The base price for a SportsChassis truck is $130,000, but the luxury vehicles are designed to last 1 million miles, company CEO Alan Aneshansley says. [PHOTOS PROVIDED]

THE BEST PICKUP MONEY CAN BUY?

And it's made in Oklahoma

BY JIM STAFFORD
For The Oklahoman

CLINTON – You probably have seen them – those four-door semi looking trucks, pulling a horse trailer, or with an RV trailer in tow. If you were like me, you probably assumed they were a work truck, with a few extra parts added to them.

Alan Aneshansley threw open the door to a jet-black, heavy-duty pickup known as the SportChassis and invited me to climb in. Once inside the cab of the four-door truck parked on the SportChassis plant floor, everything changed.

It no longer resembled a diesel freight hauler, but a luxury SUV.

The seats were leather-wrapped Serta memory foam, individually cooled and heated. The center console offered USB power ports, cup holders and gobs of storage. An overhead console concealed a fold-down, 15.1-inch TV screen wired for satellite programming. The front dash featured a touch-screen, voice recognition and

SEE SPORTSCHASSIS, PAGE 6C

Alan Aneshansley, CEO of SportChassis Heavy Duty Pickups, explains some of the innovative designs that go into the high-end pickups.

SportsChassis: Diversification is a key

FROM PAGE 1C

navigation audio system with satellite-ready audio and Bluetooth onboard digital music storage.

"Everything we do is completely engineered by us, including special noise-reduction technology," said Aneshansley, CEO of the employee-owned SportChassis Corp. "The insides of our trucks are as quiet as an S-class Mercedes." The list of luxury appointments continued: Turn signal cameras to check for clearance; backup cameras; a ride cushioned by air-ride seating, air suspension system and front anti-sway bars. Noise-reduction technology to filter out road noise. And if the driver encounters snow-packed highways, snow chains can be automatically deployed as the truck is in motion.

Behind the front captain's seat was a second row of seating where passengers can access their own controls for rear heat and air. It is an air-conditioning system engineered by SportChassis now marketed to Freightliner Trucks, largest division of Daimler Trucks North America.

SportChassis has its roots in the early 1990s quest of its founder, the late Tim Sinor, to manufacture ambulances in Clinton. "We learned a lot about building quality and reliability into everything we do, and we have transferred that knowledge to the SportChassis," Aneshansley said. "An ambulance must be smooth, quiet, and most of all, reliable, as are our SportChassis trucks." Ambulance production ended in 2002, and the 300,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Clinton turned its production to the SportChassis.

At a base price of $130,000 each, SportChassis markets its luxury pickup through a nationwide dealership network to diverse markets. Its largest market is the equestrian market and people who tow heavy horse trailers to shows and rodeos.

"This truck is a million-mile rated truck," Aneshansley said. "Our main competition is pickup trucks, but you are going to wear three or four of those out before ours needs replacement. Our name has become the standard for this market."

Other markets include owners of heavy RV trailers; large boats; corporations that haul advertising-wrapped trailers filled with merchandise for marketing purposes; and professional athletes. Think Scottie Pippen. Chris "The Birdman" Anderson. Joe Montana. Shaquille O'Neal owns two of them.

"The reason they buy them is because they fit into them," Aneshansley said. "When Shaq bought his, he said it's the first vehicle he ever bought that he fit in."

As with many firms in Oklahoma, SportChassis slumped during the recession. Aneshansley has converted SportChassis into an employee-owned corporation in which employees earn stock in the firm.

Today, it has about 46 employees and produces two luxury pickups per week, or just over 100 annually. In January 2016, SportChassis purchased a Fort Worth, Texas, company called Salient Designs LLC, and moved its thermoform plastic manufacturing operations to Clinton. It produces consoles for SportChassis, as well as for other clients.

SportChassis branched into what it calls the "upfit" business of adding heavy duty work beds or hay lifts onto pickups sold by dealers across a large area of western Oklahoma. The company also began producing right-hand-drive vehicles for foreign markets and specialty purposes.

"Diversification is the name of the game," said Billy McCullers, SportChassis vice president. SportChassis has developed a close relationship with the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance, adopting the alliance's LEAN manufacturing philosophy. That cut hundreds of man-hours off a vehicle's production time.

"Our success has been based on the ingenuity and commitment of our employees," Aneshansley said.

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