



THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS

19 July 2007

A couple of weeks ago, while searching for a used pickup truck, I visited a car dealership in Troy. The salesman had called to say they had a truck on the lot he thought might fit our needs. Though it had an extended cab, which we did not want, it also, he assured us, had a full sized bed, which we need. So Sam and Will and I stopped by on the way home from camp to take a look. Which is all we took because we only had to look once to see that the truck had a short bed. When I explained to the young man who had rushed out in that eager car salesman way to greet us that this precluded us from buying the truck no matter what sort of special deal he wished to offer, he stared at me in disbelief and asked why I would need a full bed on a pickup truck.

I would like to be able to report that this car salesman is simply an idiot. Surely anybody with a vaguely functional brain could figure out why someone buying a vehicle designed to carry large amounts of stuff would want it to be able to, well, carry large amounts of stuff. But a brief survey of vehicles on the road indicates how even a mildly intelligent car salesman might come to suffer this confusion about the purpose of pickup trucks. Since our trip to the dealership, Will and I have carried out our own research, which shows that of the startling large number of pickups being driven, two thirds have extended cabs. From this we can conclude either that a lot of idiots are driving pickups around the capital district these days or that people have come somehow to view the pickup truck as a passenger vehicle. Given this consumer behavior, a car salesman might be forgiven for assuming that someone shopping for a pickup would not care a great deal about how much cargo it could haul.

Might be, but not by me. Surely car salesmen are aware that pickup trucks get lousy gas mileage, handle poorly, and, because of their bulk, rigid frame design and height off the road, do an excellent job of killing people in small cars who are unlucky enough to get into accidents with them. Knowing all that, car salesmen ought to ask people thinking of buying pickups why they need one. Those who cannot supply a reasonable answer, such as “in the course of my job I frequently transport large amounts of stuff significant distances”, should be steered to vehicles that actually suit their needs and reminded that on those rare occasions when they might actually need a pickup truck, they can easily rent one for the day.

But that would be un-American. This is the land of consumer choice. If millions of Americans want to buy pickup trucks for stupid reasons, nobody is going to stop them. In fact, car companies will rush to design and produce the sorts of trucks such people really want—ones with more passenger space, bigger engines and a lot less cargo area—and the dealers will do everything they can short of offering a reasonable price to get as many drivers as possible into these monstrous vehicles. If you drive past any of the car dealerships in Greenwich all you will see at the front of the lot are trucks—huge trucks with small beds. I am not entirely sure they even sell cars any longer.

Which is odd, since you can buy a car that costs half as much as a truck, uses half that gas and not only won't cause as many accident fatalities, but can also steer clear of

This week's share: Chard, Garlic, Kohlrabi, Leeks, Lettuce, Snap peas, Pepper, Hot pepper, Squash, Basil, Mint

accidents without flipping over. True, driving such a car will not make you feel like a cowboy or a rugged construction worker. And, sadly, it will not hold those big piles of debris and scrap metal that trucks in ads always seems to be hauling up steep hills. This would be a problem for all those Americas hoping to take loads of broken concrete and I beams to scenic vistas. But for those of us hoping our kids do not have to live in a world made increasingly inhospitable as a result of poor consumer choices, having more people pass up on pickups would be a boon.

And frankly if people are not willing to make a sensible choice about what vehicle to drive, they ought to get a little help from the rest of us. I know we tend to find the idea of such coercion distasteful, and not entirely without reason. But we are immersed in marketing, which is nothing more than coercion for the private financial benefit of companies. Without intensive marketing, car companies would sell far fewer pickup trucks to people who do not need them. If companies can skew people's choices for their own profit, surely we can do the same to our own advantage. We could try everything from requiring more fuel efficient trucks to imposing hefty taxes on trucks clearly designed to carry people and not stuff. Perhaps in time we would achieve a little common sense and recall that trucks have those large empty spaces behind the cabs so that people who need to can fill them up with things they have to transport, such as lumber for chicken houses, organic fertilizer, greenhouse plastic, and even tubs of fresh produce.

Given what the squash patch has been up to this past week, we could probably have filled a pickup entirely with tubs of squash. Fortunately a little common sense prevailed in the packing room and we passed up the opportunity to fill up your bag entirely with squash. We had to leave room for a few other vegetables, like the chard. This turns out to be a good year for chard too, which I hope at least some of you regard as good news. I do, and not just because I like to see the crops thrive. I also like eating chard, especially cooked with lots of garlic and a little hot pepper.

I would like to see peppers thrive. I keep hoping that some year the plants will grow at least a couple of feet tall, but they never do. This year they seem especially recalcitrant. I am not sure they have grown any taller since we transplanted them almost two months ago and they are slow to produce fruit. But they have started at last. The hot peppers, as always, are somewhat more vigorous. Unfortunately, I have lost track of which variety is which (we have several new ones this year), so I cannot say how hot your hot pepper might be. Try a little from the tip (the least hot part of a hot pepper) and keep in mind the seeds and membrane are the hottest part. I doubt that any of them are overwhelmingly hot (unlike the red habaneros, which ripen later), particularly this early in the season. You could roast and peel your peppers (hot and sweet) and serve them with grilled squash and a yogurt, garlic and mint sauce. You could add the leeks, too, which can be grilled. Just trim the tops and roots, rinse them with cold water, brush on a little olive oil and put them on the grill, turning them as they begin to char. When they are soft chop them up and add them to the other vegetables. This would be good cold too. You could take it to a picnic. Just put the dish in the back of your pickup along with four thousand pounds of rock, drive up a big hill, and enjoy the view and the vegetables.