

More fuel efficient, cost effective and comfortable. That's Mercedes-Benz's verdict on its new Econic, reports John Challen from Frankfurt

Enter the Econic

Mercedes-Benz continued the refresh of its commercial vehicle range by unveiling the new Econic and Unimog 4x4 (see panel) in Frankfurt last month – and the new versions are as impressive as the rest of its line-up.

“Fuel consumption has gone down and that’s been confirmed by customers,” states Stefan Buchner, head of trucks, adding that Econic operators can expect a saving of up to 4%, compared with the outgoing model. Further gains come from longer engine service intervals and a 40% reduction in AdBlue consumption – in line with all EGR/SCR (exhaust gas recirculation/selective catalytic reduction) Euro 6 designs.

Smarter engines

In fact, the new Econics will be powered by one of two of Mercedes’ OM 936 LA six-cylinder 7.7-litre engines. Power is 299bhp or 354bhp, with peak torque of 1,200–1,400Nm and more available at lower rpm – reflecting the operational requirements of these hard-working vehicles. An Allison six-gear automatic transmission, with specially developed Eco-software to help save fuel, completes the lower-revving powertrain.


Then, thanks to a double-paced decompression engine brake, 235kW braking power is available at 2,500rpm – translating into reduced operating costs, at least in terms of brake lining and disc wear. And Econic has leaned on its bigger Actros brother for the chassis architecture, which is lighter, so helping to offset the 300kg penalty imposed by Euro 6.

More power to weight and control, then – but that’s not all. Given the Econic’s versatility, Mercedes has taken soundings from a range of industries. “The Econic is tailored to meet the needs of municipal applications, distribution, airport services and firefighting missions,” explains Buchner. “So we have raised the bar even higher in this new model.”

And that shows. For example, there are hole-patterns in the

chassis side supports, which allow the rear cross member position to be adjusted to suit the required body and equipment. Further, the arrangement of the power units behind the cab makes mounting bodies easier and releases more space for equipment – also made manageable by an increase in the maximum front axle weight to eight tonnes.

Econic will be available in 4x2, 6x4 and 6x2/4 axle configurations, with electro-hydraulically progressive-steered leading and trailing axles in both the 18- and 26-tonne vehicles. Both the two- and three-axle versions will also be available with wheelbases from 3,450mm up to 5,700mm. And, as for the new low-entry cab, standard internal height is 1,295mm, while a 1,745mm model is also available. Both take on upgrades seen with the rest of Mercedes’ new family.

Finally, recognising the requirement for operators to further reduce fuel costs, Mercedes says a natural gas-powered version of Econic will be available in due course. Its NGT engine is to be developed from scratch and the manufacturer has confirmed that prototype testing is underway. 

New Unimog unveiled

Mercedes-Benz also took the wraps off a 10-vehicle line-up of rugged Unimog trucks (U 216 to U 5023). Powered by four- and six-cylinder engines, with outputs between 156bhp and 354bhp, the new models, just like the Econics, are claimed to be substantially more efficient than their predecessors.

A drop in fuel consumption of 3% can be expected, says the manufacturer, not only due to improved engine technology, but also helped by a new power hydraulics system that takes the place of earlier PTOs. Meanwhile, safety improvements include a larger panoramic windscreen and a front camera, while Mercedes also claims improved off-road capabilities.