

Winding up its product renewal programme, Mercedes-Benz has now launched the latest version of its Atego. Ian Norwell reports from Karlsruhe, Germany



# Sum of the parts

**W**hen you are renewing an entire truck range in the space of just a couple of years, the process must get easier? So it has surely been for Daimler, as the German giant has approached the light end of its commercial vehicle portfolio, with the Atego. Engine technologies and transmissions are virtually proven in service, so isn't a redesign here and a tweak there all that's required, before marching off to the Daimler parts bin to plunder the parts?

Possibly a slight exaggeration, but there is no doubt that the technology used in this latest truck upgrade has mostly been seen before in other recently renewed Mercedes-Benz machines. So there is an undeniable advantage of a lot of proven componentry.

Stepping back a minute, in Europe the Atego took more than 33% of the 6.5–16 tonne registrations in 2012, while in the Germans' home market over 50%. In the UK, the outgoing Atego fared less well, but gained strength as it reached the top end of the gvw in its range. At 7.5 tonnes, the truck suffered from a relatively high chassis weight, achieving just an 11.7% slice. So the added after-treatment burden at Euro 6 for this little truck was always going to be an issue that would see Daimler production engineers never far from a weighbridge.

That said, with the extensive search for weight saving that we've already seen on the 'Loader' variants of Mercedes' larger trucks, its engineers have done a good job of limiting the penalty to between 50 and 90kg. Fuel tanks, springs, side guards and wheels have all been slimmed down and innovative engine internals have also helped to shave off the pounds.

As for the look and feel, the body-in-white cab is carried over from the previous model, but all else is new. Doors, panels, grille, front apron and lights have all been refreshed, as has the cabin interior, which takes on updates similar to those in the Actros, Antos and Arocs.

It's a similar story with the power plants. Two of Mercedes'

new Euro 6 engines have emerged for the new Atego. Its OM934 four-cylinder 5.1 litre and the OM936 six-cylinder 7.7 litre have seven power outputs between them and improved torque levels over their forbears. The smaller engine offers 156–231bhp, with the larger unit taking over at 238bhp and topping out at 299bhp.

## Better fuel performance

Composite camshafts, CGI (compacted graphite iron) blocks, four-valve crossflow heads, common rail injection pressures of 2,400 bar and a claimed world first of an adjustable exhaust camshaft to manipulate temperatures for regeneration of the DPF (diesel particulate filter) all make an appearance. And the result: fuel economy is apparently 5% better – a claim that carries some weight, given promising early fuel performance reports from operators of Mercedes' new Actros at Euro 6.

Also welcome with this truck will be its standard specification of an AMT (automated manual transmission). Drivers and fleet engineers alike have been waiting a long time for a full AMT at this weight – the former to ease operations in the multi-drop environment, where an AMT has so much more to offer than on a tractor; and the latter to reduce the number and cost of clutch replacements.

This is likely to be particularly welcomed by rental fleet engineers, who often struggle to invoice customers for new clutches. Manual gearboxes are still available, but now as options. A six- or a nine-speed manual is available, as is a five-speed torque converter gearbox, for those that still need one.

As far as cost of ownership goes, apart from improved fuel economy AdBlue consumption has been cut by 50% (in line with most others at Euro 6) and service intervals are extended by 20% to a maximum of 120,000 km. Additionally, maintenance contract rates have taken a 5% cut.

Altogether, this looks like a more than worthy successor to one of Europe's most popular light trucks. **TE**