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The opening pages of

1961-1993 Dodge D-Series & Power Wagon Buyer's Guide

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Factory-Correct Restoration Reference

1961-1993 Dodge D-Series & Power Wagon Buyer's Guide

Model Year 1961-1993

Models	D100-W300 / D150-W350 / Ram / Power Ram
Years	1961-1993; sweet spot 1972-1980
Smart money	Documented trucks; Club Cab; Cummins 1989-93
Watch for	Clones; Utiline beds; galvanized ≠ immune
Parts	Mechanical excellent; trim thin; LMC 1972-93

Every specification in this guide was checked against factory literature, marque references, period road tests, and documented survivor cars. Where sources disagree or the record is silent, this guide says so rather than guessing.

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Inside This Guide

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Chapter 1 — Three Generations, One Family

The Dodge D-Series ran 1961–1980 in three generations, then became the Dodge Ram for 1981–1993 on the same bones. For buyers, the generations are three different markets: 1961–1971 (Sweptline era — thinner parts, vintage charm, lower prices), 1972–1980 (the sweet spot — galvanized bodies, Club Cab, Adult Toys, real parts support), and 1981–1993 (the Ram years — modern enough to daily-drive, including the Cummins diesels from 1989).

The honest hierarchy: if you want a classic truck to restore and enjoy, buy 1972–1980. If you want vintage character on a budget and accept the parts hunt, 1961–1971 delivers. If you want a usable old truck with modern parts availability, 1981–1993 — especially a Cummins truck — is the rational choice. This guide covers all three, but its heart is 1972–1980.

Generation	Years	Buyer take
1st (Sweptline)	1961-65	Exner beds; thinnest parts
2nd (Sweptline)	1965-71	Crew Cab 1963; vintage value
3rd	1972-80	The sweet spot; galvanized; Club Cab
Ram	1981-93	Daily-drivable; Cummins from 1989

Chapter 2 — 1961-1971: The Sweptline Era

The first generation (1961–1965) introduced Exner's Swept-Line bed — the full-width bed that became the industry template — plus the slant six, the alternator, and the three-speed automatic. The second generation (1965–1971) brought the 1963 Crew Cab, the first factory four-door pickup. These are handsome, honest trucks with the thinnest parts support in the family.



Buying a Sweptline-era truck means accepting the salvage-first parts reality: sheet metal via Desert Valley Auto Parts and forum classifieds, trim via NOS hunts, mechanical via the evergreen Mopar parts stream. Buy the most complete truck you can find — completeness is the entire value proposition when parts are thin. The Crew Cabs are the collector play in this era: first factory crew cab, genuinely historic, and priced accordingly when documented.

Sweptline.org is the community hub — engine stamping decodes, registry data, and the classifieds. A Sweptline buyer without forum membership is a buyer without a parts department.

Chapter 3 — 1972-1980: The Sweet Spot

Everything that makes the D-Series buyable concentrates here: galvanized bodies that resist rust better than Ford/GM contemporaries, coil-spring independent front suspension on 2WDs, the 1973 Club Cab (first factory extended cab), front disc brakes from 1973, and the LMC Truck catalog covering 1972–1993 with steel repair panels. This is the generation this guide's restoration companion covers in full.

Within the generation: 1972–1975 trucks are the value play — all the engineering, none of the special-edition premium. 1976–1979 is the collector zone — Warlock, Macho, Li'l Red Express, Midnite Express — with prices to match and clones to avoid (Chapter 8). 1977 brought the D100-to-D150 rename: a '1977 D100' doesn't exist factory. 1979–1980 wear the quad-rectangular face; by 1979 the big blocks were gone.

The Club Cab premium is real and justified — the pioneer body, the extra space, the jump seats. Verify with the fender tag's body code; a standard cab with Club Cab badges is a story. And the Utiline rule for special editions: Warlocks, Li'l Reds, and Midnites were never Sweptline short beds — the stepside bed is the truck's identity.

Chapter 4 — 1981-1993: The Ram Years

The 1981 rename (D→Ram, W→Power Ram) kept the same basic truck through 1993. For buyers, these are the usable classics: better parts availability than any earlier Dodge truck, modern enough for real work, old enough for character. The 1989–1993 Cummins 6BT diesels in D250/D350 trucks are the blue-chip play — million-mile engines with a cult following and prices to match.

Buying notes: the 1981–1993 trucks share the LMC catalog with the 1972–1980 trucks, so sheet metal is supported. The later trucks' interiors and trim are easier to source. Rust is the same story — cab corners, rockers, beds — but the later trucks lived more of their lives in the salt era, so geography matters more. A Southwest Cummins truck is worth the premium over a Midwest one; the math on rust repair hasn't changed.

The first-generation Cummins trucks (1989–1993) deserve their reputation and their prices — but buy on condition, not legend. A worn-out Cummins is still a rebuild, and the truck around it is still a 30-year-old Dodge. The 12-valve's simplicity is real; so is the rest of the truck's age.

Chapter 5 — Power Wagon: W-Series Buyer's Brief

The W100/W200/W300 (W150/W250/W350 from 1977) carried the Power Wagon name from 1961 through 1980 — the civilian flat-fender Power Wagon's legend (1946–1968) transferred to the W-series with the badges, the hood emblems, and the 'rain catcher' hood. The 1972–1980 W100/W150 is a conventional part-time 4WD: Dana 44 front, leaf springs all around, NP203/NP205/NP208 transfer cases depending on year.

The 4WD system must work — that's the whole buying criterion. Engage high and low, lock and unlock the hubs yourself, and drive it in 4WD. A Power Wagon that doesn't do 4WD is a 2WD with extra weight and a price problem. Budget the front-axle rebuild (ball joints, bearings, u-joints, seals, hubs) into every purchase; plow trucks — the Power Wagon's classic second career — eat front ends.