

POLE POSITION

Plenty of payload capacity plus the ability to stand up to life's hard knocks are two of the key criteria scaffolding companies bear in mind when they consider acquiring trucks, finds Steve Banner

To these can be added manoeuvrability - many of them work regularly in congested city centres - and a three-seater cab. Erecting scaffolding requires labour, and a three-strong crew will not be short of work.

A low cargo bed is favoured, too, in order to keep the overall height of what is bound to be a heavy load as shallow as possible, says MAN sales engineer, Andrew Telling; a wise safety precaution.

Payload capacity is one reason why Isuzu's N75 7.5-tonner has proved popular with scaffolders in recent years, says Isuzu Truck (UK) head of sales Richard Waterworth. A N75.150 (E) can offer a 4.1 tonne body and payload allowance, he points out, which puts it ahead of traditionally-engineered 7.5-tonners with a European as opposed to a Far Eastern heritage. "Our range includes 7.5-tonners with a compact footprint so they can get on to homeowners' drives," he continues. "A lot of householders are having extensions built at present."

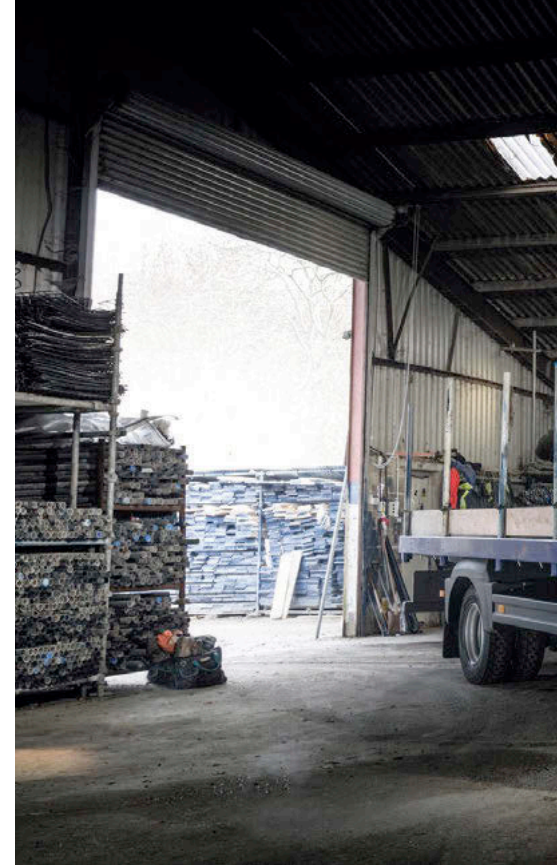
However, a compact footprint has to be balanced against the truck's ability to carry all the scaffolding poles the job in hand requires. "What we're finding as a consequence is that scaffolders who opt for a N75 typically choose one with a 4,475mm wheelbase and a 21ft dropside body," he says. "It comes with a dual passenger seat, as do all our trucks."

Manoeuvrability concerns often centre around width, says Waterworth, as drivers may need to squeeze down narrow side streets. N75's cab has a slim overall width of 2,040mm. "Our cab is narrower than those on our European competitors," he states. Some clients want a lighter rigid; some want a heavier one. The Isuzu line-up marketed in the UK (pictured below) runs from 3.5 tonnes to 13.5 tonnes, Waterworth adds.

BODY ISSUES

Scaffolding companies want to maximise payload, but they also need strong, durable dropside bodies on their trucks, given the hammering they receive from poles, brackets and boards being dropped into them when scaffolding is dismantled. The two requirements can clash with one another, so the body has to be as carefully specified as the chassis.

A bulkhead, dropsides and side raves all made from lightweight alloy can usually withstand the pressure, says Roy Shelton, sales director at West



Midlands bodybuilder Bevan Group. Special attention has to be paid to the cargo bed, however, given that it is directly in the firing line. "We tend to favour a 21mm WISA-Trans slip-resistant plywood floor with a 440-gramme or above phenol face," he says. The 15-ply laminated floor typically rests on a galvanised steel subframe.

Sockets are usually inserted just inside the drop-down sides at regular intervals. Into those upright bars can be inserted to help contain the load; all items transported should of course be properly restrained. "Some scaffolders have a special restraint cradle constructed," says Shelton.

Double dropsides are regularly specified, with the poles stowed at the front, and boards and other items carried at the back.

ENGINES

How much power does a scaffolding truck need? Says Telling: "If it's a 7.5-tonner on urban work then we're





talking about 160bhp, increasing to 190 on rural routes. At 12 tonnes then it's more like 220bhp, increasing to 250bhp at 15 tonnes, and about the same at 18 tonnes."

Adds DAF marketing manager, Phil Moon: "We find that a 227bhp 18-tonne LF is a popular option, with either a six-speed manual or a six-speed AS Tronic automated gearbox, a day cab - sometimes with a third seat - a 5.3m wheelbase and steel parabolic suspension. The unladen weight when fitted with a scaffold body built by Bevan is 6,620kg, giving a payload of 11,380kg," he says. "Manoeuvrability is aided by a 53° turning angle and a short front overhang."

Automated transmissions are of course well worth considering if vehicles are being deployed in busy towns with a lot of stop-start driving.

DAF holds trucks ready-bodied for scaffolders by Bevan in stock along with other ready-bodied vehicles such as skip wagons, says Moon. "They're our two

fastest-moving ready-bodied models at present," he reports.

The demand for them suggests that certain sectors of the construction and waste disposal industries are having to raise their standards. "In the past a lot of scaffolders would buy an old second-hand truck with a box van body, chop the body off, and put a body on the back that could carry scaffolding," he says.

CITY WORKERS

The roll-out of tighter emission controls in urban areas means they can't do that anymore. "If they're working in cities, then increasingly it's got to be Euro VI," says Moon.

Scaffolders tend not to clock up high mileages and many of them keep their trucks for a long time. A truck in service for a decade that has only covered 150,000km wouldn't be unusual.

"The work they do is hard though," reflects Andy Durkin, a director of Abingdon, Oxfordshire's Oxford Blue Scaffolding, which operates Mercedes-Benz Atego 816 7.5-tonners (pictured above). "Some of the sites we're on and off can be pretty rough, and the trucks get plenty of punishment."

Scaffolders with contracts in city centres are increasingly having to think about the risk of colliding with vulnerable road users, and how they can minimise it. This is especially the case for businesses tackling jobs in the capital

with the introduction of Transport for London's Direct Vision Standard (DVS).

Croydon-based ASA Scaffolding Services has responded by acquiring a 26-tonne Mercedes-Benz Econic 2627L (pictured below). It has a five-star DVS rating thanks to its deep, panoramic windscreen and full-height, glazed, folding side door. These features, plus a seating position which is much lower than that of a conventional truck, allow the driver to make direct eye contact with cyclists and pedestrians at junctions or in traffic queues. Extra safety systems alert the driver to hazards. "A low deck height makes loading and unloading that bit easier," says ASA managing director, Lee Tolan.

A lifting rear steer axle makes it simpler for the Econic to negotiate its way around sites and yards littered with potential obstacles. Its purpose-designed split dropside body was built by Spectra Specialist Engineering of Westbury, Wiltshire.

Opting for a rigid with a dropside body isn't the only solution, observes Telling. "We've supplied them with a 26-tonner with a hooklift on it," he says. It can drop a container full of scaffolding poles and related equipment at a site, go off and handle other tasks, then collect the container and poles once the job is completed.

Another option MAN has discussed with scaffolding firms is an urban artic plated at 28 tonnes consisting of a 4x2 tractor unit married to a tandem-axle semi-trailer. In this case it is the trailer laden with scaffolding tackle that is left at a site to be picked up later.

Have customers in the sector enquired about zero-emission electric models given that many scaffolding trucks travel for comparatively-short distances on urban roads and remain stationary for much of the day? "We've had one or two ask about them," says Moon. "But I'm not sure the sector is ready for electric trucks yet." **TE**

