

MADE TOUGH



AFTER THREE YEARS OF EXTENSIVE TESTING, HINO HAS LAUNCHED THE 300 SERIES 4X4 EXCLUSIVELY IN AUSTRALIAN, FILLING A MARKET GAP FOR THE JAPANESE MANUFACTURER.

Story by Peter Shields and Bianca Dohnt.

In November 2017, Japanese truck manufacturer, Hino, held the long-awaited launch for its new 300 Series 4x4 models. The Australian location for the launch was appropriate for the global release, considering that the truck was built specifically to fill a market gap that Hino had identified among its Australian clientele.

The lack of a light-duty 4x4 truck in the Hino lineup was a deal-breaker for some large buyers, Hino says, particularly those looking to approach one manufacturer to supply their entire fleet. So in 2009, the company made the decision to develop the 300 series 4x4, and the project began to engineer a 4.5-7.5-tonne gross vehicle

mass (GVM) truck.

Real-world testing of prototypes began here in 2014 with the Cook Shire Council in Cape York in far north Queensland, and Kennedy Drilling in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. Passing the test with flying colours, the Kennedy Drilling team particularly highlighted the use of the four disc brakes, which are less likely to be affected by water or dust compared to drum brake systems – something of extreme importance for off-road applications. In recognition of these environments, the 300 4x4's air intake has been raised more than a metre compared to the 4x2 to better protect the engine from dust.

The engine is the Euro 5 Hino N04C four-litre engine, which delivers 121kW (165hp) at 2,500rpm and a maximum torque of 464Nm at 1,400rpm. For the type of work that such a vehicle can be expected to handle the engine still has around 380Nm available at 1,000rpm, which makes the truck very tractable. During our test we tackle some of the roughest terrains using low range in either third or fourth gear and the engine doesn't even seem like it will stall. The truck trundles along nicely in freeway and suburban driving, but really comes into its own on the logging track section of the test. Manually engaging the twist action front hub locks sets the vehicle

ready to engage 4x4 mode, which is easily selected with switches located in the centre of the dash. Although we don't drop any air pressure in the tyres, the Hino takes the roughest and steepest sections with ease.

Using low range third and fourth gears and the torque of the engine to maintain momentum, we are able to negotiate just about any obstacle and only resort to the lower gears when climbing up sandstone shelves that exceed around 300mm in height. The 4x4 versions of the Hino 300 are fitted with a six-speed all-synchromesh manual transmission.

The transfer case provides a low range reduction of 2.2:1 and has been sourced from the 13-tonne GVM Hino 500 GT 4x4, so it is well proven.

The front and rear suspension incorporates multi leaf springs in place

FAST FACT

According to Hino, the 4.5-7.5-tonne gross vehicle mass (GVM) 4x4 market in Australia represents approximately 700 new units per year, spread predominantly across mining (32 per cent) and fire (27 per cent) applications.

of the softer riding parabolics on the 4x2 models, and the shock absorbers perform a reasonable job of smoothing out the smaller bumps and corrugations. Over the bumpy tracks, the driver's magnetically-dampened, torsion bar spring suspended seat works hard to keep the driver comfortable, though the same comfort isn't afforded to the passenger or rear bench seat. However, the rear passengers are treated to a dedicated air conditioning console mounted at the back of the front row of seats and a separate heater unit located beneath the rear seat. Getting in and out is assisted for passengers and drivers alike with three points of contact, helping crew into the raised vehicle, which is quite high off the ground for a small truck. The Hino 300 is the first Japanese 4x4 light truck to have Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), and

Hino says 33 per cent of fatal accidents recorded could have been prevented had VSC intervened. However, the feature – along with the ABS – is disengaged when the Hino is in 4x4 mode, to allow tighter manual control over rough terrain at slower speeds.

VSC is on the must-have list for many mine operators as well as those involved in bushfire fighting applications. In acknowledgement that the truck can be destined for applications in remote locations the 300 4x4 has a total of 170 litres of fuel capacity spread across two tanks. The test truck is a dual cab so both tanks are mounted on the driver's side, while the single cabs have the 100-litre tank on the driver's side and the 70-litre auxiliary tank mounted on the kerb side. Another handy feature for the target market is the optional locally sourced alloy bull bar that is capable of accommodating up to an eight-tonne capacity winch, and the reversing camera is a handy piece of standard equipment that uses the familiar audio unit's screen. Forward vision is enhanced by the cab's height and the slim A pillars.

Though a long time in the making, Hino Australia made a good decision not to rush the release of the 4x4 versions of the 300 Series, and its commitment to years of comprehensive testing in harsh environments has resulted in vehicles that will be well up to the tasks expected of them – and sometimes beyond.