

RENAULT: a new



Following its range renewal in Lyon last June, Renault has now revealed its construction range. Ian Norwell went to a Barcelona granite quarry to check out the offerings for tipper and mixer operators

When you renew an entire truck range, with new cabs, engines, chassis and running gear, it allows design engineers to pick and choose from an array of components to get it right. In replacing its Premium, Lander and Kerax models, Renault has introduced the 'C' (construction) and 'K' (heavy-duty) ranges that bring Euro 6 compliance, and – most noticeable – standardisation on AMTs (automated manual transmissions). Manuals have been relegated to an option on a few 2.3m cabs with 8-litre engines.

Parent company Volvo has refined its I-Shift offering and there's clearly been some cross-fertilisation from Gothenburg. Be it construction or long haul, the 12-speed Optidriver AMT, from Renault, has many of the I-Shift's internal organs. It's one place where the advantages of the 'same-suit, different-pockets' strategy can pay off.

I drove one specimen with the Optidriver box that did not have off-road mode, and it demonstrated why you want it. The speed of decision-making and swift interpretation of changing demands that off-road mode can deploy are impressive. Even so, it is important to say that a manual mode is included, which was worth reverting to for the descents. This, and the retarder (two-stage Optibrake is standard, five-stage Voith an option), which provides up to 414kW (Optibrake+) of friction-free braking on the 12.8-litre DTI 13 engine, kept my feet off the pedal.

That said, compared to the outgoing Kerax – which addressed the muck-away sector, where robustness of build is top of fleet engineers' wish-lists – the new K range looks like doing a better job. New chassis with better options for bodybuilders, Euro 6 common-rail engines with increased torque and resigned cabs make a strong package.

Protection from damage for the hardest working of

construct

Fleet efficiency

With further developed versions of its Optifleet telematics and Optifuel training packages, Renault now delivers the kind of detailed information on truck and driver performance that have become indispensable. Geolocation of vehicles, hourly monitoring of fuel economy and work-site driver training, are all aimed at squeezing economy.

Away from the brutish K520 'Extrem', and the other 6x6 specialists, the bread and butter volume model for Renault will be the 'C' range 8x4, which goes for payload and will be aimed squarely at the sand and aggregate fleets. According to Nigel Butler, Renault UK's commercial director, the 11-litre 430bhp truck is likely to lead its new registration figures, with the mixer fleets – which have virtually deserted their staple six-wheelers in favour of four axles – probably taking the 460.

Renault has made a good fist of replacing what had become, by its own admission, a 'bits-and-pieces' range. In 2012, Renault took 5.3% and 7.4% respectively of the three- and four-axle rigids in the UK. On a level playing field, the firm should do better with these new ranges. Its difficulty will come from a field that keeps tilting – with a lot of other hot, new competition. Volvo's FMX and the Mercedes-Benz Arocs will be the biggest worries.

chassis has been addressed with liberal use of steel on bumpers and exposed parts up and down the chassis. It may eat into payload, but if it keeps trucks on the move and out of workshops' repair bays, the economic argument is strong.

Power and comfort

Two engines, (nominally 11- and 13-litre) give six power options from 380–520bhp, while torque values span the 1,800–2,550Nm. Both are naturally SCR (selective catalytic reduction) based: they do use EGR (exhaust gas recirculation) but only to achieve operating temperature, after which it is switched off.

Meanwhile, the cabs have lost that utilitarian feel and now have much in common with the long-haul T range, although the trapezoidal design and improved aerodynamics are less useful here. But a claimed best approach angle of 32° will help in tight spots, as will a reduced turning radius of 9 metres on the 6x4.

Renault is also keen to point out that it does not regard the construction sector as the poor relation as far as driver ergonomics go, and the K and C range interiors are testament to that.

Duty of care legislation has produced a pair of interesting options. The breathalyser ignition interlock is now available on these chassis ex-factory. And, to prevent unauthorised entry into a sleeping driver's cab at night, a mechanical door lock, which slides a steel bar over the grab handles, provides an extra level of personal safety.

Meanwhile, a positive safety appearance is made by the automatic electronic parking brake, as well as the hill start aid, which prevents roll-back. To those who say it's de-skilling the job, the counter is that it only takes one brief unintended roll back or forward to put a serious injury on the accident record.

I drove three examples, all with tipper bodies: a K460 8x4, with the 11-litre engine; a K520 6x4, with the 13-litre; and a C320 8-litre 6x4. Over a challenging course in a Barcelona granite quarry, they all performed well. Low noise levels (particularly on the K520) and very good seats made light of the work. Controls for the AMT were simple and intuitive, and the dash was uncomplicated. Drivers are likely to resort to manual mode on site until they get familiar with the vehicle, but road work will be pure AMT.

A 'distribution' passenger door gave extra glass in the nearside footwell, providing extra visibility. However, the multi-function steering wheel often obscured dashboard information when not in the straight ahead position. Maybe this won't be an issue, but I found occasions when gear or retarder data was not visible. That's a minor gripe, though, on a truck with a solid feel to it. **TE**

The last bastion of the manual box, the construction sector, is finally letting go. For good reasons: the control you need on site puts demands on ratio choice, and the increasing sophistication of software designed around off-road work has now put AMTs front of mind for construction vehicles

