

## Guide to Choosing the Right Truck Bed

1. **Purpose of the truck bed:** Determining the main use for the bed will help you decide between the many models available.
  - a. **Ranch work** –
    - The bed style chosen by most ranchers is usually more basic with a flat deck including internal stake pockets, a lip on the sides, and **made of steel** for more strength.
    - One or more **toolboxes** may be mounted underneath the bed for storage.
    - Removable **side rails** can be handy for preventing load slippage.
  - b. **Towing** –
    - Newer trucks can have a **taller box which makes it difficult to tow low profile gooseneck trailers**. Installing a truck bed can solve this problem and any basic model will serve this purpose just fine.
    - For even more convenience and style, a **hauler style truck bed may be a better choice**. This style bed is more likely to be set up with steel skirts, a **few lockable boxes** under the bed for storage and maybe a gooseneck trough for **easier hitching** up of a gooseneck trailer. This style should include a rear bumper and fenders.
    - If you're thinking of an **RV hitch**, be sure you know what is involved in mounting the fifth wheel assembly in the bed you choose.
    - With towing being the main purpose, you may even want to consider an **aluminum bed as a sharp-looking alternative**.
  - c. **Utility box** –
    - **A utility style service bed's main purpose is to provide storage**
    - **Lockable storage** is important in a utility box. **How many storage** compartments are available and **what kind of hardware** is used for the hinges and handles?
    - Consider whether **rear tapered corners** will be necessary and are available for increased turning radius.
    - Consider that some utility style beds **can limit the type of gooseneck trailer you can tow**
  - d. **Cosmetic reasons** –
    - For a dressed up **pickup truck, you will definitely want to consider an aluminum** truck bed.
2. **Construction:**
  - a. **A stout construction** is going to be your number one consideration.
    - A truck bed constructed of **steel is going to be stronger than aluminum**, so your choice between aluminum or steel will be limited by the purpose of the bed as outlined above.
    - Consider the size and thickness of the material used. Compare the size of the **frame rails, cross-members, thickness of the deck and spacing of the frame rails**.
    - A **tread plate deck** is important to decrease slippage in a load and to increase strength.
  - b. **Hitches** – Are they included in the bed you are considering?
    - Consider the **placement and structure of the gooseneck ball** mounting box and if there is a cover. The box should be easily accessible but not interfere with the flat deck when you want to haul other things like hay or lumber.

- The bed should also be set up for a **receiver mount and safety chains** to prevent having to alter the bed for this purpose.
  - Some beds can be ordered with a **built-in B&W hitch** if preferred.
- c. **Lighting –**
- At the minimum, the bed should include all **DOT required stop, turn, tail, back up, clearance and marker lights**, and all lighting must be wired to meet all DOT requirements as originally intended by the vehicle manufacturer.
  - Additional **lighting in the headache rack** will increase safety, making you more visible on the road.
  - Look for **recessed lighting** to reduce potential damage to lights, in both the headache rack and for the tail and brake lights in the back.
  - **LED lights will also increase visibility** and are a great option to consider.
- d. **Finish process –**
- Truck beds finished with a **powder coating process** will provide an end product with more durability, longevity and gloss retention. Considering a truck bed is intended for hard work, **this feature can't be overlooked**.
3. **Features:** After looking at the main construction of a truck bed, it's time to review other features like the side rails, stake pockets and the headache rack.
- a. **Consider whether the rails are permanent or removable.**
- **Removable side rails** available in some models will definitely increase the functionality of the bed.
- b. Determine if the bed has **internal stake pockets or external stake pockets with a rub rail.**
- Ranchers will usually choose internal stake pockets to avoid a gap that might trap a dog's leg while jumping on or off.
  - External stake pockets and rub rail might allow for more flexibility in securing a load.
- c. Consider the **style of the headache rack.**
- **Does it have a boxy look or does it follow the curves of the vehicle cab** to increase eye appeal?
  - It should protect the back of the cab but at the same time **not block the view from inside the cab**.
  - Also, as mentioned above, **tail, brake and back up lights in the headache rack will increase visibility and safety**. Those **lights should be recessed** for their protection.
- d. **Tapered rear corners** can be an option on some beds but **must** be considered on longer beds for **increased turning radius when towing**.
- e. Some models will **have a lip on the edges of the sides and others will be smooth.**
- A smooth edge facilitates **easier loading with a forklift**
  - A lip can be an additional aid in **preventing a load from slipping** over the side.
4. **Options:** Other options are available that you may want to consider.
- a. **Tool boxes –** If the model you've chosen has no tool boxes, you may want to add some.
- Consider the **size of the tool box** and where it will be located. Most under the bed boxes are mounted on the driver's side in the front; make sure the fuel hose doesn't interfere.

- A **side mounted top box** is popular for some installations but may not work well with a bed that has a lip on both sides.
- b. **60" tall headache rack** for the taller cab on a cab and chassis.
  - c. **Gooseneck trough** – as mentioned above, this might be desirable for a truck bed set up specifically for hauling. With a trough, a gooseneck trailer doesn't have to be lifted as high before backing under it during hitching up.
  - d. **Aluminum tread plate package** – can be added to dress up most steel truck bed models.
  - e. **Work lights and cargo lights** – these make your truck bed more functional.
  - f. **Dove tail** – commonly seen on beds set up for hauling.
  - g. **LED lights** – increase safety and visibility on any application and longer lasting.
- 5. Installation and choosing the right size bed for your truck:**
- a. **Installation kits** included with the bed will make your job easier in a do-it-yourself installation and can affect the price of having it installed elsewhere.
  - b. Extras that may be necessary include the **fuel filler hoses** that can vary depending on the truck.
  - c. Choosing **the right size bed** –
    - Most beds are built specifically for certain brands and year of truck. Make sure you have the **brand, year, and model of truck** when discussing the bed with a dealer.
    - Depending on the truck, you may also need to know the **cab to center of axle distance, height from frame to top of the cab and the width of the frame rails on your truck.**
    - Let the dealer know if your truck is **dual or single wheel**
    - Often missed is consideration of the extra length if the truck is a **cab and chassis**. Trucks that come from the factory as a cab and chassis have a standard 34" frame measurement which is different than trucks that come with a bed. If you purchased your truck without a bed, make sure you know if it is a cab and chassis or a take-off.
  - d. **Universal mounting systems** are used by some manufacturers allowing for the mounting rails to adjust to any size truck frame. However, the downside to this is that the mounting rails will be bolted instead of welded to the bed, resulting in a potentially weaker installation of the bed.
  - e. Be aware that **some manufacturers will not allow some installations**. For example, mounting a 9'4" bed on an 8'6" truck frame moves the hitch back too far, causing an unsafe load placement on the truck.

These guidelines should get you started in choosing a truck bed to fit your situation. Please contact us for more information.

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