

As truck and van OEMs and converters cash in on demand for off-roaders, Brian Tingham reviews recent introductions capable of tackling tougher jobs



MUD PLUGGERS

There's more to off-roaders than an ability to leave the tarmac without getting stuck. Hence the range: pick-ups; 4x4 panel vans; light all-wheel drive trucks, even all-terrain conversions for the emergency services and military. Each offers enhanced traction, but what differentiates them is how much and, beyond that, the functional capabilities.

Which is why fleet managers specifying off-roaders need to consider everything from gear ratios to running

gear, tyres, ground clearance, towing capacity and cab construction. They should also check payload potential, and chassis and body types – including their ruggedness and, in extremis, ability to withstand anything man and the elements might throw at them.

For those unable to justify the mighty Unimog, Iveco's updated New Daily 4x4, as premiered at this year's CV Show, offers considerable muscle for tackling harsh conditions. This vehicle is now available in 3.5- and 5.5-tonne variants,

with a choice of on- and off-road tyres, plus wheelbase options of 3,050 and 3,400mm.

The 5.5-tonne model can tackle gradients up to 45° and approach angles of 49° degrees, and has a maximum wading depth of 660mm. Other points to note include: its off-road chassis frame; the three-piece steel front bumper; its range of PTOs on the transfer box and gearbox; and 24 forward (12 mixed routes and 12 off-road) and four reverse gears.

Grey area on speed limits

Fleet managers are being advised that larger pick-ups may be contravening UK speed limits, as they could be classed as light commercials, not cars.

So says vehicle lessor Arval, which points out that models including double-cab derivatives of the Ford Ranger, Toyota Hilux and Volkswagen Amarok can easily exceed the legal 2,040kg unladen weight classification for dual-purpose vehicles. This suggests they should not travel faster than 50mph on single carriageways and 60mph on dual carriageways.

The company has raised the matter with the DfT (Department for Transport), which concedes that some pick-up classifications may need to change.

"Confusingly, there is a possibility that examples of the same model might fall either side of the 2,040kg limit because of optional equipment, such as pick-up tops," comments Eddie Parker, commercial vehicle consultant.

"Our advice would be that ... it is probably best to advise pick-up drivers to adopt the lower limits. There is little to be gained from having to fight a test case if one of your vehicles is prosecuted."

EXTREME ASSIGNMENTS

But if that's not quite right, how about a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 6x6 (not just the highly capable factory-built 4x4), with its conversion by German specialist Oberaigner? West Sussex Fire & Rescue commissioned the first such unit in the UK through dealer Rossetts Commercials. Bodied by WH Bence Coachworks, of Bristol, this vehicle has been equipped with a 1,200-litre tank, pump, hydraulic rescue gear and medical response equipment. It can carry up to five crew across country – including in snow or water – and boasts 1.8 tonnes' capacity for other equipment.

What both have in common is truck OEM backing. No one decries the likes

of Toyota's Hilux, the new Fiat Fullback, Volkswagen's Amarok and Crafter 4x4, Nissan's NP300 Navara, or Isuzu's D-Max Centurion. However, if big and rugged are what matter to you, check out MAN's long-awaited TGE or Iveco's New Eurocargo mid-weight 4x4 truck.

MAN's TGE, unveiled at the IAA Show in Hanover last month, will be available next March with an all-wheel drive variant, driven through a six-gear manual or eight-gear automatic, and powered by Volkswagen's four-cylinder 102–177bhp engine. Options include crew cab bodies, two wheelbases, three roof heights, 3.0–5.5 tonne gw base units, and load volumes up to 18.3m³.

As for Eurocargo 4x4, launched



at the BAUMA construction event in Munich last April, you're looking at an 11.5- or 15-tonne gw, 3,240–4,150mm wheelbase truck, available with day or sleeper cabs. Engine choices are Tector 7 220 and 250bhp for the 11.5-tonne variant, or 250 and 280bhp for the 15-tonner. The rest of the driveline comprises ZF six-speed manuals with a servoshift system and permanent four-wheel drive, with a longitudinal

differential and fast- or slow-ratio selection, plus three diff locks.

Off-road protection includes steel bumpers, retractable access steps and a tough new radiator guard. And the new 4x4 is equipped with a front towing jaw, while a PTO is also available. Incidentally, the steering angle (ranging from 40° to 48°, depending on tyres) means the 4x4 Eurocargo should perform well on urban roads, too. [TE](#)

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