

SIZE DOES MATTER

The UK market for 7.5-tonne chassis may have been slashed, but there's more to this segment than meets the eye. Ian Norwell continues *TE's* series, assessing the latest in small trucks

For years, 7.5-tonners represented the entry level for would-be commercial vehicle drivers. A Category B car licence was all they needed, which helped make light trucks attractive to operators, too. Indeed, in 1985 they accounted for more than 28% of the truck market. By 2015 that figure had plunged to just over 10%.

But reports of the death of this weight class have been premature. Not only have UK registrations now stabilised – just shy of 5,000 chassis sold last year – but manufacturers have fleshed out the gw availability, in some cases right up to 22 tonnes.

So what can buyers now expect for their money? Well, as discussed with tractors and eight-wheelers (*TE*, October 2015, page 31, and January 2015, page 24, respectively), the main event has been AMTs (automated

manual transmissions), albeit only relatively recently. Early AMTs were aimed only at heavy trucks, essentially because prices – as a percentage of total chassis cost – could only be tolerated at the tractor level.

There's an irony here. A dispassionate commentator would suggest that multi-drop 7.5-tonners should have been first in the queue, given AMTs' positive impact on the daily grind, as well as transmission wear and tear. Either way, eventually they trickled down to high street delivery trucks, with Iveco among the first to standardise (2008) for its Eurocargo.

Fast forward, and New Eurocargo – launched in Europe last autumn and almost immediately crowned international truck of the year 2016 – provides an excellent example of this class of truck for today's operators.

Certainly, having spent a day in one, the first observation must be that, compared with 30 years ago, the stresses have moved out of the cab and on to the street. Delivering to high streets was easier then: traffic densities were lower; the cyclist lobby didn't have you down as an untrained killer; and you were marginally regarded as a service to society.

STRESS FREE?

In 1986, the stress was all about the truck – especially for anyone on agency work and handed the 'punishment wagon'. No power steering, drum brakes and a manual almost certainly with no synchro on bottom gear. Less performance, higher noise levels, poor ergonomics: it was all there to dislike in light trucks.

What a difference now. My truck was

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Light rigids background

Since January 1997, category B licence holders have been barred from 7.5-tonners. That was the first torpedo and it was followed by successive legislative burdens that made light trucks increasingly unattractive – with O licence requirements, drivers' hours and the DCPC (driver certificate of professional competence) all adding to the degradation.

A decade ago pundits predicted there would be equal migration away from 7.5-tonners up and down the gvw scale. Those heading south were getting into 3.5-tonne vans, where the legislative complexity could still be avoided. Others heading north were seeking productivity improvements.

As Martin Flach, Iveco's UK product director, puts it: "In terms of efficiency, a 12-tonner that gives you a seven tonne payload should be better than a 7.5-tonner that carries around three tonnes. But it clearly doesn't fit for many operators, because that's not the direction the tide's been running."

a new Eurocargo ML75E16S 4x2 rigid with the 160bhp power plant and a box body, part loaded. It had a permissible gtw of 16,500kg when equipped with the six-speed box and a drawbar pack. For an operator cubing out, that's a good option, but if you are running anywhere near that weight limit, the ML75E19, with the higher 190bhp

output, would be needed. Or even the 210bhp version.

All three options are based on the same four-cylinder, direct injection 4.5-litre Tector 5 unit. Crucially, all models also take the ZF 6AS700 AMT as standard, with a ZF 6S700 manual as a no-cost option. The six gear ratios are identical (AMT or manual), but the rear axle ratio is 3.91 at 160bhp and 3.58 with the 190bhp unit.

How does it feel? Driveability for a typical workload and duty cycle has never been better. The simplest possible gear shifting, with a DNR-style button cluster on the dash, is assisted by a manual override stalk for up- and down-shifting, plus a two-stage exhaust brake. AEBS (advanced emergency braking system) comes in at 10 tonnes, and ACC (adaptive cruise control) as well as LDW (lane departure warning) arrive at 7.5 tonnes.

What isn't present that you would expect to find in a modern 6x2 tractor? Not much. Indeed, the overriding impression is big truck sophistication and safety. Fleet managers will also be pleased with the protected clutch and driveline, as well as the new telematics hardware and service packages.

What about economy? Iveco claims up to a 5% better fuel consumption, and a reduction of up to 8% on multi-

Not just a 7.5-tonner

Yes, my light truck was based on the 7.5-tonne chassis, but it's important to put this in perspective. New Eurocargo trucks aren't manufactured in isolation at that weight.

Gross weight availability – as a European vehicle – covers no less than 13 weights: 6.0, 6.5, 7.5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18 and 19 tonnes.

So any operator wanting to shake off an outdated gvw in the search for extra productivity is not short of choice. A third axle conversion can even push a top-end 16-tonner up to 22 tonnes.



drop emissions, for the new Eurocargo with the Tector 5 engine. In the era of incremental gains, that comes from all around the chassis. The 160bhp and 190bhp engines are claimed to contribute 3%, while a surprisingly high 1.5% comes from the electromagnetic fan clutch. The rest is derived from the driveline eco strategies and low viscosity oil fill.

This truck is only just out of the box, with very few on the road, and all in early service. So ratified fuel figures will have to wait. But Iveco's second place in the market at 7.5 tonnes won't be done any harm if the promised fuel improvements materialise.

So, even if so-called 7.5-tonners have been somewhat marginalised, they are still very much here – and as part of a much broader family. Drivers who have only recently come to the industry may not realise they've 'never had it so good', but they absolutely have. **TE**

