

Ford has high hopes with resurrected Ranger

Ian Thibodeau, The Detroit News Published 12:00 a.m. ET Feb. 11, 2019 | Updated 11:21 a.m. ET Feb. 11, 2019

Bruce Plumb's 2019 Ford Ranger hadn't even been fully registered with the state of Michigan when he called Jan. 3 to put it on his insurance.

"They couldn't find the VIN," Plumb said, laughing.

The 69-year-old Brownstown resident is the first person in North America to own the reborn Ranger, the midsize truck Ford Motor Co. officially revived in January. The automaker is pruning sedans and small cars from its lineup in favor of larger, more profitable trucks and SUVs so it can fund bets on electrification, autonomous vehicles and mobility ventures.

[Buy Photo](#)



Bruce Plumb of Brownstown Township is the first person in the nation to own the new-model Ranger. Ford has brought it back after an eight-year hiatus. (Photo: Todd McInturf, The Detroit News)

The Ranger is at the forefront of that push. Ford officials say more than 300,000 people have inquired about the truck — coming off an eight-year hiatus — online or at dealerships. The automaker is adding a Saturday shift at its Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne so it can make more of them. Experts and analysts say the vehicle could be a boon for the automaker that's been thin on new product for the last couple years.

Plumb got his "shadow black" Ranger Lariat SuperCrew with the off-road package just a day after his dealer at Bill Brown Ford in Livonia called him about the four-door pickup.

[Buy Photo](#)



The new Ford Ranger pickup is bigger than the original — and more expensive. (Photo: Todd McInturf, The Detroit News)

"I told him if they ever built a four-door Ranger, I'd buy it," Plumb said. He took regular drives late last year past Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne where the trucks are built just to see if he could get a look at any parked outside the plant. "I was willing to take the first one I looked at."

Ford is relying on enthusiasm like Plumb's as it re-enters the midsize space. Ford is trailing cross-town competitor General Motors Co. as well as Toyota Motor North America to the market. The bygone Ranger that Ford sold until 2011 was known as an affordable, reliable mainstay in the lineup. The 2019 model is bigger and more expensive than the old models, and it's more tech-packed than most of the competition.

([story/business/autos/ford/2018/08/06/ford-technology-new-2019-ranger-midsize-pickup/848771002/](https://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/autos/ford/2018/08/06/ford-technology-new-2019-ranger-midsize-pickup/848771002/))

GM's midsize trucks help it claim the crown for selling the most pickup trucks in the U.S. Ford claims perennial leadership as the country's ^{best-selling} pickup nameplate through its F-Series, selling more 909,000 copies in the U.S. last year. But it hasn't been safe from barbs from the competition over its sluggish decision to bring the Ranger back — notably from GM President Mark Reuss.

2019 Ford Ranger

"Welcome to the party," he quipped at an event earlier the week touting GM's heavy-duty pickups. "You're only five years late and half a million trucks behind."

Ranger has room in the midsize space to scoop up sales, according to Michelle Krebs, industry analyst with Autotrader. Midsize truck buyers tend to be less brand loyal than those who buy full-size pickups, though Ranger could be a tough sell as it's higher-priced than most of the midsize competition.

ADVERTISEMENT

"The Ranger has extremely high name recognition," she said. "Some people didn't know it ever went away. But they hemmed and hawed about making the decision to do this."

Andrew Frick, director of U.S. sales at Ford, repeated what other Ford executives have said in recent months: F-Series dominates the pickup market. But there's a lot of customers out there for the Ranger, and now is the right time for Ford.

For example, Plumb owned three Rangers before he bought an Escape in the mid-2000s because he needed a backseat to cart around his grand-kids. Then he and his wife bought a 2009 Flex. His wife currently drives an Edge. He would have bought an F-150, he said, but it wouldn't fit in his garage.

"I always wanted something with a bed," he said. "It's a great size. This fits in almost anybody's garage."

Ford says it isn't worried about the Ranger eating away at F-Series sales. Ford set a F-Series January sales record last month in spite of the Ranger launch, Frick said. The automaker doesn't detail monthly sales figures anymore, but he said Ford moved more than the targeted 1,200 Rangers off dealer lots in January. The trucks sat an average of just seven days before being sold.

Buy Photo



In this framed image, Bruce Plumb, left, poses with Bill Brown Ford Sales Consultant Tony Juncaj after Brown Ford received word they sold the first Ranger, in the nation, to Plumb. (Photo: Todd McInturf, The Detroit News)

The launch hasn't been without its bumps. Ford already has recalled roughly 3,500 2019 Rangers because of a possible issue with the shifter. Ford also simplified the number of order combinations on the truck, offering just one engine option and upsetting some enthusiasts before the launch. Plumb said he was impressed with the 2.3-liter EcoBoost engine because it feels powerful.

Ford hopes the midsize truck might keep some current sedan customers in the dealer network in addition to the people it sucks away from other brands.

"We've seen customers migrate from the car," Frick said. "Those customers are going somewhere. They're going into utilities and they're going into trucks."

ithibodeau@detroitnews.com

Twitter: @Jan_Thibodeau

Buy Photo



The front grill of Bruce Plumb's Ford Ranger. (Photo: Todd McInturf, The Detroit News)

Read or Share this story: <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/autos/ford/2019/02/11/ford-has-high-hopes-resurrected-ranger-pickup-truck/2744831002/>