

Ford Wins Most Awards Ever From Popular Mechanics

Ford Motor Co. set a new record in [Popular Mechanics](#) Automotive Excellence Awards by winning more categories in a single year than any other automaker in the history of the awards.

Ford vehicles winning 2010 awards, which recognize the best in design, execution and technology, were the: 2010 Ford Mustang Shelby GT500, Best Performance; 2010 Ford Transit Connect; Best Workhorse; and the 2010 Ford F-150 SVT Raptor, Best Off-Road Ability.

"Ford's sweep of three categories in this year's awards speaks to the onslaught of great products coming from Dearborn," said Ben Stewart, automotive editor, *Popular Mechanics*

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Best Off-Road Ability - 2010 Ford Raptor



Ford's Special Vehicle Team—the same engineers who developed the Mustang Shelby GT500—transformed the F-150 pickup into the most capable high-speed 4WD truck ever produced. The Raptor team tuned the suspension on a brutal 62-mile loop in a remote part of the California desert.

The Ford F-150 Raptor looks tough enough to run straight down the Baja Peninsula, race across the Mexican mainland and then continue roaring down through South America until it plows across Antarctica. It is the most extreme high-speed 4x4 pickup ever produced. It looks simply ferocious with its swollen flanks, aggressive stance, visibly rugged suspension pieces and thumping 35-inch-tall BF Goodrich off-road tires.

The powertrain is still pure F-150, with a 320-hp 5.4-liter V8 linked to a six-speed automatic, though an exclusive 400-hp 6.2-liter "Boss" V8 will soon become an option. Engineers widened the F-150's track by 7 inches with new upper and lower control arms. The lower arms are chamfered like a skidplate, so rocks can slide underneath without hanging the truck up. To allow

the Raptor to glide over obstacles and take the punishment of hard landings, the Special Vehicle Team (SVT) chose specifically tuned internal-bypass Fox Racing shocks. There's nothing exotic about how the Raptor moves over pavement. But the thrills off-road are mighty indeed-the truck is absolutely magical. Whoops, whoop-dees and whoop-dee-dooos all get swallowed up by the Raptor's suspension with casual disdain. At speeds that would lead to jail time when practiced on any interstate, the Raptor can cruise over yard-deep gullies as if they were speed bumps at a Wal-Mart.

Amazingly, while all of the SVT's changes are designed to aid the Raptor's off-road ability, they don't exact a toll in truck utility. The Raptor is rated to tow 6000 pounds and carry a maximum payload of 1020 pounds. A truck that works as hard as it plays? Sign us up.

Best Performance - 2010 Ford Mustang Shelby GT500



The GT500's menacing maw gobbles air to feed a hungry, supercharged 5.4-liter V8. This is old-school Detroit muscle, yet the Mustang offers a level of refinement previous hot Fords have lacked. The GT500's chassis is more sophisticated than any Mustang in the car's 46-year history.

The 21st-century muscle car wars have a new superpower to contend with: the Mustang Shelby GT500, the baddest of all Mustangs. This 540-hp street terror will rocket through the quarter-mile in just 12.6 seconds- trouncing its Detroit competitors by a wide margin. Even better, Ford's Special Vehicle Team made sure the GT500 sticks to the corners and stops like a proper sports car. The chassis is wonderfully competent and makes it just as fun to attack the back roads as it is to tear down the quarter-mile. The steering is quick, light and devoid of slop.

This confident handling wasn't achieved by sacrificing the visceral thrill we want in a ponycar, either. Ford has quieted the supercharger, so the burbly V8 exhaust is more audible. The twin-plate clutch is now much lighter and it engages smoothly, a perfect ally to that cue-ball shifter and the well-defined gates it engages. The brakes are always reassuring, and the pedal is close

enough to the throttle for easy heel-and-toe work. And somehow lurid, sideways, tire-smoking burnouts never, ever get old in this car.

Part of the magic here is in the details. The designers employed a deft hand, including small, subtle details like stitched-in seat stripes and an aggressive chin spoiler.

Sure, the GT500's near \$50,000 price is in Corvette territory. But this is a thrill ride that's worth every penny. Is this the best Mustang ever? Oh yeah.

Best Work-Horse Vehicle - 2010 Ford Transit-Connect



2010 Ford Transit-Connect

For generations, the default vehicle for plumbers, contractors and delivery drivers has been the full-size van. The pressures of the economy, ever-increasing urban congestion and the fluctuating price of gasoline could move them to smaller rigs like the Transit Connect. The size is just right, with a low, flat floor that can be loaded through any of the three cargo doors.

Powered by a thrifty four-cylinder engine driving the front wheels, the van returns 22 mpg city and 25 on the highway, is low enough to slide into many garages and can handle a 1600-pound payload. There's also Ford's Tool Link, a system that builds RFID sensors into the van so that at the press of a button the driver can see an inventory of all the tools aboard.

The Transit Connect could also be a fun utility truck for the outdoor enthusiast-135 cubic feet can hold an awful lot of camping gear.