

# Light 'n Easy

Hino has dramatically improved their 300 Series with new engines, an expanded cab range, more Hybrid choices and vehicle stability control. Geoff Paradise reports



It's been a busy year for Japanese truck manufacturer Hino.

Earlier this year the company revealed its new 500 Series range of trucks and more recently their 300 Series light duty models.

The public – at least the show going public – saw some examples of the new 300 range at the 2011 Brisbane Truck Show but it was nearly six months before they were ready for release and the chance for us to drive them.

The wait was worth it. Hino has over the past decade massaged this light duty truck into something very special. When it debuted about 10 years ago it was known as the Dutro but that name – an acronym for something but what exactly I can't recall – was lauded by the media at the time.

It did raise the bar significantly in

this sector and gave market leader (then and now) Isuzu somewhat of a fright in the market.

But a decade is a long time in the truck industry, hell, it's a long time period, and a truck maker

can either improve a model line up or stuff it. Thankfully Hino are guilty of the former and why this new series is very good is because the Australian management and







engineers were able to make tangible inputs into its specification for our conditions. It may well give those pesky Isuzu N-Series trucks another fright, only time will tell.

As a rule, Japanese truck makers (read: their engineers and product planners) don't like taking advice from the colleagues outside of Japan. I'm sure they subscribe to the theory "what would they know?" Well, a lot in fact. Because it is the local engineers and product planners that know our conditions, what operators want and expect and what a truck needs to be successful. The truck market, the Japanese are slowly waking up to, is not a "one size fits all" business.

According to Hino "the entire model range has been redesigned outside and inside, and was subject to record levels of Australian development input". They say, and I'll quote them directly, "as a

result it offers the best in improved drive ability, aerodynamics, vision, cabin ergonomics, comfort and convenience, ease of maintenance and vehicle security".

Having spent a couple of days driving most examples of the 300 Series – including the too often overlooked Hybrid – I have to agree. The 300 Series is good.

But that in itself begs the question; are there any bad Japanese trucks in this category these days? At the risk of sounding like Kevin Rudd who answers his own questions I'll say, "no, there isn't". They are all extremely competent, fuel efficient, comfortable and easily maintained.

So what will drive customers to the new Hino at the expense of the other three brands? Obviously value for money and standard features.

While all manufacturers have a base price, or recommended retail price, there are always deals to be done at the point of sale so

published RRP's are to be used as a starting point where negotiations begin.

Space doesn't allow us to square off each truck in this sector – that's something you can do on the internet when there's nothing on telly – but Hino has certainly gone for the doctor with the new 300 Series, including one feature the others don't have...yet. All models have dual SRS airbags, four-wheel ventilated disc brakes incorporating ABS braking, electronic brake-force distribution (EBD) and, in an Australia first for a light-duty truck, vehicle stability control (VSC).

VSC provides optimal traction in cornering to complement the way in which anti-skid brakes (ABS) provides optimal braking performance and stability under braking, and traction control optimises traction when accelerating.

It also dampens strong



understeer or oversteer to ensure vehicle stability.

The VSC system includes a dedicated electronic control unit (ECU), which controls VSC, ABS and traction control (ASR).

VSC utilises some of the 300 Series' existing ABS hardware and software, including the wheel-speed sensors and throttle position sensor. If the VSC system detects an oversteer situation (loss of rear-wheel grip), it controls the engine output and (depending on the extent of the tendency) applies the brakes on the outside front and rear wheels.

This generates an inertial moment in the vehicle's outward direction and helps dampen its tendency to oversteer. VSC assumes priority over ABS and traction control. The new and more fuel-efficient diesel engine range has, say Hino, a class-leading combination of power and torque, with up to 121kW of power and 464Nm of torque from its ADR80/03 Euro 5-compliant diesel engine.

And, in what is mainly the preserve

of European trucks the Hino's exhaust emissions also easily meet the EEV (Enhanced Environmentally Friendly Vehicle) standard, regarded as the cleanest available in the market and one step up from your 'basic' Euro 5 compliance without needing AdBlue.

"The gains in power, torque and fuel efficiency have been achieved through careful attention to engine design, turbocharger pressures and the high-pressure (common-rail) electronic fuel injection," said Hino Australia divisional manager, product strategy, marketing and dealer development, Alex Stewart.

"Injection pressures have been increased and a new intercooler adopted.

Key features of the Hino engine include a high pressure common-rail fuel system, a variable-nozzle turbocharger, cooled exhaust-gas recirculation system and closed crankcase ventilation.

Mr Stewart said the Hino engine has the best Diesel Particulate Active Reduction System (DPR) system in class,

with an 800,000km service interval and an automatic self-cleaning system which begins when the filter is only at 30 per cent of overall capacity.

Hino has the added reliability of three fuel filters, including two with water separators mounted on the chassis, and a main long life filter mounted on the engine.

All models have an 80 Amp alternator for optimum reliability.

"Hino has also looked to increase 300 Series' driving range, by fitting a 70-litre sub-tank on medium, long and extra-long wheelbase wide cab models," Mr Stewart said.

He said the new range would allow customers to better select the right truck for their needs.

"We want to make our customers' businesses more profitable, while providing a truck that is more pleasurable and, most importantly, safer to drive," he said.

"Whichever truck they choose, buyers will have the safest, most powerful, most efficient and comfortable truck in the segment.

"We've redistributed models to offer the maximum payload for the various car licence and light-





truck licence categories up to 8.0-tonne GVM.

"In the crew cab range, for example, we now offer two 5.5–4.5-tonne models (manual and auto) which can be operated on a car licence, as well as a manual 6.5-tonne model, and auto 7.3-tonne model and a manual 8.5-tonne model."

Hino's new 300 Series meets the internationally recognised European Structural Standards Regulation No. 20 (ECE-R29) for cabin strength.

To their enormous credit, has persevered with their Hino hybrid technology despite a less than enthusiastic uptake in the market place, and now offer no less than eight hybrid models featuring a new parallel hybrid system promising



increased performance and a new AMT (automated manual transmission).

In another claim to fame, all of Hino's wide cab models have a six-speed transmission in either manual or automatic, with the automatic transmission now available on a greater range of models. Hino is currently the only Japanese truck manufacturer to offer a full automatic transmission in the light-duty market. It's a good transmission and while comparisons will be made against other brands it's important not to compare it with automated manuals which have a personality all of their own.

I found the 'Power' mode to be the most useful. It shortened up the shift point from a standing start compared to the 'Economy' mode which was a bit leisurely

in its shift point under the same circumstance. It's all a matter of horses for courses mind you. Other drivers might prefer to leave the transmission in 'Economy' mode for ever and a day.

"It is the best on the market for light-duty truck applications and has a host of electronic control features normally associated with high-end luxury cars," said Mr Stewart.

The 'intelligent' automatic has fuel-saving torque converter lock-up in five ratios – from second to sixth gear. The learning characteristics of the transmission can comfortably adapt to the driving style of the driver. It has a 'neutral control' feature which electronically switches the transmission to neutral when the truck is stationary and the brakes are applied. This reduces engine and

drivetrain load, offering significant savings in fuel consumption, Hino say.

To make life easier and safer all manual models have Hino's ES (Easy Start) hill-start assist. The new range is sharper looking too, although I have trouble when any manufacturer claims their cab-over trucks offer class-leading aerodynamics. But that's not to say some minor wind cheating tweeks can't be achieved, Freightliner's Argosy is testimony to that and they have a full size fair dinkum wind tunnel in their back yard!

However, the 300 Series does have a new exterior design Hino claims provides improved fuel economy and they also say the new wide cab model's coefficient of drag is significantly better than that of its major competitors. Hmmm.







The driver's vision is improved over the previous model and there are new multi-position electric controlled and heated main and spotter mirrors, and slim A-pillars that greatly reduce forward blind spots. In another light duty truck safety first, high-intensity discharge (HID) headlamps on wide cab models are available as an optional fitment and fitted as standard equipment on Hino Hybrid.

Cabin entry and exit has been improved, with larger door apertures, wider opening doors, larger steps, increased foot and leg space, and even a collapsible gearshift lever.

The cabin interior has been completely redesigned for improved convenience, storage and driving comfort, including new seats (all wide cab models now have a driver's suspension seat as standard equipment), instruments, switches, audio

systems and remote central locking for all doors (including the rear doors on crew cabs), and an integrated engine immobiliser.

No chance of you getting hot under the collar in the noon-day heat as all models have factory-fitted Denso air conditioning while crew cab models have an additional rear air-conditioner unit.

Medium, long and extra-long wheelbase wide cab models have an increased driving range, thanks to a new 70-litre sub-tank giving a total fuel capacity of 170 litres.

On the road the trucks behave exceptionally. The suspended drivers seat is a bonus and coupled with an adjustable steering column provides the driver with plenty of choice to obtain the most comfortable driving position.

There is nothing hidden on the dash – the gauges are easy to read, the switches conveniently placed and even the standard cabs have a feeling of space. There

is nothing claustrophobic about these trucks.

Handling is crisp and the steering sharp, it doesn't wander and requires minimum effort from the driver to stay straight and true. A small point to be sure, but who wants to be correcting a truck all day long?

The ride is good with only the roughest of Queensland roads managing to rattle our teeth, but on that note it wouldn't matter what light truck you were in.

With Fuso and UD both releasing all new models in this sector in 2011 it's going to require some diligent homework and number crunching to determine which truck is best for you.

Great cabin features and models, a full automatic transmission, powerful and torquey engines or the choice of a Hybrid are just some of the features that will make the final decision that much harder. **TT**