

Chicago 2008: Ford introduces Work Solutions in-dash computer package for F-150 [w/VIDEO]

click above for more high-res images of the Ford Work Solutions package

Sam.Abuelsamid@weblogsinc.com Feb 5, 2008

click above for more high-res images of the Ford Work Solutions package

Ford is not shy about reminding the world of the enormous number of full-size trucks that it sells every year. A large portion of those trucks get sold to people who use them to earn their living. Contractors, plumbers, electricians, installers, landscapers and more use their trucks and vans as mobile offices, workshops and tool cribs. With the market for this class of vehicles getting increasingly competitive, thanks to new models from Chrysler and entries from Toyota and to a lesser degree Nissan, Ford knows it needs to provide something that appeals to those core commercial customers. In mid-2006, the brand that Henry built talked to its customers and determined that owners would appreciate new features that would make their more productive in new ways. So they worked with partners like Master Lock, DeWalt and Sprint to create a package called Work Solutions that will be available on 2009 F-150 and Super-Duty pickups and E-Series vans. Basically a fully functional in-dash computer with lots of gadgetry built in, the Work Solutions package is a technological tour de force for commercial customers. Read more about it after the jump.

[Source: Ford]

The most basic element of the Work Solutions package is CableLock, which was developed with MasterLock. CableLock is a retractable locking cable mounted into the bed of the truck to keep equipment from walking away. The system uses a eight-foot-long, plastic-sheathed 10mm braided steel cable. It can be wrapped around tool boxes, compressors and anything else that might be left in the bed.

Next up is an in-dash computer running Windows CE that makes other interesting features possible. The computer fits in a standard double-din audio slot and has a 6.5-inch touch screen. Since many such trucks are used in "off-road" construction scenarios, the computer only has flash memory instead of a spinning hard drive, making it more robust in these environments. Aside from the 2GB built in, more storage can be added via a USB port on the front face of the unit or an SD memory card slot.

The computer also has built in bluetooth and EVDO wireless broadband provided by Sprint. In addition to the connectivity, the system also includes GPS guts provided by Garmin, so that drivers can figure where they are and how to get to their next job site.

One of the applications that runs on the computer is called Tool Link, which was developed with DeWalt and ThingMagic. The Tool Link system uses a pair of radio frequency identification (RFID) readers in the bed tied to an application on the computer. The Tool Link application allows the user to create lists of tools for different jobs. Passive RFID tags can be applied to every tool and the readers sense when these tools are put in the truck. Selecting a particular job list will notify the user if all the necessary tools are

on board to make sure the owner doesn't head out to a job without the necessary tools and also doesn't leave anything behind at the end of the day.

The CableLock and RFID reader in the truck bed

The CrewChief application is a telematics application that lets managers and dispatchers keep track of where their trucks are so they can make better decisions about who to assign to what jobs. CrewChief also notifies the managers about the mileage on other vehicles and transmits diagnostic information so that these vehicles can be brought in for service when needed.

A remote desktop application also lets the user access a computer at home or the office to get or update job information. With an optional bluetooth printer and wireless keyboard, they can even print out invoices on the spot. If access to additional service manuals or other data is needed, a built-in web browser allows access to manufacturer web sites.

All of this gear will be available in mid-2009 and on an ala carte basis, although obviously applications like CrewChief and Tool Link will also require the computer, as well. The systems will also be available either as a factory option or dealer installed. Owners of relatively recent Ford trucks that have a double-DIN head unit will also be able to retrofit the systems to their vehicles, so recent F-150 owners won't be left in the lurch. Pricing hasn't been announced at this point, but the potential savings from not having to record information multiple times, or leave a job site for more information, or to retrieve or purchase forgotten tools should help the system pay for itself in short order.

PRESS RELEASE:

FORD WORK SOLUTIONS: EXPANDING THE CAPABILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY OF AMERICA'S FAVORITE TRUCKS

- Ford Work Solutions is a collection of affordable technologies –including four industry-first features – that will provide Ford customers connectivity, flexibility and security to better run key aspects of their business – from their Ford Truck, even on the job site.
- Ford Work Solutions will be available this fall on the 2009 F-150, F-Series Super Duty, and E-Series vans. Transit Connect vans join Ford truck's commercial vehicle lineup with this technology in mid-2009.

CHICAGO, Feb. 6, 2008 - Ford is further expanding its 'smart' features for truck customers, announcing today a collection of industry-exclusive technologies for F-Series trucks and commercial E-Series vans that will help make business owners more productive and successful.

Ford Work Solutions delivers four innovative features:

- An in-dash computer developed with Magneti Marelli and powered by Microsoft Auto that provides full high-speed Internet access via the Sprint Mobile Broadband Network and navigation by Garmin. It's the first broadband-capable in-dash computer in production. This system allows customers to print invoices, check inventories and access documents stored on their home or office computer networks – right on the job site.
- Tool Link, a Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) asset tracking system developed in partnership with DEWALT, the industry leader in professional power tools,

and ThingMagic, the industry expert on embedded RFID technology. This enables customers to maintain a detailed real-time inventory of the tools or equipment stored in the pickup box.

- Crew Chief, a fleet telematics and diagnostics system, which allows small fleet owners to efficiently manage their vehicles, quickly dispatch workers to job sites and keep detailed vehicle maintenance records.
- Cable Lock security system developed in partnership with Master Lock®, the industry-leading lock manufacturer, to discourage theft of expensive tools too large to fit in the cab.

"Our truck customers are smart – and they work hard," said Mark Fields, Ford's president of The Americas. "Ford Work Solutions provides truck customers new technologies and tools to help them work even smarter and further boost their productivity."

F-Series has been the best-selling truck in America for 31 years. Two out of every five commercial trucks sold in the U.S. wears a Ford oval.

For years, truck capability has been measured in maximum towing and payload ratings. The new 2009 Ford F-150 builds on that kind of industry-leading capability, offering the most 'smart' features that make towing and hauling more flexible, easier and safer. Ford Work Solutions adds still another dimension of capability for commercial truck owners.

"Ford Work Solutions takes productivity to a new level by bringing the office to the job site in an integrated, seamless way that only Ford could deliver – with a strong network of industry-leading partners like DEWALT, Microsoft, Garmin, Master Lock®, Magneti Marelli and Sprint," said John Felice, general marketing

manager, Ford Division.

Ford Work Solutions features were developed through hands-on research with contractors and skilled tradespeople in multiple markets around the U.S.

All four Ford Work Solutions will be available this fall on the new 2009 Ford F-150 XL, STX, XLT and FX4 trucks; F-Series Super Duty XL, XLT and FX4 trucks; and all 2009 E-Series vans. Transit Connect vans join the lineup in mid-2009. In time, several of the features will be available for dealer installation to upgrade Ford Trucks already in service.

Online On the Job Site

Ford is delivering fully integrated mobile office functionality into F-Series trucks on the job site – an industry first.

An in-dash computer, developed with Magneti Marelli, transforms the new 2009 F-150 or

F-Series Super Duty into true mobile offices, capable of linking into the business owner's main office computer network or a home computer via a cellular broadband connection.

Users can access existing files on an office computer miles from the job site, open a word processing document, a spread sheet or their business accounting program, make updates and print them in the truck on an available Ford-certified, on-board, Bluetooth-enabled, battery-powered inkjet printer.

Powered by Microsoft Auto, the system provides high-speed Internet access via the Sprint Mobile Broadband Network. It works with Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones, offering hands-free calling with push-to-talk voice

recognition, access to user phonebooks and the ability to receive text messages.

The in-dash computer also includes navigation by Garmin, which comes standard with features like re-routing due to construction or traffic congestion and points of interest including local gas stations and their fuel prices, restaurants, Ford dealerships and Quick Lane Tire & Auto Centers.

The computer is integrated into the vehicle's center stack, filling the same space normally occupied by the standard radio. It is equipped with a 6.5-inch, high-resolution touch screen, two gigabytes of memory, a secure digital slot for additional memory, a USB port and includes a wireless keyboard and mouse. A stylus, stored next to the CD slot, is included for use on the touch screen.

The computer is 'Built Ford Tough' – designed and tested to the same stringent standards as the other parts on the truck.

Tracking Tools

Ford F-Series trucks offer customers the most flexible, most accessible pickup boxes in the industry, thanks to class-leading hauling capability, industry-exclusive features like tailgate and box side steps – as well as a unique technology like Ford Work Solutions Tool Link.

Developed with DEWALT and ThingMagic, Tool Link offers owners the capability to mark and scan high-value tools, safety equipment, material inventories and other important assets using RFID tags. When the vehicle is running, a pair of RFID antennas, mounted in corrosion- and impact-resistant

housings on the inside of the pickup box, scan the box for the items on a pre-programmed inventory list.

The data is transmitted to a reader mounted inside the cab and displayed on the in-dash computer screen, alerting the driver if any inventoried tools are not loaded on the truck.

"Tool Link increases productivity and saves money," said William Frykman, Ford Work Solutions product and business development manager. "It helps contractors and tradespeople guarantee they show up at the job site with the right tools for each job— and that they don't leave equipment behind."

Tool Link comes pre-loaded with several standard tool lists that are easily edited to reflect specific types of jobs. The system uses industry standard second-generation RFID tags that can be fastened to tools or other items and can read and catalogue hundreds of tools or assets in just seconds.

Manage the Crew

Fleet owners and managers often need to dispatch vehicles quickly for service calls. Ford Work Solutions Crew Chief provides them a telematics and diagnostics system that delivers real-time vehicle location and maintenance tracking, allowing them to quickly respond to calls and optimally deploy their fleets.

The data is linked to a web-based application, which can be used by a fleet administrator in an office or anywhere there is Internet access – including a Ford Work Solutions in-dash computer.

As an added benefit, Crew Chief interfaces with the vehicle's electrical architecture and can monitor numerous diagnostic functions, including tire

pressure or check engine light codes.

It also can be programmed to identify user-set alerts, such as unauthorized use of a vehicle or excessive idling.

The system will also provide fuel calculations and fuel tax reporting, helping fleet managers and business owners manage costs more effectively.

Master Lock Keeps Cargo Secure

"Secure, lockable storage is important for all customers," said Frykman.

"That's why we worked with Master Lock to deliver the Cable Lock, a convenient way to secure items such as toolboxes, air compressors, generators or large power tools that may need to be in the pickup box when the vehicle is parked."

The strong, eight-foot, 10 millimeter steel cable is wrapped in a protective plastic sheathing and is easily woven around toolbox handles or through and around items and then locked to the truck with a cuff-style clasp.

The clasp can be attached to any of the items in the box, any of the tie-down cleats, or simply clamped back onto the cable itself. The self-retractable cable is stored in a corrosion- and impact-resistant housing mounted to the inside wall at the rear of the pickup box. The unit is spring-loaded and uses a friction mechanism that will gently retract the cable when not in use. Cable Lock is easily installed on virtually any Ford pickup truck.