

DAILY SURPRISE

The new Daily is a massive upgrade on the outgoing model. It's plain that Iveco is out to get the Germans, says Ian Norwell from his Turin driving experience

New Iveco Daily vans seem to come along so regularly that buyers could be forgiven for a little cynicism. This time, however, even the most hardened might want to sit up. The revisions to this New Daily – body volumes, engine features, suspension, interiors and a restyled exterior – make it entirely worthy of the prefix 'new'.

Why the scale of improvements? It's unusual for executives to make comparisons with competitors' vehicles, but Lorenzo Sistino, brand president for Iveco, names Mercedes-Benz's Sprinter as the reference for New Daily. Maybe the choice is a nod to Tesco's move back to Sprinter, which, given the size of this fleet buyer, certainly skewed market figures. Either way, although Sprinter's position at the top of the premium pile may seem unassailable, New Daily might just square up to it. That's what a €500 million investment and some good design work can do.

So what can you expect? Apart from the promise of reduced operating costs (see panel), the most significant changes to this van, chassis cab and minibus range are to: suspension; NVH (noise, vibration and harshness); engines (largely driven by compliance); and additional wheelbases and cubes.

Balocco proving ground

I drove two models at the Italian Balocco proving ground. First up was a 3.5-tonne, 16m³, 4.1m wheelbase van, with the 3-litre Euro 5b+ engine, quad leaf steel front suspension and air on the rear. All manual boxes are six-speed. The two most obvious characteristics were low noise levels, helped by a new interior, and an almost total containment of roll. Designers have improved NVH dramatically and the new quadrilateral front suspension, with double swing arm and leaf spring, is a very effective design.

For heavier applications, the 'quad-tor' front suspension is available with torsion bars, instead of the leaf spring, and an uprated axle of 2,500kg. As with most other Euro 5b+ and Euro 6 engines, there's more torque over a wider engine speed range, and this gives better roll-on power. This example sat well at 2,000rpm in top gear. With two engine sizes (2.3- and 3-litre), nine power ratings (106–205bhp), and



nine cubes (7.3–19.6m³) there's plenty of choice. And with the biggest body shell nudging 20m³, the super-large van slot – abandoned by Mercedes with the withdrawal of its Vario – looks like it's been occupied.

My second drive was a 7-tonne, 3.75m wheelbase chassis with a dropside body and the 3-litre engine. It felt like a modern truck compressed into a much smaller space. As a chassis-cab, it was inevitably not as quiet as the van, but still good, and the recovery in top gear, from 60kph to the limited 90kph, was more sedate with the extra gvw. Test loads were admittedly all low down, so stability should have been good. However, the handling on the slalom course was exemplary, showing just how much a suspension re-design can achieve. Just the job for pothole Britain.

If Sistino's engineers are aiming at the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter, they've done a good job. Standard specification is good and two upgrades to Daily Plus and Daily Top can add items like automatic air

Prices and deals

New Daily is being pegged in line with the outgoing model, while operating costs look better. There's a 5.5% fuel improvement and, with optional eco packages, that figure can be lifted to 14%.

Longer service intervals also allow R&M rates to be cut by 5%, while the heavy-duty models take on truck-style after-treatment costs.

The newcomer is available for order now, with a September retail launch.



Designers of the New Daily have made dramatic improvements to noise, vibration and harshness

Van or small truck?

On the global stage, Daily has a very big part to play. To regard it as the little brother to Stralis and Iveco's other heavies would be a mistake. A constituent of CNH (Case New Holland) Industrial, with its €25.8bn revenues in 2013, Iveco represents 31% of the business, and the Daily takes a 55% majority slice of Iveco's registrations.

As Giuliano Giovannini, Iveco's European head of product marketing, puts it: "Fleets of over 50 vehicles now account for half of all vehicles sold... New Daily is launching into a growing van sector that is now 60% of the total commercial vehicle market."

From a service standpoint – which equates to dealer profitability – this increasing share may be a challenge, as heavy long-distance haulage vehicles generate much more service work than vans, some of which don't rack up much mileage. Technology is conspiring to get vans driving past the service bay, too, with a DPF clean for Daily predicted right out at 500,000km. Stretched much further (as the van inevitably will be), for many that can effectively be deleted from the maintenance schedule.

conditioning and suspension seats. Plastic lower body panel guards will also save money on nuisance damage, but fleet managers need to study the options closely, if they want to cut operating costs or match a precise need.

Options are many and varied, including such items as Webasto heaters and Telma retarders. The EcoPack, which includes start/stop and a 'smart' alternator, makes bold claims for fuel economy in urban operations. That said, the EcoSwitch, a "driver-operated torque reduction device", for light and empty running, really should be automated, as on the Stralis tractor. It's a button drivers are unlikely to reach across the cab to press voluntarily.

Most van manufacturers move ahead with new models, but stay where they are in market terms, simply because everyone else is making better vans, too. This New Daily seems to have done more than that, though, and genuinely narrowed the gap between itself and the top competitor. **TE**