The Latest in Dump-Truck Technology for Pickup Trucks

story by archer stokes
photography by greg santavy

If you use your truck for hauling and dumping supplies, converting your empty bed into a full-blown dump truck with a quick-install insert could be the answer to your prayers. Today’s inserts are compact, durable, and can pay for themselves in the long run.

While dump inserts designed for full-size or shortbed pickups have been around for years, recent technological advancements—such as light extruded bed flooring, multistage telescopic hydraulic cylinders, compact hydraulic pressure systems, and the use of high-end materials like T-6 aluminum—have drastically changed this market for the better. Older dump-bed designs used thick steel plating to carry heavier loads, which resulted in a lower payload ability—the insert’s weight comes out of the vehicle’s overall GVW.

For years, dump inserts were built with mild steel and painted to hide day-to-day abuse, but more inserts are now being made from a combination of aluminum and stainless steel for improved appearance and reduced weight.

We recently went to Weingartz Supply in Farmington, Michigan, for a peek at the newest in dump-bed technology. TruckCraft, one of the top dump-bed-insert manufacturers, designed this unit, the TC-120 Ultra. It has a reinforced aluminum floor with extruded-aluminum side panels, which provide strength and cause it to weigh approximately 350 pounds less than the stainless-steel equivalent. Once installed, the insert sits only 3½ inches above the bed. It can lift and extend to nine feet at an angle to completely empty its payload, but retracts (like a telescoping hydraulic jack) to less than three feet to save valuable storage room.

The real magic of these compact workhorses is the small yet powerful hydraulic pump and cylinder systems that lift the dump bed up. The TC-120 Ultra insert can lift 7000 pounds to 47 degrees in 18 seconds.

TruckCraft dump inserts use only two 5/8-inch-diameter grade-5 bolts to hold them in place. Both go through major portions of the pickup-truck-bed frame section. While the insert isn’t going anywhere, it’s easy to remove should the need arise.

Costs and Features

Most dump-insert companies offer a basic version that can be personalized for utility and appearance. Base mild-steel inserts typically start around $3500, aluminum/stainless-steel inserts around $4500. Options include a cab protector, retractable mesh cover, utility rack, side panels, a leaf box, salt spreaders, and more. Weingartz Supply usually recommends an aluminum/stainless-steel dump insert—it looks and works better over the long haul and don’t cost that much more to buy. TruckCraft models come with a three-year limited warranty.—A.S.
Once you get the insert installed and operating, there are a few common maintenance issues to watch for. Don’t worry—taking care of these minor issues is relatively easy.

**Rattles**
If you don’t take care of debris stuck in pivot or resting mount areas, the noise of the dump insert rattling around in your pickup bed is guaranteed to drive you crazy. The best way to stay sane: Keep the area under the bed clean, so the insert lays evenly on its stops.

**Debris**
The hydraulic rams aren’t impervious to wood chips, rocks, or other non-compressible items. These can get wedged underneath the ram pivot, limiting motion. Inspect this area regularly and clean it out immediately, before the ram gets damaged.

**Purging**
Every year, bleed the air out of the hydraulic system that forces the ram up, so it can provide maximum lifting force. The manufacturer’s installation and operating instructions address this fairly painless process.—A.S.