



In updating its Unimog to Euro 6, Mercedes-Benz is also aiming to appeal to a broader range of applications and operators. John Challen travels to Germany to find out more



Fit for purpose

When fleet engineers think of Unimog, most associate it with winter, with a snowplough attached. But at the launch of the Euro 6 version, Mercedes-Benz was keen to emphasise not only how compact this tough all-wheel drive truck can be, but also its versatility.

Operators and local authorities, says the company, could maximise their investment by using the machine for all 12 months. Because, yes, winter service may be the most obvious reason for adding a Unimog to a fleet, but the same vehicle can operate as a grass cutter, bark chipper, agricultural plough and fire truck. Put that way, it's potentially a shrewd acquisition.

Together with the Econic low-entry chassis, Unimog is the last of the Mercedes-Benz range to have been re-engineered for Euro 6. But it's not just about reduced engine emissions: as part of its €137 million investment, the German giant has also improved the drive system, added more variants and redesigned the cab. The goal: to make Unimog a more economical, comfortable and efficient workhorse.

On first impressions, the company has delivered on its aspirations. Inside the cab there is a larger, lower and more panoramic screen, enabling a better view of attached implements. That makes coupling and uncoupling much easier, says Mercedes. Additionally, for those that need it, new Unimog also gets an optional camera monitoring system, which transmits images to a unit on the windscreen.

As for power, Unimog will be offered with a choice of five of Mercedes-Benz's new BlueEfficiency engines. Three four-cylinder OM 934 and two six-cylinder OM 936 engines are available, with displacements of 5.1- and 7.7-litres respectively. Power is thus from 156 to 299bhp, with torque up to 1,300Nm (slightly up on the outgoing Euro 5 equivalents), and the company claims a 3% fuel consumption improvement, to boot. As for the transmission, Unimog retains its eight forward and six reverse gears, as well as the company's EQR (electronic quick reverse) system.

In total, four body-mounting areas are available for attachments – two at the front on a mounting plate, and the

others between the axles or on the loading bed at the rear. Improving the performance of these is EasyDrive – what Mercedes-Benz describes as a “synergistic drive system for precision applications”. Translated, this enables the vehicle's hydrostatic drive and transmission to work together to provide smoother power changes while on the move.

In Drive-Work mode, for example, drivers might be cutting a grass verge, but, when they are finished, a flick of the switch transfers all power to the manual gearbox, allowing speeds of up to 50km/h – a significant improvement over the outgoing model. The adjustable modes also mean less clutch wear, and extra efficiency, not to mention better fuel economy.

On the road

There's no doubt that some operators will be attracted by new Unimog's compact dimensions (the latest model boasts a width of just 2.15m), but it also offers real flexibility. What's more, U 218 has a turning circle of just 12.6m (slightly less than a B-Class hatchback), and a wheelbase of 2.8m – a combination that should appeal to any site where access is an issue.

For a vehicle with such an agricultural heritage, the new engines are refined, and the gear changes smooth. So while, as you would expect, the Unimog will tackle tough terrains with ease, it will also be more at home on the tarmac. Who says it's only a winter warmer? **TE**

Example specifications

Model: Unimog U 218
Engine: OM 934 5.1-litre four-cylinder
Max power: 175bhp @ 1,200–1,600rpm
Max torque: 750Nm
Wheelbase: 2.8m

Model: Unimog U 427 SWB
Engine: OM 936 7.7-litre six-cylinder
Max power: 272bhp @ 1,200–1,600rpm
Max torque: 1,100Nm
Wheelbase: 3.15m