

Top story

your weekly motoring guide: week 42, october 12 - 18, 2009

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Daihatsu Gran Max arrives



Diminutive one-tonner makes business sense

Daihatsu delivers



TRISTAN WIGGILL

Built in Indonesia and known as the Toyota Load Ace in Japan, Daihatsu's new Gran Max one-tonner is set to make waves in the local Light Commercial Vehicle (LCV) market.

Sounds good so far, but how would you react if I tell you it's powered by a naturally-aspirated 1.5 litre petrol engine? Shock? Disbelief?

Well, believe it, because this workhorse uses the diminutive, but proven, petrol engine as fitted to Aunty Thelma's Terios.

As to be expected, Daihatsu have had to heavily revise its gear ratios. And it has tweaked its final

drive too - the result being a nippy vehicle that will not go much faster than the national limit - no matter how hard you try.

The DOHC motor employs Dynamic Variable Valve Timing, which improves torque at low revs, leading to better pull-off and peppy performance figures of 71kW and 134Nm from an ever-so-modest displacement. Worth noting is 90% of the torque is available from just 2 000rpm, which makes its way to the rear wheels.

Daihatsu claims overall fuel consumption of as little as 7.5 litres per 100km, and if this figure is consistently realised, business owners will reap the rewards of low running costs and less time spent at

the pumps. Also, due to extensive parts commonality with other Daihatsu models, maintenance costs and parts availability should be good, thus contributing to a significant reduction in down time.

Designed to be an inner-city business vehicle, the Gran Max is highly manoeuvrable with a rated turning circle of 10.0m.

This puts the LCV into passenger car territory when it comes to acute turning ability - courtesy of a reduced front overhang as well as the fitment of very modest 13-inch wheels. Power steering, fitted as standard, further assists the turning process.

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However, the ride is nothing like a passenger car, or half-ton bakkie for that matter. It's simply too harsh and bumpy. Unladen, the rear feels a little light, but it's nothing like the old Nissan 1400.

For the driver's convenience, the Gran Max boasts an adjustable driver's seat with 182mm of sliding range.

The steering column remains fixed, so you have to make do with what you get in terms of seating position and comfort.

A practical ergonomic feature is the high-mounted gearlever set into the dashboard that's supposed to create additional legroom in the front.

However, while the front seat should allow three people to sit abreast, the positioning of the park brake and dropdown fascia may foul the poor sod sitting in the middle's legs. Not to mention their

ribcage which could be under attack from a flailing elbow as the driver changes gears. The interior is typically barebones and, alas, air-conditioning is not fitted as standard.

A canopy can be ordered at an additional cost of R7 400, while an immobiliser can be tacked on for R1 000 extra.

In terms of safety, Daihatsu says the LCV features crumple zones up-front, dual side impact bars in the doors, and a collapsible steering column for frontal impacts. ABS brakes are standard, but there are no airbags.

The vehicle sports a "cab forward" design, specifically intended to increase the loading area, providing convenient working space.

Its load bed is 2.4m long and 1.6m wide. This large loading area (over 3.7m²) complements the Gran Max's carrying capacity of a full ton, with drop sides all round to improve its cargo handling



Don't let the small engine put you off: it copes just fine even with a ton loaded.



For ease of use, the loadbay sports no less than three dropsides. Photos - Daihatsu

efficiency. Other practical design points include a low loading height of 72cm from the ground, further assisting in loading and unloading duties. Fewer injuries when attempting to load and unload and fewer general workplace injuries could be other positive spin-offs.

Such functionality, coupled with a reinforced, two-stage ladder frame chassis, and a reliable Daihatsu engine, makes it a seemingly sound business partner.

In addition, at a launch price of R119 995, the Gran Max is the cheapest Japanese one-tonner in SA.

The fact that it's designed and engineered in Japan is important, as these qualities, combined with its perceived enhanced reliability and serviceability are, to be frank, streets ahead of its cheaper Indian and Chinese rivals.

It is available now at any one of Daihatsu's 58 dealerships countrywide.



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