

BROADENING

PowerTorque's test team duo spends a day out on the road with Hino's wide cab 500 Series – Ed Higginson gives his first impressions with Brenton O'Connor having the benefit of second thoughts.



Ed Higginson

Hino launched its new 500 Wide Cab range just a few months ago, and already there are good reports coming through from early buyers, showing great signs of customer approval with strong sales. From a development perspective it's been a nine-year project to bring it right up to date, and in many areas it's fair to describe the 500 Series as being class leading.

The medium-duty truck market is hotly contested, with models coming from Japan, Europe and America, making the Australian market unique. However, the Japanese brands certainly take the volume share in this segment with Hino being firmly in the front row just behind Isuzu.

Hino boasts that there are 51 model variations with the 500 range, soon to be 53 with crew-cabs arriving in a couple of months, so one for every conceivable application. To get a decent understanding of how they perform for both the fleet owners and drivers, we had to narrow down the list to just two versions to take for a day's drive. Joining me for the evaluation would be my fellow *PowerTorque* journalist, Brenton.

We chose the FG1628 with the Allison six-speed automatic box in 4x2 configuration on spring suspension, and the GH1832 also with the Allison six-speed in 4x2 form on airbags. Our choice came mainly so that we could compare how the Allison 3000 series auto gearbox worked under slightly different horsepower ratings, but with similar configurations and weights, plus the difference with modern springs and airbags to look after the bumps and potholes of NSW roads.

As my daily drive is more commonly a modern Volvo or Mack running B-doubles, it took a few kilometres to get

used to the different characteristics of the Japanese ride. But after running through the small narrow streets of southern Sydney in stop/start morning rush-hour traffic, we soon understood where the new model was targeting, and that it was doing a decent job of it, too.

For the route, we chose to head south out of Sydney, through the hills of the M1 Princes Motorway, down Mount Ousley towards Wollongong and beyond to the small town of Berry for a round trip of 240 km.

After a quick overview of the trucks and prestart check, I jumped in the smaller of the two units, being the FG1628 (16-tonne and 280 hp) on springs. Setting off from the Hino's head office in Caringbah in southern Sydney, we quickly got to appreciate where the nine years of development had been spent, and the type of work for which the Hino 500 was designed.

The power behind the brand for the Hino 500 range starts with the 7.0-litre engine at 220 hp and has seven variants up to the 9.0-litre 350 hp unit.

The smaller truck of our two test units, came turbocharged and intercooled, and powered by the 8.0-litre, six-cylinder, in-line, overhead camshaft design that utilises SCR to reach Euro 5 with the assistance of the addition of AdBlue. The direct injection engine is labelled the J08E-WA, running with 280 hp @ 2500 rpm and 883 Nm of torque @ 1500 rpm, so ample for a GVM of 16000 kg.

The larger unit that I subsequently drove back from Berry came with the slightly larger 9.0-litre, six-cylinder, in-line, overhead camshaft design, again with SCR to reach Euro 5. This engine is labelled the A09C-US. With 320 hp @ 1800 rpm and 1275 Nm of torque @ 1100 rpm, the ride felt much more relaxed with the quieter engine note, especially when pulling away from the lights or when moving into a gap on our route in order to overtake slower trucks, a task that it did with ease on the many hills we covered.

By comparison, the smaller FG1628 revved a lot higher, which made it sound like it was working much harder, but, surprisingly over the route, the smaller truck performed better on fuel, going an extra 0.3 km/l of fuel and didn't get delayed too far behind its bigger brother.

HORIZONS

The 500 range comes with two widths of cab, being the standard with day-cab, rest-area-cab and crew-cab, plus the new wide-cab model that we'd be taking for the day, that comes with the option of rest-area-cab or crew-cab.

The two wide-cabs that we'd be taking would be virtually the same, except that with the smaller engine under the FG, it gets just two steps to climb into the cab, making it an ideal choice for those multi-drop jobs around the city.

Inside, the cab interior and materials are typically Japanese, which you know will stand up well to heavy use, especially in the multi-drop segment where different drivers jump in each day. The ISRI driver's seat is great and much better than you'd expect in this segment. It's just a shame it doesn't come with the armrests, which would have helped on the longer drives.

The steering wheel tilts and is also telescopic, so you can get it into the position you want, plus an airbag now comes as standard. The cab comes with a shelf behind the seats for short rests rather than sleeping, and also with three seats where the centre seat can be folded down for storage when not in use.

An area where Hino has leapt the competition, not only in this segment, but the best across all trucks I've been in (I know this is a bold statement but surprised me too!) was the entertainment device. As standard fitment, it comes with a 6.1-inch touchscreen, incorporating DAB+ digital radio, AM + FM radio, CD, DVD, USB and SD access plus Bluetooth to pair with your phones including streaming.

A reversing camera is standard fitment, and on our tautliner body the camera lens had been mounted high on the body so that it was virtually facing down, which restricted the area displayed on the screen and made it harder to use. A word here is necessary to the bodybuilder, as when fitted correctly and providing a broader area display it could be very useful safety tool.

As an optional extra with the entertainment system, you can also add the Navigation SD card that is designed specifically for truck applications asking for your height, length, weight and DG status before setting off. This ensures that the mapping system doesn't send you towards those low bridges as can be experienced with some iPhone-based mapping systems.



The Allison box also meant we could relax and concentrate on the road as we tried to get south towards Wollongong. It especially helped in the morning traffic and endless number of traffic lights, so it comes as no surprise to find that Hino now claims to sell more trucks with autos than manuals these days. The Allison gearboxes are well proven and fitted across a lot of trucks and sizes, so we know it is a more than capable unit.

As we got out from the slower moving and congested traffic and up to 100 km/h, the smaller engine had to work a little harder but didn't slow down too much going up the hills, with the box picking the right gears at the right times. For the down sections, the exhaust brake worked well at holding us back on most sections.

The larger of the trucks was able to pull a little ahead on the bigger hills, and the addition of the engine brake along with the exhaust brake worked even more efficiently at holding us back, and undoubtedly would help with the maintenance bills over time.

The guys at Hino have focused heavily on the safety features of the updated model, which will be a big draw card in this segment.

The trucks all come with Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) as standard, which incorporates rollover stability along with ABS, a first for a Japanese brand. The trucks also get Anti Slip Regulation (ASR), or more commonly known as traction control. Also comforting for the driver and any passenger is the news that the new wide-cabs have been built to meet ECE R29 European crash tests that are seen as the highest standard, plus they now all come with a driver's airbag as well.

Hino has not only been focusing on the driving experience of their trucks in recent years, but also delving in to the overall ownership experience for fleet operators. In doing so, Hino has called on the reach of its parent company Toyota to broaden the offerings it can provide.



Under the caption, "Hino Advantage" it offers innovative business solutions, such as Hino Finance, service agreements with set fees, a five-year extended warranty, Hino Traq to monitor your fleet's performance 24/7 through telematics, road side assistance, and a call centre to answer queries about your truck. To these attributes is added a support network through 62 service centres and dealerships to ensure every customer has the benefit of a great Australia-wide coverage.

Only the customer knows what deals can be achieved on the trucks they are going to buy after making the required number of phone calls to different suppliers. With the Hino 500 the customer gets a great package that will surely offer a very competitive cost of ownership over its life. Combined with the many improvements that this newest model update has brought to the market, the result is a truck range that will continue to increase its sales appeal and one that should be a serious consideration for any upcoming purchase option.

ED'S VERDICT

Points in favour: Fantastic entertainment unit, safety devices as standard and total cost of ownership with Hino Advantage a major benefit.

Points against: Passenger mirror couldn't be used with tinted wind deflector as fitted to the test vehicle, the sun visors didn't go full width of cab so let a lot of sun through the intervening gaps, and the Allison gear selector control box needs changing to a lever or stick.



Brenton O'Connor



An invitation from Hino Australia to review its new 500 Series Wide Cab range was a unique opportunity to learn more about the important updates to one of the mainstays of the Australian distribution truck offerings over the last 30 years.

Sarah Rosales, Hino's National Marketing Manager, gave us an outline of Hino's "Advantage" program, which encompasses a range of products and services designed to benefit the customer.

As with some other European manufacturers, Hino has come to the realisation that today's truck buyer wants more than just 'the truck' – the expectation today is for the vehicle manufacturer to provide a Total Business Solution.

The purchase price of any truck is relatively small compared to the total cost of ownership when you factor in fuel costs, wages costs, service and maintenance, tyres, depreciation and finance costs over the working life of the vehicle. As such, many of today's buyers are looking beyond just the initial purchase price and want their vehicle supplier to be able to offer a complete package. Consequently, many are now offering contract maintenance at an attractive cent per kilometre price, as well as in-house financing options and guaranteed residual values, amongst other offerings.

Hino, through its Advantage programme, has jumped on board this shift in the market to offer its customer more than just a truck – its Advantage programme comprises six founding pillars including:

QDR – quality, durability and reliability – something Hino has been famous for.

Business Solutions – Hino's in-house telematics systems to monitor vehicle performance.

Service – including fixed-price service plan offerings.

Hino genuine parts – allowing quick turnaround of vehicles and guaranteed quality.

Finance – Hino, being part of the Toyota group, allows for aggressive finance offerings.

Care Centre – allowing 24/7 assistance, including roadside breakdown assistance to customers.

This above model will help differentiate Hino from an otherwise crowded Japanese truck sector in the Australian market, and will put Hino in a position to compete with similar offerings we have seen, in particularly, from the European truck manufacturers.

Hino has a large footprint on the Australian market with a total of 42 selling dealerships and an additional 20 parts and service dealerships ensuring that customers have ready access to not only purchasing a Hino, but, more importantly, parts and service allowing operators to keep their vehicles moving and doing the job they were purchased for – namely to move goods from point A to point B.

Following the presentations from the marketing and sales departments we were provided with the keys to two of Hino's latest medium-duty rigid models from their new 500 Series, including a FG 1628 XLong Auto and the GH 1832 XLong Auto.

Hino has in recent times adopted the naming structure that Mercedes-Benz has used for many years – with the first two numbers identifying the GVM of the vehicle and the subsequent two numbers identifying the horsepower rating of the vehicle (by adding a zero to the end). Both vehicles were fitted with 12-pallet tautliner bodies built by Alltruck in Melbourne, both loaded with bulk bags of sand to provide ballast and an overall gross weight of approximately 14.5 tonnes.

The two new Hino's are immediately impressive to the eye – the new grille looks very sophisticated, and the addition of alloy wheels as standard across the new 500 Series range is a nice touch – both giving a tare weight advantage as well as a visual lift to the vehicle.

Standard specification on the new Hino 500 Wide Cab range is really impressive, both from convenience features for the drivers as well as some of the standard fit safety features. A media centre encompassing AM, FM, DAB+ (digital radio), reverse camera, Bluetooth telephone and media connectivity as standard, and optional navigation is a very welcome addition to the vehicle. The inclusion of both roll stability control and traction control as standard fit is even more impressive. Not so long ago, these features were typically only found on expensive European cars, but no matter if you are an owner/driver or running a large fleet of trucks, this is sure to add to the desirability of the Hino 500 Series Wide Cab compared to other Japanese truck offerings.

To the untrained eye, both trucks looked identical – both 4x2 rigids with 12-pallet tautliners fitted, however, upon closer inspection, there are key differences – namely an extra step to enter the cab on the 1832 model (three steps to enter the cab vs. two steps on the lower hp rated 1628).



This is due to the cabin being fitted higher above the chassis to allow for the bigger engine in the 1832 (8.7 vs. 7.7 litres respectively), also the bigger truck has four grille slats vs. three slats on the lower hp variant.

Opening the door to both trucks shows a relatively narrow staircase to the driver's seat – however the steps are cleated and cascading and offer good grip to help avoid slippages. Once in the driver's seat the biggest problem of the truck becomes apparent, there simply is not enough seat travel. Anyone over six-feet tall in height will struggle to be comfortable, as the seat will not slide back nearly as far as required by many drivers with long legs. As such, the gap between the front of the seat squab and the steering column is relatively narrow, making entry and exit somewhat difficult for tall drivers and those who frequent the fried food sections of roadhouses a little too often! On a positive note, the standard fit ISRI seat is excellent, offering excellent support, with numerous lumbar adjustments – an armrest on the left-hand-side of the seat would be a welcome touch, however.

In addition to the seat, the mirror positioning for tall drivers was problematic, through the mirror heads having been mounted too high on the support brackets. This resulted in the top third of the mirror view being restricted. Re-adjustment during pre-delivery check will fix the problem. Both around town, and out on the open road, the Hinos perform really well – the Allison automatic is brilliant and cannot be faulted.

The Allison is a far superior option to an AMT for the type of work that this type of vehicle is likely to do, due to faster gear shifting and enabling reverse creeping back into a loading dock much easier. I've always been a huge fan of Allison transmissions, and, given that they can stand up to rubbish collection work, which, as well as route bus work, is going from full horsepower to stop hundreds of times a day, this is testimony to their robustness. In addition to the ease of use, particularly in city driving, the Allison will also

help reduce repair costs on clutches and synchromesh transmissions, particularly when many truck drivers use a synchromesh gearbox like a constant mesh Roadranger and double de-clutch – which leads to premature wear of the gearbox synchronizers.

This comparison also provided a striking contrast between steel leaf suspension and rear airbag. The difference is huge, with the airbag version providing a far superior ride, which is beneficial to the overall life of the vehicle, the freight being carried as well as the operator – providing a less fatiguing workplace. A further bonus in Victoria comes from a 4x2 vehicle on air suspension being able to carry an extra tonne of freight compared to its steel-sprung brethren. This back-to-back comparison was a timely reminder of the benefits of air suspension, and why anyone would option spring suspension for this type of vehicle is difficult to understand.

On the trip from Caringbah, NSW, to Berry and return, the overall fuel consumption was 3.5 km per litre for the 1628 and 3.2 km per for the higher hp 1832. This was considered good fuel consumption given the nature of the route and the stop-start traffic found along the route. However, the big advantage of the new 9.0-litre engine is the integrated engine brake, providing far superior engine retardation compared to the exhaust brake found on the smaller 1628.

Overall, both trucks are an impressive package, and it's recommended that with the optional air suspension and Allison automatic it's an ideal package for both metropolitan and regional distribution work. The 280 hp variant is more than adequate for the 4x2 variant, given the gross vehicle weights allowed (15.5 t GVM in NSW), and there was quite a reasonable fuel gain advantage on this engine. However, if stepping up to a 6x2 variant with a 14-pallet body, operating at a GVM of 23.5 t, the new 9.0-litre engine, with the additional horsepower and also the brilliant integrated engine brake would really come into its own – especially on regional routes that may include some hilly terrain. 

BRENTON'S VERDICT

Points in favour: Ride with air suspension, Allison automatic, standard specification vehicle is well equipped.

Points against: Lack of seat travel for tall drivers, armrest needed for left-hand-side of seat, need to adjust mirror position on mounting bracket.

