

Truckin' Around

► With Mike Morris

No Rust, No Worries, Mate

SHINY, MIGHTY PICKUP BEDS STRAIGHT FROM THE OUTBACK.

"In Australia, a Ute is a pickup truck, but they don't look like our pickups," says Randy Cryer, who lived there for a time and discovered that most Australians drive trucks with shiny, all-aluminum aftermarket pickup beds instead of "factory tubs."

Cryer's own experience with a rusty box on his trusty '83 Toyota Hilux convinced him there was a market here for these smartly designed pickup beds, so he brought Ute Ltd. to the U.S. in 2001. Now, Utes are beginning to catch on, thanks to his growing relationship with General Motors' Business Central commercial dealerships, which offer them as a "bed delete" option on GMC and Chevrolet pickups.

Constructed entirely of extruded aircraft-grade T6 aluminum, the beds are lightweight but strong—load-rated for up to 8,000 pounds, depending on the vehicle. Their weight-to-strength ratio makes them fuel-efficient, too.

Because the entire deck sits above the wheels, the Ute's box is relatively shallow (about 12 inches), but the tailgate and both sidewalls drop down or are easily removed, turning your pickup into a flatbed. This allows for optional undermounted

toolboxes or a slide-out tool drawer (4½ inches deep by 5 or 6 feet long). Top-mounted utility boxes are also available, as well as stake sides, a cab-protecting headboard, side steps, drop-in ladder racks, and a three-door canopy top.

Ute beds come in sizes to fit compact, full-size, and Crew Cab pickups, plus chassis cab models. To date, GM is the only manufacturer to offer

Utes through its dealerships.

Installed cost is around \$2,400, according to Cryer, who says dealer incentives can cut that price by up to \$900.

Utes also are available through commercial upfitters and can be purchased as a DIY retrofit for existing pickups.

For more information, contact any GM Business Central dealer or call 866-883-2337.

