

City Slicker

Hino's 700 Series is ideal for local delivery work where minimising fatigue ranks high on the agenda



The competition is certainly hotting up with the start of 2011, and the Japanese importers are all wondering about the impact on their market share of the soon-to-be-released Chinese truck alternatives. Admittedly, the Chinese manufacturers, like the Koreans, are starting at the light truck end of the market, but that's only the tip of the iceberg. There's plenty of heavier weight product just waiting in the wings, with the respective importers of Chinese trucks watching how their first toe-in-the-water exercise takes off.

Hino has been working hard at improving its brand specification and reputation, and at the top of the range the Hino 700 Series becomes worthy of close inspection because of its ability to blend Japanese functionality with European technology. In the case of the 700 Series, it's a matching of Japanese engine to European transmission in the form of the ZF AS-tronic 16-speed automated manual gearbox. Is it worth the effort? You bet!

Regular readers of *PowerTorque* will know we've evaluated the 700 Series as a prime mover and single trailer around the busiest parts of Sydney in peak hour as we hauled a full 42 tonnes GVM in and out of tight city streets. This time we took our drive further down the road, with an interstate run from Melbourne, northwards up the Hume Highway, to Sydney.

The main reasoning for the longer run came down to giving us the chance of running proper fuel economy evaluations, as running in an urban environment is prone to so many influences, making a true fuel consumption figure harder to establish. And the other information the run provided was whether Japanese horsepower is really based on smaller horses than their European counterparts.

As a local haulier running intrastate the Hino 700 has much to offer in value and ease of driving.



We'll start with the cab interior, which has had some additions and upgrades since first being introduced.

Access and egress is easy, thanks to well placed grab handles, easy to find, well spaced steps and a relatively flat floor. It's not a straight step-across type of flat floor, as the centre console does restrict clear crossover access, but it's not that difficult, either, to get from one side of the cab to the other. The high roof is similar to the European competition, but storage is reduced compared to something like a Volvo or Scania alternative. There are two small over windscreen lockers, a full-width over windscreen shelf with mesh net front and there are two indentations with corresponding coat hooks in each rear side panel, to accommodate coats of jackets on a hanger.

The front passenger gets a fixed base seat, but the driver gets the always-impressive Isri air-suspended 6860 seat with integral seat belt. It's weight and height adjustable,



and provides a good range of variation to find the ideal combination. Assisting the driver in finding the right position is the tilt, rake and height adjustable steering column, which has a huge range of permutations to suit any driver size.

As with all Japanese cabs, the bunk area is not built for entertaining. The bottom bunk can be configured with a mattress extension to give a width of 800 mm, or there's the added alternative of folding down the upper bunk. For those intent on a good sleep, there's curtain railing already installed, running around the outer edge of the cabin and across the windscreen area to shield off the total cabin interior. The centre console also has plenty of indented trays, plus a small locker for keeping glasses, wallets and coins from dropping onto the floor.

Visibility is excellent thanks to large, power-adjusted door mirrors and separate convex spotter mirrors mounted below. They're vibration free and are heated to keep vision clear. What we did find though, when we hit the heavy inner city traffic in Sydney around the airport at the end of the drive, was that vision would benefit from a kerbside mirror on the left-hand door, above the passenger window. There's a considerable blind spot between the front A-pillar and the B-pillar that could be cleared up with a convex kerb mirror for added safety.



Under the cab is a Hino 12.9-litre, common rail injected, turbocharged and intercooled overhead camshaft diesel that produces 353 kW (480 hp) at 1800 rpm, and peak torque of 2157 Nm rated at 1100 rpm.

When running in 16th gear at 100 km/h, the engine spins happily at the 1600 rpm area, and holds the gear strongly down to the top half of the green band. Once it drops under 1300 rpm the torque does drop off, and it's here that you'll find the AS-tronic is quick off the mark to change for a lower ratio. If you want to over-ride the automated change and drive it manually, especially on the approach to the crest of a hill, a light push forwards on the selector will take the AMT up one gear, push further forwards and it will take a double gear upgrade.

The ability of the software to pick the most appropriate gearing is impressive, but you can improve on its performance, particularly when accelerating on relatively flat roads from rest, by manually selecting each change, skipping up two ratios at a time in the box and giving better acceleration.

The big advantage of the ZF automated manual is really felt whenever you hit the city. All you have to do, as a driver, is avoid everything happening around you, as the Electronic Control Module is well up to the task of finding an appropriate gear ratio for whatever life throws at you.

If you have to manoeuvre at very low speeds, the driver hits a "slow" button alongside the gear shift, with 1st or reverse engaged, and this reduces speed for situations such as parking or reversing onto a loading dock.

As part of the ZF AS-tronic transmission you get the option of the ZF intarder, and this is such a good addition you'd be mad not to include it on the specification. With its five-position control wand on the steering column, you can bring on as much retardation as you want, and it's well capable of

The ease of driving could attract a whole new group of drivers as Maree found when she took the wheel.

holding vehicle speed as well as reducing it, even on long and relatively steep declines. It's such a valuable addition, that any extra cost associated with its inclusion will be easily recouped through a reduction in service brake application and wear. It also enables hill descent speed to be more closely controlled to keep within posted upper speed limits.

The ride comfort is not quite on equal terms with European makes, but, with semi-elliptical tapered leaf springs at the front and Hendrickson HAS airbags on the rear, neither is it harsh. Those looking for tipper work, or different applications, can opt for a six-rod rear end.

Throughout the drive north from Melbourne, and running at full gross weight, we certainly averaged acceptable journey times and average speeds, but that also calls into play whether you'd want to buy such a prime mover for long haul work, even if hauling high volume loads rather than running at maximum weight.

With an overall fuel consumption of 2.11 km/litre, the Hino acquitted itself well, but also illustrated that its forte will be for city work rather than the great open highway. It would be ideal as a day truck running trailers for changeover, but, even with its twin bunk and high roofed interior, it was never going to be a popular alternative to longer haul, overnight or interstate work.

As a reliable and honest workhorse, the Hino 700 Series offers a great engine/transmission mix, and, with the ZF intarder, it's well worth a close look if you're in that segment of the market. **Dr**

