



Before the end of the year, Renault Trucks UK will unveil its long-awaited RHD D Cab 2m 7.5-tonner, developed with Nissan Motor in Spain. Brian Weatherley examines what's on offer

On the face of it, launching a truck into a market that's declined more than 60% in 20 years seems odd. Bare percentages seldom tell the full tale, but there's no escaping the fact that, while 1996 saw 12,376 7.5-tonners registered in the UK, last year's number was just 4,690. So why would Renault Trucks attack a depleted market already inhabited by strong competitors, with right-hand drive versions of its D Cab 2m chassis?

Commercial director Nigel Butler is

will open on the D Cab 2m light-middleweight chassis, plated at 6.5 and 7.5 tonnes, for delivery in early 2017. Both models will have the same narrow (2m) day cab and be powered by the 3.0-litre Euro 6 DTI 3 four-cylinder diesel. For the 6.5-tonner it delivers 150bhp and 350Nm of torque and drives through a six-speed manual. The 7.5-tonner has a higher 180bhp rating with 450Nm of torque, plus a slightly uprated six-speed ZF box. However, the latter also gets the option of a two-pedal Optitronic AMT (automated manual

inevitably, both the D Cab 2m and NT500 share the same cab-in-white, chassis and driveline, the Renault front end has been restyled to Renault's identity, while its interior trim is also Renault-specific. Significantly, Nissan will not sell its NT500 in the UK.

The bottom line for Renault in the UK is that the OEM gets a purpose-built 7.5-tonner after years of selling its Midlum essentially as a down-plated 10-tonner. "In later years, certainly from Euro 4 onwards, there was a price to pay for that," concedes Butler. "It was more expensive ... and heavier as well."

No surprise, then, that what should make D Cab 2m attractive is its low kerb weight and resulting high payload – as per Japanese-designed trucks offered by Isuzu and Mitsubishi. Butler makes

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having none of it. He reckons that prophecies of the demise of 7.5-tonners in the wake of the 1997 driving licence changes were exaggerated. While accepting that volumes have dropped off, especially since 2007, he insists there is still a demand for 7.5-tonners, and adds that it's likely to continue – certainly as long as urban HGV weight-limits stick at 7.5 tonnes.

Indeed, for him, this market may well grow. Why? In part, because of increasing availability. "As we launch product into the market, it will bring back demand – just as happened with Isuzu and Mitsubishi. We think this market will grow to 5,000 and 7,000 units annually."

So what is Renault offering? From the fourth quarter of this year, its order book

transmission). And while the lighter unit has a hydraulic braking system, the 7.5-tonner gets a full-air system.

DROPSIDES, TIPPERS...

Butler reports that D Cab 2m will be sold with a UK-specific body. "We're assessing which partners to go with but we're looking at dropsides, tippers, boxes and curtainsiders." Meanwhile, it looks like being the classic 'cookie-cutter' truck, not least by virtue of its single cab choice. If an operator wants a crew cab, Butler says Renault would suggest its D-range with the seven-man crew cab, covering from 10–18 tonnes.

That said, D Cab 2m is all-new. It's a joint venture with Nissan Motor, in Spain – based on its latest NT500 model – and will be built at Nissan's Avila plant. While,

the point that most European 7.5-tonners have become heavier over the years, not least due to the exhaust emission management equipment. "European style 7.5-tonners have not been as cost effective [as Japanese rivals] certainly to purchase or to run, because the payload hasn't been there."

So, have light middleweights from Isuzu and Mitsubishi Fuso slowed the UK decline of 7.5-tonners? Butler doesn't go that far, but suggests they have given light truck buyers other options. "Where operators were perhaps struggling with cost and payload, those two OEMs came in with a product that met their need." D Cab 2m should do the same.

But, along with good payload, Butler expects D Cab 2m's slimmer day cab to prove popular, certainly to smaller own-



“We have a solid customer base for 7.5-tonners from the Midlum days”

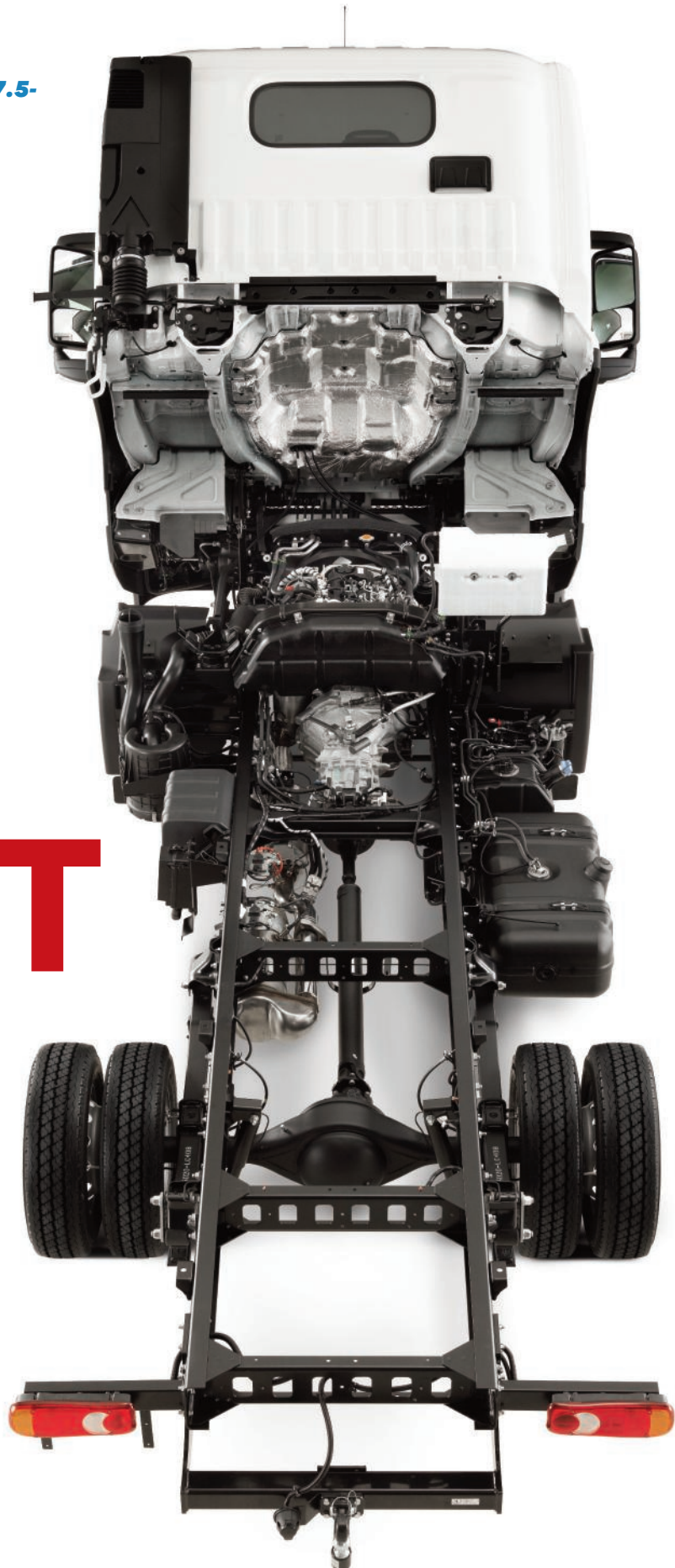
Nigel Butler

account operators running trucks as an adjunct to their businesses, rather than a main function. Many prefer van dimensions – another reason for Isuzu and Mitsubishi Fuso’s success.

CANDLESTICK MAKERS

Will the Japanese manufacturers be Renault’s main target? Butler expects to take some business from Isuzu and Mitsubishi Fuso, but says Renault won’t just focus on that market. Part of the pitch will be explaining D Cab 2m’s benefits as a European product. “It’s a case of look at our other European competitors, then come look at this and see how it can improve your operation and cost base,” he says.

Easy to say: harder to achieve. While it’s not difficult to deal with big fleets, it’s



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harder to reach the 7.5-tonne truck buying butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. However, Butler makes the point that all Renault UK truck dealers already retail light commercials in the shape of the Master at 3.5 and 4.5 tonnes. That dealership footprint will help the firm with D Cab 2m.

“We see this as a product that sits with our LCV operation, more than heavy trucks, because it’s more standardised. So we’re focusing it through our LCV team.” That said, Butler accepts the team will have to compete with high street dealers and LCV alternatives. “Our advantage over the car boys is our workshops, which can provide a much higher level of service. We have a really strong network and I think that’s where we’ll win.” 