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# The **W** **W** **W**



**WHO KNEW?** A diesel-powered off-road rig can also be a hot rod? And a fuel-efficient highway cruiser to boot? Well, Gale Banks knew; that's for sure. His company, Gale Banks Engineering, has a new Sidewinder All-Terrain package that is all that and more.

We speak from firsthand experience here, having dropped the hammer on each of these trucks, and also manned the wheel for a thousand or more miles on the Hot Rod Power Tour through the Midwest, all the way from Wisconsin to Florida. Along the way, each of these brawny trucks averaged more than 12 mpg, and that was with a lead-foot stomping on the loud pedal.

In addition to promoting this new approach to performance, another reason Banks' crew made the trip was to gain some experience with these novel configurations and optimize the company's setup and tuning, particularly in the rear-end ratios to compensate for the larger-diameter tires.

What prompted Gale Banks to create these do-everything trucks in the first place? Maybe it was a bit of envy, having seen so much attention lavished on those muscled-up Mustangs

and modified sport compacts. Isn't it about time for diesel power to strut its stuff?

Indeed: "These are some of the first diesel tuner trucks," Banks proclaims. "It's an ignored category. There's magic to diesel. I want to move it into a performance image, a status symbol. This is my 47th year in business, and it's time to provide something for the kids, or at least those who are young at heart," explains Banks, with a thirst for performance. The speed potential of diesel comes as no surprise to diesel enthusiasts, but it's obviously not the popular perception. What Banks is striving to show is that diesels aren't just for 18-wheelers and farm tractors but can have a quickness quotient, too.

Available on Chevy, Dodge, and Ford trucks (note the following profiles on each make), the Banks Sidewinder All-Terrain package not only features true off-road capability with an aggressive Baja attitude but also offers tremendous speed and acceleration at the turn of a switch.

That's delivered by the Banks Six-Gun diesel computer tuner that generates massive amounts of horsepower and torque. Available with Speed-Loader or PowerPDA options, the Six-Gun system basically manipulates three fuel-injection parameters; the fuel pres-



sure, the timing, and the injector pulse width.

The Six-Gun is part of the Big Hoss package, loaded with a ram-air cold-air induction system with lifetime ram-air filters, a gigantic Techni-Cooler charge-air cooler assembly with bigger boost tubes, and a 4-inch Monster Stainless-Steel Muffler with a Split-Dual Exhaust and 5-inch stainless tailpipe tips. Completing this performance upgrade is an electronic DynaFact pyrometer and boost gauge.

Outfitted with the Banks' Big Hoss engine upgrades, the Sidewinder All-Terrain trucks boast as much as 500 hp and 1,000 lb-ft of torque. With that sort of output on tap, you'll feel nearly invincible in one of these rigs. Is that a wild bunch or what?



BY STEVE TEMPLE  
PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVE TEMPLE

# Red Bunch



An Impressive Trio of  
Red-Hot Banks' Diesel Rigs







# '05 Dodge Ram



If you judge this truck solely by the suspension height, the Dodge Ram looks the mildest of this truck trio, but that's actually an illusion. Even though the lift from the KORE race suspension is only about 3 inches, Banks engineers modified the chassis for more vertical articulation.

Banks engineers also tinkered with the suspension geometry, improving the tracking and minimizing the bumpsteer, so the Ram now charges ahead straight and true.

Banks also points out that the 5.9L Cummins engine has the toughest internals and the most inertia of the three engines. Our driving impression was that the drivetrain felt the most truck-like—not that there's anything wrong with that.

The stock Cummins comes with a non-variable turbo, so Banks decided to bolt on the





## '05 Dodge Ram

company's new ShapeShifter variable-nozzle turbo charger. It's a Banks/Garrett turbo with adjustable vanes that change the effective size of the turbine relative to airflow. In other words, it lets the turbo act like a smaller unit for rapid acceleration and also as a large turbo for improved top-end power. As a result, the Dodge boasts the most power of the three trucks shown here, with 500 horses and 1,000 lb-ft of torque produced at the flywheel.

As good as the engine is, some diesel Dodge owners malign the automatic transmission. Banks engineers say the real cause is not the tranny itself but the fins or ribs on the torque converter, which don't provide enough reinforcement for the heavy torque loads, allowing the clutch surface to warp. That's why Banks installed an upgraded billet steel converter.

Initially, the rearend ratio was 3.73:1, but it was lowered to 4.10:1 to offset the addition of bigger rolling stock. The wheels are Weld's 20x10-inch Velociti 8s, fitted with Toyo Open Country M/T 35x12.50R20LTs. A set of Bushwacker fender flares keeps flying mud and gravel off the shiny sheetmetal.

Personally, we found the Dodge Ram to be the most practical of the three for everyday driving. It doesn't take a ladder to climb into the cockpit, and while there's still lots of suspension travel, you don't worry about tipping over on hard cornering. Sure, the engine feels a bit more industrial than the others, but it also has the most juice on tap. Just dial up the Six-Gun system on the dash, and this Ram can butt heads with just about anything on the road.







# '05 Chevy Silverado



Everyone who drove the Chevy on the Hot Rod Power Tour felt the Chevy was the most comfortable of the lot. It still runs and pulls as a diesel truck should, but the ride and cockpit felt more comfy and quieter.

Some credit for the improved on-road manners should go to the Fabtech-supplied 6-inch suspension lift. This system features high-arched crossmembers for maximum ground clearance and a thick steel skidplate wrapping for the differential housing. It also features solid billet sway bar links with oversize urethane bushings and extended cast-iron steering knuckles, which retain the factory center link for proper steering geometry and allow for the use of a stock wheel/tire combination.

Of course, the rims on this rig are much larger than stock, the same 20x10-inch Weld Velocity 8 wheels used on the Ford and Dodge, along with Toyo Open Country tires and Bushwacker flares. To compensate for the bigger rolling stock, the rearend ratio was lowered to 4.11:1.





## '05 Chevy Silverado

What really separates the Chevy from the other two trucks is the amount of modification done to the bodywork. For improved departure angles, both front and rear bumpers were modified. "There's a bumper lift on the Chevy," Gale notes. "It doesn't look like a 4x4 in stock trim, so we sectioned the front bumper's top cap in-house for a more Baja-style treatment."

With the Banks Big Hoss Bundle on the 6.6L Duramax engine, the output increases to as much as 450 horses and 950 lb-ft of torque at the flywheel. To monitor the engine vitals, the Chevy came with Banks' PowerPDA control that provides all sorts of information and programming capability.

Basically, the PowerPDA is an input/output device for the Six Gun system. Using the touch-screen, the driver can quickly and easily set up performance parameters and also display sensor data such as boost and EGT levels. On the latter function, it's capable of displaying 15 different forms of data from engine sensors, including coolant temp, oil temp, and vehicle speed.

Instead of the dial-up knob seen on the other two trucks' dashboards, the Banks Six-Gun is controlled by the PDA using touch-screen control, so power gains are literally at your fingertips. You can also make adjustments to limit the EGT or other engine parameters, and use the PowerPDA as diagnostic scanning tool. The unit functions as a regular PDA as well, allowing the driver to have access to contact lists, a calendar, an optional MP3 player, and optional GPS. No wonder the Chevy came out as the most user-friendly truck of the lot.







# '05 Ford F-250



Taking things to extreme heights, whether in engine output or suspension height, is Banks' forte—after all, this is a company that's used to breaking things, as in world speed records at the Bonneville Salt Flats.

On the Ford, the sky's the limit with a Kelderman Air Suspension that raises the F-250 anywhere from 6 to 10 inches. The whooshing sound of the system activating may remind some of Darth Vader's breathing apparatus, but there's no dark side to this lofty lift. It furnishes more than enough room for the Weld wheels and the humongous 38-inch Toyo tires (38x15.50R20LT). The ATS Fiberglass' fender flares shield the paint from any debris slinging off those fat knobbies.

Due to the extra rubber on the road, the Ford's rear axle ratio of 4.56:1 is the lowest of this wild bunch, and as a result, the handling





## '05 Ford F-250

felt a bit busy on the highway at cruising speeds. The engine sound was also louder at idle, so much so that you'll have to shut down the engine at a drive-thru to order a cheeseburger.

Gale Banks attributes the increased decibel level to the lack of a common rail fuel system on the Power Stroke, which uses hydraulic multiplication for fuel delivery instead—the Cummins and Duramax engines come equipped with the common rail fuel delivery.

No doubt the increased ride height also contributed to the more nervous feel of the Ford. While it kept up just fine with the other two trucks, it seemed to want to wander off the pavement and head for the hills, which is entirely appropriate and understandable. If we were to pick our favorite for off-road adventures, this F-250 would be it.

There's certainly plenty of power under the hood for some tackling some gnarly terrain. The Banks Big Hoss Bundle on the 6.0L Power Stroke engine pumps out 460 hp and 825 lb-ft of torque at the flywheel.

Why are those figures slightly less than the others? The boost levels help to explain. The Ford runs at 28 psi, the Duramax 30 pounds, and the Cummins with its beefier internals can handle the most pressure at 35 pounds. Whatever the power level, we would be happy to drive any one of these rigs, anytime, anywhere. Banks Sidewinder All-Terrain packages are available as complete systems as shown. **DP**

