranger is so popular among sport truck enthusiasts.

DODGE DAKOTA

No discussion on best sport truck buys would be complete without mentioning the Dodge Dakota. This midsize pickup is slowly gaining popularity with performance-oriented enthusiasts who recognize the potential of putting a V8 into a midsize truck. Introduced in 1987, the Dakota is offered in shortbed, longbed and Club Cab models, and it was fitted with either the 2.5-liter inline four-cylinder or the 3.9-liter V6. In 1991 the front of the truck was restyled and the 5.2-liter V8 was initially offered, cranking out 165 horses. In 1992 the 3.9-liter V6 received sequential multiport fuel injection, boosting the horsepower to 180. That same year an all-new 5.2-liter V8 was added, rated at 235 horsepower.

Dodge also made a limited number of convertible Dakotas in 1989 and 1990; a handful of V8-equipped Shelybs were made in 1990, also fit-

ted with the 5.2-liter V8. The convertibles are a steal at less than \$10,000—if you can find them. The limited-production Shelby goes for similar cash. Budget buyers should keep an eye out for rare four-cylinder manual shortbeds of the '90 or older vintage for around \$6000, while performance nuts should look for '92 and newer V8 models, which run approximately \$11,000 and up for a standard-cab automatic, and \$12,100 and up for a Club Cab model.



The '89 Shelby was a limited-production truck that ushered in V8 availability.



The Dodge Dakota is the sleeper of the sport truck set, but its 235hp V8 says a lot about the truck's off-the-shelf performance potential.

TOYOTA PICKUP

For the budget-minded buyer and mini-truck aficionado, the Toyota pickup stands at the forefront. Available in standard- and extra-cab configurations and equipped with the 150hp 3.0-liter V6 or the economical 116hp 2.4-liter V6, the Toyota is one of the most popular mini-trucks on the market. They're

also fairly inexpensive if you opt for the bargain-basement standard-cab model with the four-cylinder and the five-speed tranny. We saw several '90-'92 models in the *Southern California Truck Trader* for between \$4800 and \$6500. An Xtra-cab SR5 loaded to the hilt of the same vintage runs \$8000 and up.



The Toyota pickup is a perfect buy for first-time used-truck buyers wanting plenty of bang for their buck.



Many aftermarket sport truck accessories are available for the Toys, ranging from mild to wild. This late-model Pro Streeter is on the wild side, sporting a tube frame and an alcohol-breathing small-block.

BEST BUYS

HOW OLD IS IT?

If you're not sure of the actual age of a truck, the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) will tell the tale. The letter in the 10th position tells the year, starting from 1981. The VIN is located on a special metal tag on the driver's side of the dash at the base of the windshield.

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|--------|--------|
| B=1981 | J=1988 |
| C=1982 | K=1989 |
| D=1983 | L=1990 |
| E=1984 | M=1991 |
| F=1985 | N=1992 |
| G=1986 | P=1993 |
| H=1987 | Q=1994 |



The Chevy 454 SS is a great buy on the used market. It'll pass everything but a gas station.

GMC created the ultimate super pickup—the all-wheel-drive 280hp Syclone.



One of the Syclone's shortcomings was a lack of cab space, so GMC used the same drivetrain and powerplant in the S-Blazer-based Typhoon.

PERFORMANCE PAST

Several performance trucks came and went in the early '90s. Among them were Chevrolet's 454 SS—with a production run from 1990 to 1993—and GMC's Syclone and Typhoon. The 454 SS sported 7.3 liters of big-block power stuffed into a shortbed pickup. The Syclone and Typhoon both boasted a turbocharged 4.3-liter V6 that cranked out 280 horsepower and 350 lb-ft of torque, distributed through a heavy-duty automatic tranny and an all-wheel-drive system. The Syclone was pro-

duced in 1991 and 1992, while the S-Blazer-based Typhoon had a similar production run between 1992 and 1993.

A new, fully loaded 454 SS ran just shy of \$20,000, while the Syclone tipped the scales at around \$25,000 and the Typhoon at close to \$30,000. Both the Syclone and Typhoon could dust Corvettes, with 0-to-60-mph runs under 5 seconds. Since these trucks are somewhat rare, prices vary by market, although older 454 SS trucks now run about \$13,000 or less. A used Syclone runs about \$16,000, and a Typhoon still hangs in around \$20,000. ■