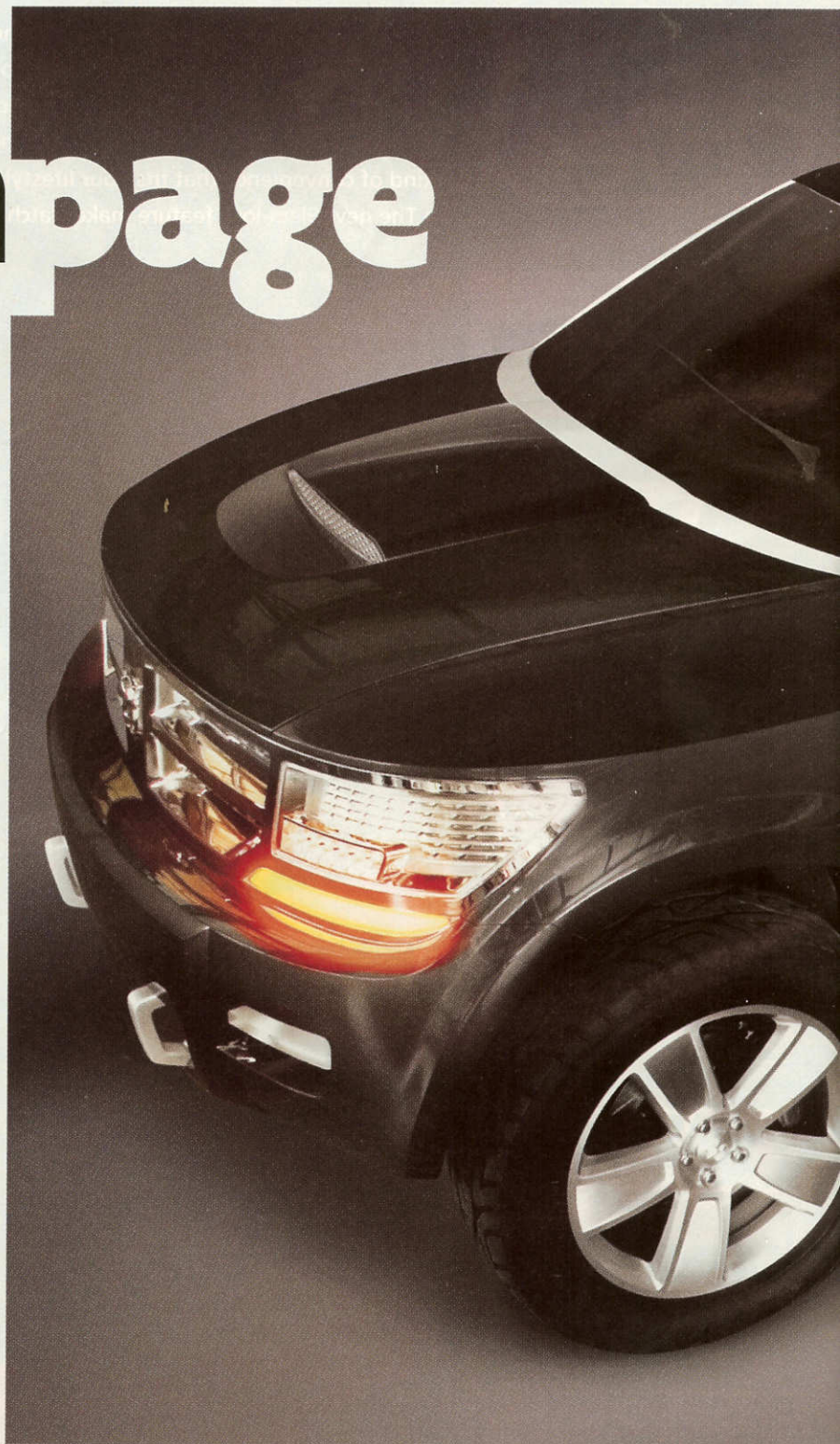
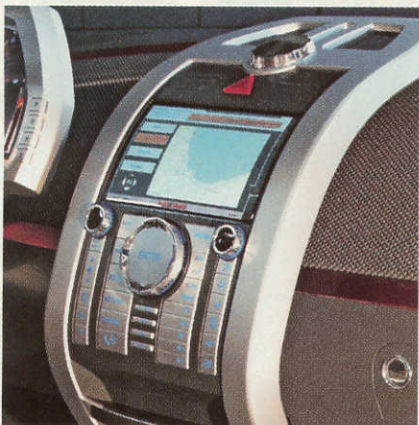


# On a Rampage

Will There Be a  
2009 Dodge Hemi  
Ridgeline Killer?

Story and photography  
by Richard Truesdell

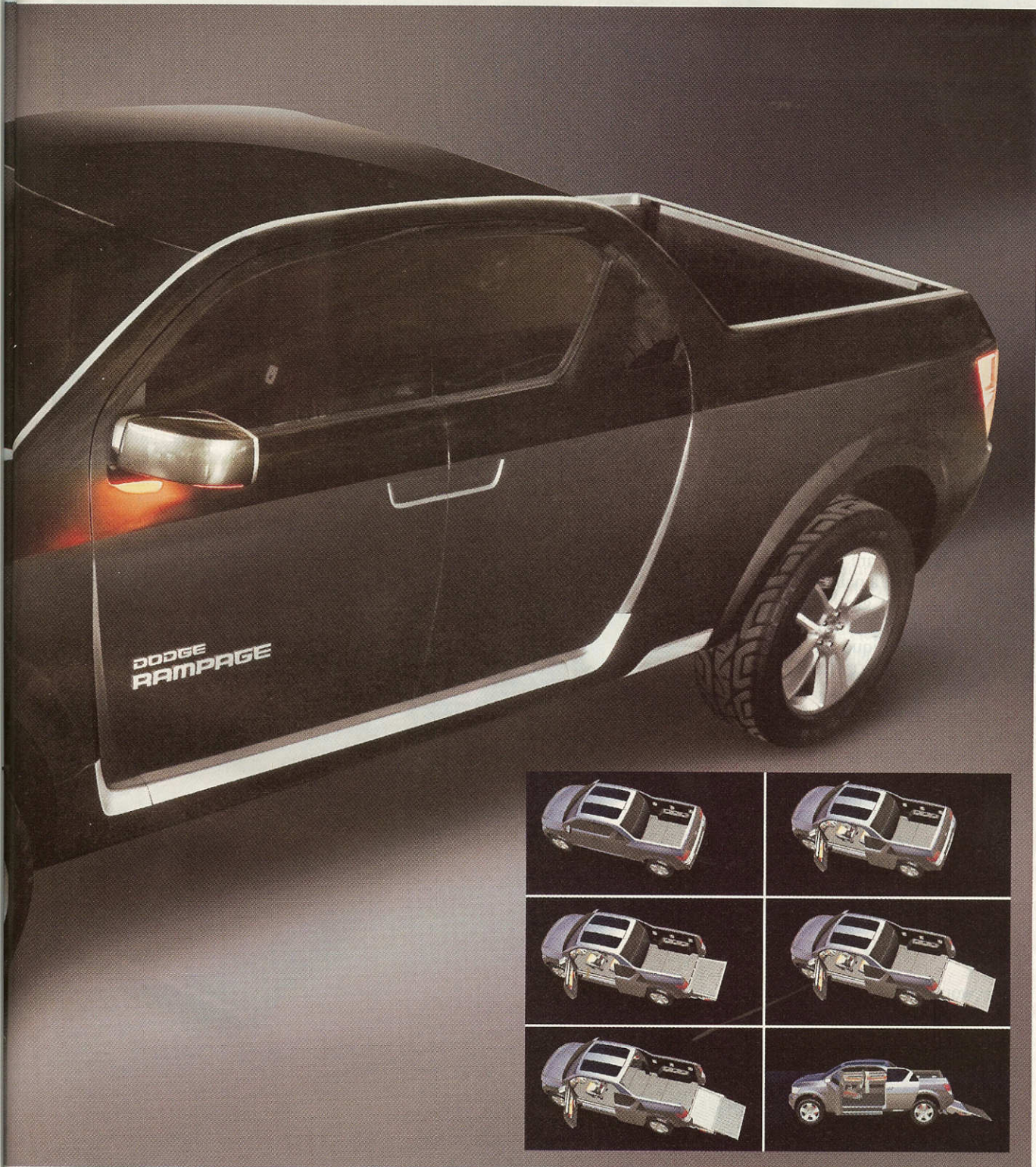


**E**ach year at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, Monday is photo night. In 2005, while snapping the then-new Honda Ridgeline, we overheard a conversation we assumed was among engineers or marketing guys from one of the Big Three manufacturers.

#### It'll Never Sell

"A front-drive pickup will never fly. What was Honda thinking?"

Since Honda couldn't directly compete in the full-size-truck marketplace, it needed to think outside the box, offering a near-full-size vehicle for non-traditional truck buyers, quite possibly those who would be buying a pickup for



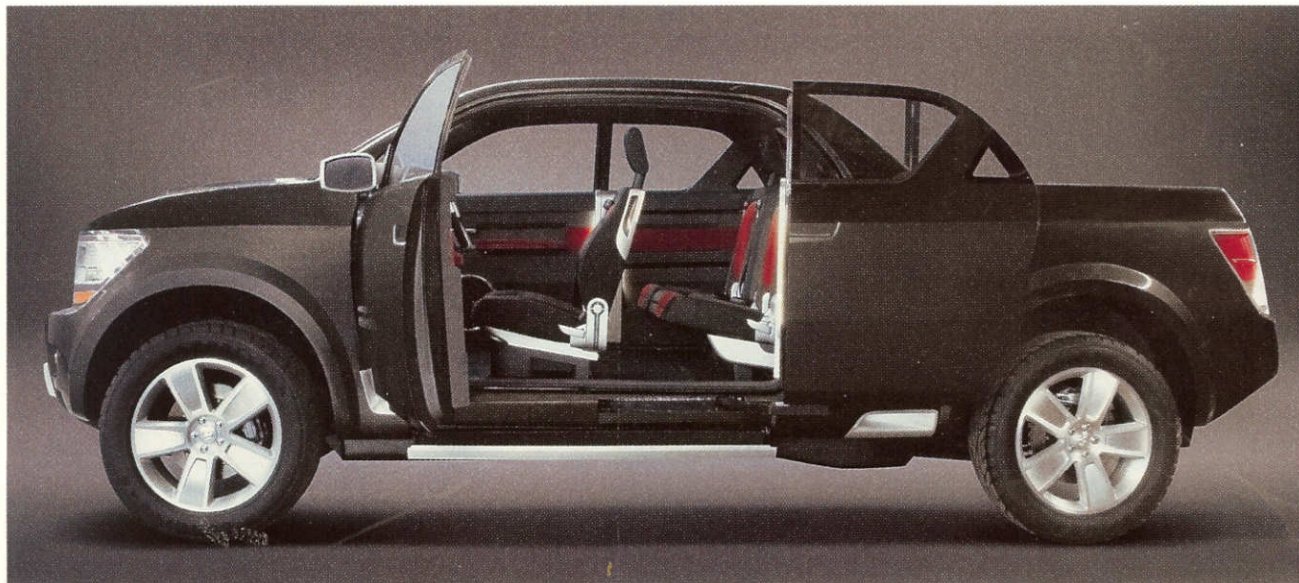
the first time. Now, after a sluggish launch, Honda will come close to meeting its first full-year sales target of 50,000 vehicles, and in the aftermath of its double win of North American Truck of the Year and *Motor Trend's* Truck of the Year, it looks like Ridgeline sales are gaining momentum in the marketplace.

#### A Different Kind of Truck

If you take the basic packaging concepts of the Ridgeline, add fold-flat seats and a healthy dose of in-your-face attitude on the style side, you'd get the Dodge Rampage, which made its debut to wide critical acclaim at the 2006 Chicago auto show.

The Rampage features a host of peo-

ple- and cargo-carrying innovations made possible with unitized body construction, front drive, and unique independent rear-wheel suspension. It looks like the Dodge design team adapted virtually every good idea from the Honda Ridgeline (which also features unitized construction) and a few from the Chevy Avalanche (a traditional



body-on-frame truck) and mixed in a few of their own homegrown ideas. These include features like Stow 'n Go seating and a rotating center stack, along with a 5.7-liter Hemi driving the front wheels (there are provisions for a later installation of a pair of 60-kilowatt electric motors to give it hybrid all-wheel-drive capabilities). What you have is a totally unique car/truck/SUV crossover that doesn't look like it was beat with an ugly stick.

It uses a unique drivetrain, a Multi Displacement System-equipped 5.7-liter Hemi driving just the front wheels. This configuration isn't seen in any other Chrysler vehicle. The initial plans called for the Rampage to have a hybrid drivetrain. By the time the rear motors were eliminated, it was probably too late to go with a conventional four- or all-wheel-drive setup, because the primary innovation in the Rampage is its five-passenger Stow 'n Go seating, the first in a pickup truck.

Why would this make a difference? A front-to-rear drivetrain would've elimi-



## Interior Design

**S**ays Irina Zavatski, principal designer, "The interior of the Rampage is durable, functional, and efficient. Everything is there for a reason."

Besides the moveable center stack and instrument cluster, overhead you'll find a ladder-type front-to-rear console with storage and entertainment units. Flanking the console are fore-aft skylights, bringing daylight to rear-seat passengers.

"The seating is designed to be athletic and comfortable, yet rugged,"

explains Chris Welch, designer of the seats, which are contoured around specially fabricated framing finished in satin silver. To make it easier to get into and out of the rear compartment, milled silver handles are integrated into the outboard sides of the front seat backs. The seats are trimmed in a smooth polyurethane-coated material and a textured spacer knit fabric, which also is used as a non-glare covering on the instrument panel. Contrasting red-orange fabric on the seat inserts echo similar accents on the instrument panel,

steering wheel, and door armrests. Adding to the interior's do-anything personality, durable rubberized material lines the cabin floor.

The stowing process for the front passenger and 60/40 rear seat is helped by headrests that flip down into the seatbacks, a solution that allows taller-than-normal seatbacks for greater support. Additionally, armrests on the front and rear passenger doors fold out of the way, further maximizing cargo-carrying capacity. All storage areas are fully accessible when the seats aren't stowed.—R.T.

nated the rear center seat from Stow 'n Go, thus destroying the versatility provided by the fold-flat seats—once they started building the concept, that was no longer an option.

"It's the truck for the nontraditional buyer," explains Scott Krugger, principal exterior designer. "This is a truck for the person who wants the functional aspects of a truck yet doesn't want a traditional vehicle. The Rampage has the capability of a pickup without sacrificing occupant space."

### Unlocking the Keys

The key to the Rampage's innovative design is that it dedicates the vast majority of its 215.1-inch length (comparable with a Quad Cab Dakota's) and 80.0-inch width (similar to a full-size Ram) to driver, passengers, and their gear. In some ways it suffers at first glance from looking too much like the Ridgeline. However, the Rampage comes off as much more trucklike, especially on the massive P305/50R22 34-inch-tall Goodyear tires mounted on 22x9.0-inch wheels. You sure won't mistake it for anything other than a Dodge.

Access to the interior is exceptional. When either door is opened, the sill pivots down to expose a step assist. While the front door has a conventional hinge, the rear door slides open to reveal an imaginative and practical interior, entry to which is enhanced by the absence of the customary B-pillar.

The interior package is innovative. Not only does the 60/40 rear seat fold into the floor, but the front-passenger seat does as well. In addition, the satin-finished center stack pivots to face either the driver or front passenger. The instrument cluster moves in sync with the adjustable steering column. It would be difficult to count all the seating configurations, and, when factoring in the power-actuated midgate (which folds into the cargo bed) and that the rear glass retracts into the midgate, the cargo-carrying capabilities are almost endless.

The five-foot cargo box also offers many utility options, including retractable cargo hooks and built-in formations arranged to secure 2x4-inch posts. The three-position tailgate can be deployed upright, folded down 98 degrees, or dropped further to an angle of 117 degrees. In this position, a stored-in-the-tailgate slideout ramp can be extended to the ground to permit easy loading of motocross bikes, ATVs, etc. While a Chrysler spokesperson wouldn't comment on the truck's towing capabilities, with a 5.7-liter Hemi even driving just the front wheels, the Rampage should be able to tackle most middle-duty towing tasks.

As versatile as the five-foot bed is, there's even more capability hidden behind the Rampage's back bumper. Acting as a second tailgate, the bumper fascia drops down to reveal an enclosed

storage space extending (with the seats up) far enough forward to provide room for a stack of 4x8-foot plywood sheets. This feature is another benefit of the FWD drivetrain and could be retained if a hybrid electric-motor package was offered to provide AWD capability.

Combined with Stow 'n Go in the cabin, these cargo box features would give the owner unrivaled flexibility, whether going to the store to buy building materials for a weekend project or taking the family on a trip to the outdoors.

### Gazing into the Crystal Ball

Will Chrysler build it?

In recent years, Chrysler has done well spinning vehicles off common platforms (300C/Magnum/Charger, Grand Cherokee/Commander, and Caliber/Compass) and if it's planned the next-generation minivan with a flexible enough platform, who's to say it couldn't build the Caravan, Town & Country, Pacifica and something like the Rampage off a common architecture? While the concept's FWD drivetrain was just for show (a production model would more likely use electric motors to power the rear wheels), imagine a similar package with front and rear buckets to retain the Stow 'n Go seating, with the Grand Cherokee SRT8's all-wheel-drive setup lurking underneath. Dodge, are you listening? **Tr**

### By the Numbers

	Dodge Dakota Quad Cab	Chrysler Pacifica	Honda Ridgeline	Dodge Rampage	Chevrolet Avalanche
Length, in	218.8	198.9	206.8	215.1	221.6
Height, in	68.7	66.5	70.3	73.4	73.6
Width, in	71.7	79.3	87.3	80.0	79.8
Wheelbase, in	131.3	116.3	122.0	142.2	130.0
Bed length, in	64.9	N/A	60	60	62
Weight, lb	4379	4511	4500	5000 (est)	5600
Drivetrain	2WD/4WD	FWD/4WD	AWD	AWD	2WD/4WD
Engine	OHV V-8	SOHC V-6	SOHC V-6	OHV V-8	OHV V-8
Displacement, L	4.7	3.5	3.5	5.7	5.3
Horsepower, hp	250 (HO)	250	255	345	295
Transmission	4-speed auto	4-speed auto	5-speed auto	5-speed auto	4-speed auto

