



TONKA TRUCKS FOR THE BIG BOYS

Super truck racing comes to North America

BY PATRICK HONG • PHOTOS BY JOE RUSZ

WHAT IS SO GREAT ABOUT OFF-SEASON motor racing coverage on your local cable channel is that it usually shows events rarely seen in the U.S. The British Touring Car Championship (BTCC), the German Touring Championship (DTM), the Scandinavian rally-cross or ice racing are just a few examples of high-intensity racetrack battles loved by car enthusiasts around the globe.

And on one of those off-season days an FIA European Truck Racing Cup event happens to come on. It shows a paint-swapping battle among several huge tractors hugging the Hockenheim road course, fighting for position with smoke billowing out of the wheel arches. It is like reliving a boyhood dream of driving a big tractor-trailer, but even better because it's big-rig racing.

As luck would have it, on a recent visit to Road Atlanta in Georgia, I came across the organization Super Truck Racing Association of North America. STRANA wants to bring big-truck racing to North America—and no, not the “little” Craftsman trucks that run in circles. We are talking about 10,000-lb. beasts that look like your average class-8 tractor-trailer on the road (minus the trailer) but powered by 800-hp engines and lapping road courses across America. Better still, STRANA extended an invitation to drive their racing truck.

From a distance, the STRANA racing truck looks like any other on the road. There is the long, pointed and sloped front end capped by the large grille. The fenders extend out to cover the front wheel wells. The boxy cab with straight-cut windshield stands



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■ The giant 10,000-lb. Tonka racing truck speeds through Turns 4 and 5, the “Esses” at Road Atlanta, with tremendous brute force and menacing presence. The 800-hhp beast is absolutely a thrill to toss around the track. It is surprisingly fast and agile. Zero to 60 mph takes just 5.5 seconds.

out in the middle, followed by a low rear end where the trailer would normally hook on. Walk closer, and the Tonka-sponsored tractor is no longer just a cargo-hauler, it's a serious racing vehicle deserving respect.

The STRANA racing truck is custom-designed and manufactured by Élan Motorsports Technologies, the same folks who developed the G Force chassis for the Indy Racing League. Constructed as a tubular steel space frame with fiberglass body par-

els, the STRANA is a purpose-built racer. To keep the center of gravity low, the 14.0-liter turbocharged Detroit Diesel Series 60 6-cylinder engine sits low and underneath the cockpit. With a compression ratio of 15.0:1 with fuel injection, the powerplant is able to deliver 800 bhp at a mere 2500 rpm, and drive the rear wheels with a whopping 2200 lb.-ft. of torque at 1800 rpm. The STRANA comes equipped with a ZF 5-speed sequential transmission and is shod with Continental racing tires just like those seen in the European super-truck series.

Steering is by rack and pinion. The suspension is upper and lower A-arms in front and a live axle bringing up the rear. Pushrod-actuated tube shocks and coil springs with anti-roll bars are at all four

corners. With the massive truck weighing some 10,000 lb., braking duties fall on the Haldex front/rear 16.9-in. brakes with water-cooling capability. When the racing truck is under heavy braking, the stuff billowing out of the wheel wells is not smoke. It's actually steam from water sprayed onto the rotors to prevent overheating.

At first, the massive STRANA racing truck can appear to be a slug to push around the track. But take a look at its 0-60-mph acceleration time of 5.5 seconds and an estimated result of completing the quarter-mile sprint in 13.7 sec. at 98.0 mph; the STRANA is no ordinary tractor. In fact, its braking distance from 80-0 mph is only 250 ft. And around a 300-ft. skidpad, it can generate an impressive lateral acceleration of 0.97g. Keep in mind this is a 10,000-lb. beast, some four to five times heavier and much larger than a normal road-going sports or race car.

Around Road Atlanta, the STRANA racing truck is fast and nimble. Honest. After a few laps, the sizable stature of the racing truck disappears. And because the cockpit sits so high up in the truck, the view forward and around is actually better than in a normal race car. Approaching a corner, the



■ It looks like a standard road truck, but it's built like a race car. Steel tube space frame with fiberglass body panels is powered by a 14,000-cc Detroit Diesel turbo 6-cylinder engine with 2200 lb.-ft. of torque!

STRANA's air-actuated brakes take some time to get used to. The first one-third pedal travel has virtually no resistance. Once the calipers bite down on the discs, the truck slows quickly.

On turn-in, the steering effort is moder-

ate, though a heavier weighting and a more direct feedback would have been much preferred. Through the apex, the STRANA's body is well checked, but the diagonal pitch is a bit disconcerting, especially during fast right/left chicanes. The factory says its sus-

STRANA SUPER TRUCK SPECIFICATIONS

Price	est \$310,000 (race ready)
Curb weight	est 10,000 lb
Wheelbase	147.3 in.
Track, f/r	87.5 in./84.5 in.
Length	214.0 in.
Width	100.0 in.
Height	102.0 in.
Fuel capacity	26.0 gal.

ENGINE & DRIVETRAIN

Engine	turbocharged Detroit Diesel Series 60 6-cylinder
Bore x stroke	133.1 mm x 167.9 mm
Displacement	14,017 cc
Compression ratio	15.0:1
Horsepower (SAE)	800 bhp @ 2500 rpm
Torque	2200 lb.-ft @ 1800 rpm
Fuel delivery	fuel injection
Transmission	ZF 5-sp sequential manual

CHASSIS & BODY

Layout	front mid-engine/rear drive
Chassis	steel tube space frame with fiberglass body panels
Brake system, f & r	16.9-in. water-cooled Haldex pneumatic disc brake system
Wheels	Alcoa 22½ x 9
Tires	Continental 315/70-R22½
Steering type	rack & pinion
Suspension, f/r	upper & lower A-arms, pushrod tube shocks & coil springs, anti-roll bar/live axle, pushrod tube shocks & coil springs, anti-roll bar

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration: 0-60 mph	5.5 sec
0-1320 ft (¼ mile)	est 13.7 sec @ 98.0 mph
Braking: 80-0 mph	250 ft
Lateral acceleration (300-ft skidpad)	0.97g
Top speed	est 120 mph

pension tuning is still ongoing and the instability will be addressed. On exiting, applying full throttle too early results in the rear stepping out. Yes, the 10,000-lb. monster will oversteer if you're not careful. With smooth steering and throttle inputs, the super truck exhibits moderate understeer through most turns. The STRANA is a kick to drive, especially with all its mass and power thundering down the hill through Turn 12 and speeding toward the front straight. It's a Tonka truck for the big boys.

This past year, the STRANA super truck has participated in a few demonstration events around the country to attract buyers and sponsors for the racing series. A few American Le Mans Series regulars such as Boris Said and Jan Magnussen have already taken their turn behind the wheel of the super truck and given their thumbs-up. So look for the big tractors battling it out on the racetrack soon. It is guaranteed to take you by surprise! For more information check out www.stranaracing.com. 