My 2005 POWER WAGON

After Two Years

I ordered my 2005 POWER WAGON in November 2004. It was delivered February 28, 2005. I have owned it for just over two years and have driven it almost 41,000 miles.

In the first seven months I owned it, I attended the Georgia POWER WAGON Rally, the California POWER WAGON Rally, the Vintage POWER WAGON Rally at Fairfield, the impromptu Hurricane Rita Evacuation POWER WAGON Party in Texas, the Berkshire Mountains POWER WAGON Rally in Lee, Massachusetts, and the Mid-Atlantic POWER WAGON Rally at West Virginia.

In face-to-face discussions with folks at these rallies, as well as reading comments on both the POWER WAGON Advertiser Forum and the Dodge POWER WAGON Forum, I have found that very few people really know much factual information about the new POWER WAGON.

What Dodge Says About It

After all the advance publicity - including test drive reports by several magazines - I was totally amazed by this. I went back and reviewed the advance publicity. Then I looked at the window sticker that came on my truck. That says my POWER WAGON is a RAM 2500 4x4 with the addition of the 26P option package. That is absolutely not true. The most basic component of any truck is the frame. The RAM 2500 4x4 frame is Part Number 52021558AK. The POWER WAGON frame is Part Number 52121299AF. A POWER WAGON starts as a POWER WAGON – not a RAM 2500.

It was obvious that the marketing folks at Dodge did not know much about this new truck. Apparently they were so focused on selling the "RAM" that they could not understand that this IS NOT A RAM WITH A POWER WAGON OPTION PACKAGE. Nowhere on a POWER WAGON does it say, "RAM", the number "2500", "HD" (Heavy Duty) or "4x4". On a POWER WAGON, it says "POWER WAGON" and that says it all.

What People Who Have Not Been Around One Say About It

Long before anyone had actually seen a new POWER WAGON, many visitors to Joe's DODGE POWER WAGON Forum and Gordon's POWER WAGON ADVERTISER Forum were discussing the reasons they would not buy one. Among the earliest discussions I recall was one in Forum 157, DODGE POWER WAGON FORUM. In a thread "2005 Power Wagon is Four Wheeler Pickup Truck of the Year" started by Russ/Wyo at 7:20PM, 11/17/2004, other Forum visitors already were saying they could take a 70's "W" series truck and build an equally capable truck for 1/3 of the cost of a new truck, and in the end, have a truck that would hold up better and be easier to maintain.

Another Forum visitor said it was not wise to buy one because it would depreciate in value. He claimed he could build up an old POWER WAGON with all the features of the 2005. It would cost less, and would only increase in value.

Once they were in dealer showrooms, a Forum visitor saw a 2005 POWER WAGON and said, "I wasn't that impressed. It didn't strike me as anything more than a mid duty truck with a hidden winch and load leveling suspension. Not a lot of uniqueness for $46,000.00 truck." His "load leveling suspension" comment showed how little knowledge is required to be an expert. If he had even read the window sticker, he would have seen there are many "unique" features.

The base price of my truck was $32,115. The POWER WAGON package was $6,335. The automatic transmission is a mandatory option at $1,170. The destination charge was $850. This brings the minimum price of a 2005 POWER WAGON to $40470. I can only guess that the additional $5530 worth of "not-unique" accessories on the $46,000 truck included leather seats, SIRIUS radio, GPS navigation, DVD entertainment center, and other passenger car options that a soccer-mom - and this Forum visitor - would order on a new Dodge Caravan.

So What Are The Facts About the New POWER WAGON?

When you put a new POWER WAGON and a RAM 2500 4x4 up on lifts, you can see the frames are different. The POWER WAGON frame has extra cross members and mounting points for the steering damper skid plate and the fore-aft bars that bridge the transfer case and fuel tank skid plates to prevent underside damage and rock wedging. There is no way some of those skid plates and other undercarriage protections unique to the POWER WAGON can be mounted on the RAM 2500 frame.

There are significant differences in the suspensions of the two trucks. Unique to the POWER WAGON is the electrically disconnecting front sway bar that allows the normal 460 (23-inch vertical height) Ramp Travel Index (RTI - a measurement of a vehicle's suspension articulation) with the stabilizer bar engaged to be increased to a 655 (32-inch vertical height) RTI with the stabilizer bar disengaged. (This is not a "load leveler") The POWER WAGON has an additional 1.8-inch increase in front ride height and a 1.4-inch increase in rear ride height with longer travel Bilstein monotube high-pressure gas shock absorbers.

Many other POWER WAGON driveline components are unique to the POWER WAGON and not available on the RAM 2500 4x4. Most notable are the American Axle *TracRite* axles with front open and rear anti-spin electrically locking differentials with POWER WAGON only 4.56 gear ratios. The front drive shafts are different. The POWER WAGON front drive shaft has a CV joint at the NV271 manual shift, two-speed, part-time transfer case. This CV joint has a lubrication fitting that was not on the

RAM 2500 and might be overlooked by a mechanic who was not specially trained to service it. Some front drive shafts on the earlier 2004 RAM 2500 4x4's failed and were replaced under warranty. Now the parts computer shows the Ram 2500 4x4 was upgraded to use the same front drive shaft part number as the POWER WAGON.

The 5.7 liter "Hemi" engine is the same as in other Dodge trucks. The POWER WAGON engine control computer has special programming for off-road operation. When driving in four-wheel drive low range, the idle speed increases by 100 rpm (from 650 to 750 rpm) - providing added control when ascending and descending off-road obstacles - and the throttle pedal response softens so that bumps in the trail are not translated into lunging engine responses.

The optional five speed 5-45RFE automatic transmission was the only transmission available when I ordered my truck – a mandatory option. It features three planetary gear sets, one overrunning clutch, full electronic control, and an electronically controlled converter clutch. Gear Ratios are; 1st, 3.0; 2nd, 1.50; 3rd, 1.0; 4th, 0.75; and 5th, 0.67. This results in an Overall Top Gear ratio of 3.06 with the 4.56 axle.

The part-time, manual-shift NV271 transfer case is standard on Dodge ¾ ton 4x4 trucks. It has 2WD; 4WD High; Neutral; 4WD Low operating modes. Transfer case gear ratios are 1:1 in high range and 1:2.72 in low range. It has no center differential function. Four wheel drive can be engaged "on the fly" at up to moderate speeds. (See information about shifting into low range in the driving reports that follow.)

The POWER WAGON is equipped with LT285/70R17D B. F. Goodrich all-terrain tires. According to a Dodge press release, these 33-inch tires provide "optimal balance between on-road civility and off-road capability" and "deliver optimum traction through sand, mud and snow." (See my comments on these tires in the driving reports that follow.)

The cab interior, bed, comfort and convenience options, and exterior sheet metal are the same as other two and four wheel drive Dodge trucks - just like back in 1957 when the "W" series that shared body design with the two wheel drive trucks was first introduced.

This is what you get when you drive it out of the dealer's showroom.

Driving Reports - Finally

During the last two and a half years, the new POWER WAGON pro and con issues continue to show up on the various Forums with comments by folks who still have not driven or ridden in a new POWER WAGON.

"Ask the man who owns one" was the simple advertising slogan of the Packard Company back when the reputation of their cars was based on what the owners told folks instead of from the advertising "hype" that faces us today.

I am a "man who owns one" and here are my observations...

How does the truck perform? On the highway, it runs quietly and smoothly. The five-speed automatic transmission shifted early and there were no instances of high engine revs except when kicking down into passing gear. Generally, the engine pulled well and accelerated without going into passing gear. At highway speeds, the tachometer showed very close to the same rpm's with the 4.56 differential gearing as on my CTD two-wheel-drive with a five-speed manual transmission and the 3.54 differential. When I had over 11,000 miles on the truck, I computed my actual total cumulative gas mileage and found it to be around 14 miles per gallon. But that's not what a POWER WAGON is about. On the highway, it is just another nice truck.

It's when you go off road that you finally know you are in a POWER WAGON.

At this point I must admit that I was not able to take advantage of all the great features of the POWER WAGON in my first trip off road. I did read the Owner's Manual when I first got the truck. But it was nine weeks before I got to actually try out the unique features on my POWER WAGON at the Georgia rally. There, I was faced with a trail that was cut through some dense woods to create a trail loop just for the rally. Before I headed down this trail, I switched on the differential locks and disconnected the sway bar. Here's where I goofed.

The locking differentials only work in low-range, four- wheel-drive. I was in high range and they were not engaged even though I had turned the switches. At one place in the manual there are descriptions of the various controls and what they do. In another place there are separate instructions that cover shifting the transfer into low range but these are about WHEN to use low range. At a third place in the manual, the owner is instructed to put it in Neutral and shut off the engine to shift into low-range. After that, the locking differentials will work.

I had not followed these three-part instructions and hit the trail in high-range and, even though I switched the lockers on, I only had standard

four-wheel-drive. I had little difficulty crossing several streams with steep sided banks. Then I came to the first man-made obstacle – a mud pit.

The 33 inch diameter of the LT285/70R17D B.F. Goodrich "All Terrain" tires is larger than most other original equipment pickup tires, but they do not give much ground clearance when compared to the 38 inch diameter 13x38x16 Super Swampers or the 1100r16 XL Michelin NATO treads on my other trucks. Trucks with these larger tires had already been using the trails, so when I got to the mud pit, my undercarriage dug in and I was stuck. The standard equipment winch got me through the rest of the mud pit. I doubt that the lockers would have made up for the small tires but I never got the chance to find out. Also, these standard equipment tires made the "approach" and "departure" angles inadequate - but then I was used to going off road in an M-37 with 11.00 x 16 Michelins.

The "frame twister" was the next man-made obstacle. This was basically a series of alternating holes made with a backhoe bucket. The holes were between two and three feet deep. The fronts and backs were generally straight up. The disconnecting front stabilizer bar did respond to the switch and made a difference in the frame twister. That helped me a great deal since I did not have the locking differentials in the "locked" mode. I did have some help from the limited slip that was standard in the rear axle. The increased wheel travel let me get the most out of the standard 4x4 mode since all four wheels were in contact with the ground MOST of the time. Several folks watching my progress told me that I had bounced the truck up onto two wheels several times. I gave in and asked for the tow strap when the last pit kept moving me toward a tree and a fallen log that threatened to cause some body damage. Because many trucks with "big tires" used the trail after me, the deepened wheel tracks meant that my being hung up on the undercarriage was totally predictable so I did not make another run at the mud pit. That precluded my getting to the "frame twister" but I do believe I would have made it through the "frame twister" if I had the use of the locking differentials.

I did get to try out the locking differentials before I left Georgia. It rained all Friday night and kept on until about noon Saturday. To enter the event headquarters, we had to cross a ditch with a culvert. The entry road was built up and had a nice cover of grass. With all the rain, the entry road soon deteriorated from a grassy path into a gooey black mud strip that became a real test of traction. Soon, most four-wheel-drive vehicles were having trouble. Having read all the different sections of my owner's manual, I approached and put my truck in low-range, four-wheel-drive and switched on the differential locks. I had no trouble getting into the event headquarters except for the reduced traction of the B. F. Goodrich tires. With more traffic throughout the day – some of which required being

towed - we found that the entry path had deteriorated even more. Later that afternoon we were getting ready to convoy out for dinner. The entry path was even worse. A lot of four-wheel-drives needed an assist with a tow strap to get out to the paved road. I was one of the last to exit the event headquarters area. When it was my turn, I made it unassisted with four tires each flinging mud and showing that the differentials were really locked.

This was my first real off-road venture, and it was in dense woods. I was pleased with my truck's maneuverability. Both the long-bed, regular cab and the short-bed, Quad-cab models of the 2005 POWER WAGON have a 140.5 inch wheelbase. M-37 wheelbase is 112 inches. A '69 W-100 wheelbase is 114 inches. A "flatfender" wheelbase is 126 inches. A '72 W-200 wheelbase is 131 inches. And, a '75 W-100 short-bed crew-cab wheelbase is 133 inches. The 2005 POWER WAGON has a fairly long wheelbase, but the steering was very good. I was following a "flatfender" and could turn a bit shorter than he did.

By the way, the front license plate bracket is a joke. It sticks down below the bumper. It's like the old saying, "Don't lead with your chin." Some kind soul retrieved my license plate and the bracket.

The next test of my POWER WAGON off-road came at the California POWER WAGON Rally at Hollister, CA. Essentially this consisted of two parts. There was a long trail ride and then some time playing at some specially prepared obstacles.

I was delighted with several characteristics of my 2005 POWER WAGON I observed during the trail ride. I did follow the instructions in the Owners Manual and shifted early to the four-wheel-drive, low range. I would have done this if I were in my WC-52, my WDX, my M-37, or my W300M. This lets me drive them more slowly without excessive use of the brakes or the clutch. I also use low range with the hubs unlocked in parades for the same reason. While the Hemi left no doubt that it had plenty of power, the low range made that power easy to handle and control. The throttle control is "fly-by-wire" and at these low speeds the pedal sensitivity is reduced so that bumps in the trail are not transmitted through the gas pedal.

Up to this point, the trail ride was mostly going up - and up - on moderately steep trails that probably also served as fire roads. It was when we started down some long stretches that I had my most pleasant surprise. I was ready to give my four-wheel disk brakes a work out. After all, what braking should I expect from an automatic transmission? I was following a beautifully original "flat fender" which had really bright brake lights on a six-volt system. I was totally astounded to find that I was not

using my brakes as much as the truck ahead with a manual transmission. I had plenty of engine braking with the automatic in low range and the gear selector in first. Before that, I would have proclaimed to all that there was no way an automatic would beat a manual for engine braking on a steep, long, down hill. The Hemi did not rev up and the transmission held the truck back. In all respects, the 2005 performed well on the trail ride.

Then, we arrived at the obstacle course. Here I was forced to reevaluate the theories of our evolution. If we were evolved from the apes, why was there so much fascination with the mud pit? I'm not sure how comfortable I am with the idea that "King Kong" is back there in my lineage, but I'm here to tell you that I am definitely not descended from "Porky Pig" like some of our folks who rushed in to wallow in the pit – without their trucks. A lot of folks did drive their trucks through the pit. I've seen pictures of what that pit can be and this year it came up short. Still, some folks were having trouble getting through. After using my winch to get out of the mud pit at the Georgia Rally, I knew I could winch myself out if I had to so I drove down into the pit. I had to stop in the mud and wait until the vehicle ahead was able to regain some momentum. Then I just eased on through with both differentials locked. It pays to read all parts of the owner's manual.

While we were at the obstacle course, I also went over and negotiated the stair step climb – differentials locked and sway bar disconnected – and had little difficulty.

Finally, I felt compelled to take the real challenge – the pit with logs across at different heights and spacing. Before I got to the first logs, there was a mud puddle to go through. So much for dry tires... It was a distinct effort at each log. Once, the truck dropped down and stopped real sudden. Would this be it? I backed up, then drove forward at a bit of an angle and continued on through. I truly did not think I would make it, but I did. I received some complimentary remarks and a few thumbs up from some young guys with Toyota Land Cruisers who apparently were there to watch – not try. I wasn't watching real close, but I'm pretty sure my POWER WAGON was the only one of the 35 at the rally that even tried the log pit. I'm glad Randy Baker was right there with a video camera to record it.

None of the other POWER WAGON events I have attended since then have presented the same degree of challenge. These two also represent my learning curve. At the California event, all the gadgets all did what they were supposed to do. Since then, I have had many opportunities to play with these gadgets that are unique to the POWER WAGON. My son's ranch has erosion control berms from many years ago. They are about five feet

high. It is fun to lock the differentials and drive over a berm at an angle so that the wheels on two diagonally opposite corners are clear of the ground. The grandkids love it when they can move from side to side and rock the truck or balance it on two wheels. These berms also provide a great place to demonstrate the value of the unlocking front sway bar. With it locked, keeping two wheels in the air is easy. With it unlocked, the suspension lets the wheels stay in contact much longer and the "rock the truck" game is cut short. Having the wheels in contact also provides traction and lets me drive over the berms without locking the differentials. This is definitely a useful feature.

I had a unique opportunity to use the locking differentials that everyone can relate to. While my son was stationed at Fort Polk, Louisiana, he bought an M-37. When I got to Louisiana to bring it home, there had been several days of rain. The place where he bought the M-37 was "almost" a junk yard. The area was surprisingly well maintained and it looked like retrieving the M-37 would be easy. The seller hooked onto the M-37 with a decent Ford tow truck, but even with the weight of the M-37 on the hook, he had no traction in the soft ground and quickly was mired down to the frame. I unhooked my trailer and drove the POWER WAGON down to see if I could pull the two trucks up onto firmer ground. Getting close enough to get a chain connected put me on some soft ground. I locked the lockers. I took up the slack in the chain had then did the "Hemi" thing. The mired tow truck and the M-37 came right along. I kept the momentum up and supplied all the pull for moving that load. We were going a little faster that the Ford tow truck's wheels were turning. By the way, that was one of the few times the B.F.Goodrich tires performed as advertised. Oh, yes! My gas mileage hauling the M-37 into a 30 mph head wind all the way home was 7.5 mpg. The great feeling of dragging that combination to high ground made the poor gas mileage even less important.

Some Final Thoughts

Appearance

With regard to the overall exterior appearance of the new POWER WAGON, I feel the Dodge guys missed out on several POWER WAGON visual clues. The original POWER WAGON came in four colors; sea wolf submarine green, red, dark blue, and yellow. Of the original colors, only red was available for 2005. And what is with them putting the POWER WAGON name plates on the sides of the doors? They should be on the hood – just like on all the "flatfenders" and "W" series previously built. They did add a POWER WAGON name on the tailgate instead of the chrome "4x4" plate. (If I have seen correctly, all the other guys have a plastic sticky thing to say "4x4".) And the cheap, honeycomb, plastic grill

insert should have followed the vertical bar grill look of the original POWER WAGON.

Tires

My truck has 41,000 miles on it. I put 28,000 miles on it the first year attending 6 Power Wagon events - Georgia, California, Iowa, Texas, Massachusetts, and West Virginia. In 2006, I attended only 2 events - Texas and Arizona - and added 10,000 miles. So far this year, I have driven this truck 2,000 miles. At 40,000 miles with most of that on improved dirt roads and pavement, the tires have worn well. The tread depth new was 16/32". After 40,000 miles, the tread depth is 12/32". I can't help wondering what the minimum tread depth is for these tires to be effective in off road, low traction situations.

The standard LT285/70R17D B. F. Goodrich all-terrain tires are inadequate in mud situations where you are going slowly and picking your way through other obstacles. They are not self cleaning and lose their traction almost immediately. The two occasions where I found them to be satisfactory was when leaving the Georgia Rally site and when extracting the tow truck with a M-37 on the hook. In both these situations I was able to rev up the engine and the spinning tires finally cleaned themselves and developed traction. I can only guess the same tread cleaning weaknesses might occur in snow - whatever that stuff is. The other problem is that they hydroplane way more than I would expect from an aggressive tread pattern.

It is hard to evaluate their overall performance in low traction situations since the electric lockers appear to be more important than the tires.

Just as most POWER WAGON owners have upgraded from the OEM tires on their trucks, I believe the OEM tires on my 2005 POWER WAGON are inadequate. Larger tires with more grip are necessary to benefit from the amazing technology built into this truck. There are many 35" or 37" diameter tires that fit the standard POWER WAGON rims. When I replace the original tires, I'll be doing some serious tire shopping.

Trailer Towing

To help my son when he was transferred from Fort Polk, LA, to Fort Hood, TX (15 miles from here), I have made three trips from DeRidder, LA. Two trips were hauling M37s. As I reported above, one trip into 30 mph headwinds gave me 7.5 mpg. I pulled another M-37 back to Texas a few weeks later over the same route - only with no strong headwinds and got 10.5 mpg.

I also hauled a partially disassembled back yard playground that presented a 10' by 8.5' face to the wind. While it was all constructed of treated lumber, the weight was secondary to the wind resistance. This trip gave me 10 mpg. I expect that 10 - 12 mpg will be the best I will get under normal conditions.

I enjoyed 16 years towing with CTDs and manual transmissions. With the diesels, it was all about having more than adequate torque which I could easily match to the load with the manual transmission. Note the words, "I could easily match to the load..."

I do not enjoy towing with the POWER WAGON. Whether in "Tow" mode or not, the automatic transmission constantly shifts in an effort to "match the load" and it actually makes me tired watching the tachometer show that the engine cannot find a horsepower/torque point that it likes. I have a friend who tows a travel trailer behind his RAM 2500 with a hemi and an automatic transmission. He has essentially the same feelings about towing with his RAM.

The PRICE

When most of you think about buying a new or a used late model POWER WAGON, you must consider the price. You might not want to pay for a lot of options that you do not need or that you will seldom use.

The POWER WAGON option package 26P was $6335. There are many options available individually at extra cost on the RAM 2500 that are included in the POWER WAGON option package. I went to the Dodge web site and priced many of these options that were included in the 26P package. Then I spent some time on the internet pricing other 26P items not available from Dodge. I believe a detailed price list of these items with installation costs for the non-Dodge items will bring you close to the package price.

You can go to the Dodge web site and use the "Build A Truck" feature to price a RAM 2500 with all the things that are standard on the POWER WAGON. Then add a winch and some lockers and you will see this for yourself.

I do not presume to take credit for my frequent posts and other comments I have sent out about the POWER WAGON not being a RAM 2500 with the option package, but this year Dodge has priced the POWER WAGON as a separate and distinct vehicle.

The New POWER WAGON - No Diesel

Some of you have made very favorable comments about this truck but almost all of you have said you will not buy one because it does not have the diesel option.

The CTD is not available and probably never will be. The new POWER WAGON is the first Dodge 4WD since some World War II WC military trucks that has a STANDARD front winch. That standard winch is mounted on a cross member that combines the winch mount and the roller fairlead. This restricts the engine compartment length and the longer diesel engine and intercooler simply will not fit.

The Cummins diesel weighs considerably more that the "hemi". Someone said having this added weight helps by increasing traction. This added weight does not add any significant traction, particularly when the front wheels are trying to climb up over most obstacles in those extreme off road situations when the locked differentials and disconnected sway bar are needed. Tires become the issue. Did you ever see a rock crawler with slick tires and 2,000 pound wheel weights?

I am a big fan of the Dodge with the Cummins. I owned four CTD Dodges prior to buying the POWER WAGON - an '89 2500, a '94 2500, a '97 3500, and a '01 2500. The '01 had the dealer installed Jake brake - best thing you can have. The '01 also had an Edge chip. When I traded the '01 in, the overhead trip computer was showing 23.3 mpg.

All these were two-wheel-drive with manual transmissions. I always figured that anywhere I might get stuck, I'd have a 4x4 on the trailer that I could use rescue myself. Pulling out the wrecker with the M-37 on it was the first time I was glad to have a 4x4 towing truck.

I have done my share of trailer towing. I often hauled two POWER WAGONs or Dodge military trucks at a time. I hauled from both coasts and from the Mexican and the Canadian borders. Texas is in the center of the 48 states. My tows included Washington, California, Iowa, New York, Georgia, Mississippi, Illinois, Louisiana, and a few within Texas that equaled a trip across New England. Typical fuel consumption towing with the diesel was 14 - 17 mpg.

Who would spend $6000 for the POWER WAGON and then another $6000 for the diesel? If you really believe you want a POWER WAGON with a Cummins diesel engine, enjoy this report about Ron Ramies who just had to have a POWER WAGON. And he had to have it with a Cummins Turbo Diesel.

Go to
http://www.dieselpowermag.com/features/dodge/0610dp_dodge_cummins_power_wagon/ **to see the rest of the modifications and options Ron added. I**

wonder who got the 12,000# winch he took off. I would like to have gone "dumpster diving" at his place.

It is amazing all the modifications he had done to set his Power Wagon up for some occasional hunting trips and to pull a car trailer down the highway.

In Conclusion

The "buy a POWER WAGON or not" discussion continues on the Forums. Several folks have e-mailed me for my thoughts. As I have discussed above, we cannot compare the new POWER WAGON to a RAM 2500 4x4. Trying to choose one truck over the other is not the issue. The choice is figuring out who you are and how you live.

For me the choice was easy. I did not need to replace my 2001 Dodge CTD. I certainly did not need to have a 4x4 daily driver. In truth, I'm retired and do not have any justification for owning a vehicle at all. I could always have my wife take me anywhere I need to go. But I'm not ready to be "grounded" and I like driving around in something more comfortable than an old POWER WAGON from the Museum collection.

Truthfully, I bought a new POWER WAGON to park in front of the Kempner POWER WAGON Museum and to represent the Museum at events. I was aware that I would have significantly lower fuel mileage. If I did not have this POWER WAGON connection, I would not own a new POWER WAGON.

I suspect that some of you do not really need a 4x4 in your everyday life. It's more of an life style image thing. We have all seen those folks with 4x4's that will never encounter an obstacle greater than the speed bumps at the local drive-in restaurant.

If you really NEED to have four wheel drive available to you in your everyday life, then you have a choice to make. Do you need the enhanced off road capability of a POWER WAGON or are you best served with the "truckier" quality of a diesel RAM 2500 - 4x4 or 4x2?

From your comments on the Forums, I am hearing that most of you "need" a regular work truck and "want" occasional four wheel drive. Even you serious hunters are only going to use your truck a few times each year to haul your ATV to where you unload it to do all your serious off-road driving.

This suggests that most of you should get the RAM 2500 4x4 with CTD and manual transmission. You'll really like the fuel mileage and towing characteristics. The Ram 2500, 4x4 with CTD is about the same money as the POWER WAGON with the Hemi.

And save the money for the automatic transmission option. Generally, the manual transmission is best with the higher startup torque of the in-line diesel design. There are still reports of problems with the automatic behind the Cummins.

The only time I think the automatic transmission is better is when it is a matter of torque management in extreme off road situations. It's much better than slipping the clutch.

At the risk of sounding a bit aloof, I have to say if you cannot afford to buy a new POWER WAGON just to play off road, you probably should not even think of buying one. I'm retired and do not use it for anything besides POWER WAGON play. I can afford it since I drive only for fun. I love my POWER WAGON and I bought it for the right reasons. If you need what a POWER WAGON will do, there's no other choice.

One Last Thought

After the first whole year that the new POWER WAGON was available, based on information in Gordon's and Joe's Forums and attendance at these rallies, it appeared that I was the only POWER WAGON enthusiast who had bought a 2005 POWER WAGON. I blame this on the poor marketing efforts by Dodge. After another year, I believe there are now two or three. I know of several others whose owners are not involved with POWER WAGON collecting or events.

I would appreciate hearing from any of you POWER WAGON folks who have a new POWER WAGON. If you send me your thoughts, I'll publish them here to compare with mine and to share with others.

****

Five year update

Five years have passed since I bought my 2005 POWER WAGON. I just returned from attending the POWER WAGON Rally in Fairfield. As I parked my truck in the Museum, the odometer showed 75,001 miles. Half of those miles were put on the first year I owned it as reported above. I

am still the only POWER WAGON owner who attended six POWER WAGON events in one year with no commercial business to conduct.

This is my daily driver. Most days start with a short trip for breakfast at a nearby restaurant. Several evenings each week, I take my wife out to dinner in this truck. I have taken many long trips as well, but all this driving in the last four years only equals the first year's mileage. My gas mileage has remained the same. The engine and transmission have the same good and bad traits I reported above. I had to replace the original B.F.Goodrich tires at 51,200 miles - not too bad for aggressive tread tires. In the interest of keeping the truck truly original, I replaced them with the original size. (In the interest of my pocketbook, I bought only three and put the spare into service.)

My impression of this truck after five years is that it drives and performs exactly the same. For me, it gets used about 95% on road in two wheel drive. The remaining 5% has been some fantastic off-road fun that has demonstrated the truck's very special features. I have taken it off road in various Off Road Vehicle Parks. The value of both the four wheel lockers and the disconnecting sway bar have been proven again and again.

And once again the poor performance of the B.F.Goodrich "All-Terrain TA" tires in mud was demonstrated when I was one of only a few trucks that had to be pulled up through some deep mud on a mildly steep slope during a trail ride. Actually, Bob Decker had to winch out both me and an M37 that had some success towing me before it, too, lost traction. To be fair, the stock skid plates were dragging in the mud, but the tire problem would not have been solved just by going up several tire sizes. As reported above, those tires did well in climbing through the log pit at Hollister. They simply do not perform well in mud.

Here's Jay Good's picture of me being rescued. Since this picture was already on some Forums, I drove in the parade with the tow strap at the ready draped over the hood.

(Picture on the Square by Will Watson)

The "NEW" POWER WAGON

A salesman at the Dodge dealer where I bought my truck on special order called me the other day and asked me to come look at the "new" Dodge POWER WAGON. It was a great disappointment. The "chrome" letter badging has been replaced with the plastic stick-ons that the lesser brands have used for years. Until now, no POWER WAGON used "sticky" labels for identification. A second major item that will reduce the off road ability of the "new" POWER WAGON is adding nine inches to the

wheelbase - a result of making the "crew cab" standard - was 140.5 inches and now is 149.5 inches. Compare with the other Dodge 4x4 wheelbases reported above.

The only thing that I find pleasing is that the POWER WAGON is still built on its unique frame and is NOT A RAM. The POWER WAGON frame is part number 55398868AC and the frame for both the diesel and the gas 2500 4x4 RAMs is 55398813AC.

And the POWER WAGON will not be offered with a diesel engine, so no one needs to keep using "diesel availability" as an excuse for not buying one. If you need the power and economy of a diesel, buy a RAM. The diesel package is still about the same cost as moving to a POWER WAGON.