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TO THE FOUR

WITH CURRENT ANNUAL SALES OF AROUND 600 UNITS THE LIGHT DUTY 4X4 SECTOR IS NOT HUGE. SO HINO'S ENTRY INTO THIS NICHE ISN'T LIKELY TO BRING A HUGE SALES BOOST, HOWEVER IT IS STILL ATTRACTIVE, DELIVERING GOOD FLEET CONNECTIONS, PARTICULARLY WITH RURAL FIRE SERVICES AND MINING OPERATIONS, AS ISUZU AND FUSO HAVE PROVED. EDITOR WHITING WENT ALONG TO THE LAUNCH TO FIND OUT ALL ABOUT HINO'S 300 SERIES 4X4.

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Hino chose the 2017 Brisbane truck show to preview its new 4x4 light truck competitor, the 300, so by the time the launch came around in November we were chomping at the bit to try it.

Hino's chosen model for Australia is the 300 Series 817 and that model number roughly indicates eight tonnes GVM and 170hp. However the actual GVM is 7.5 tonnes and the output is 165hp.

The Hino 4x4 is available in single cab and crew cab configurations, both powered by the 165hp (121kW), 464Nm, four-litre diesel engine mated to a six-speed manual overdrive manual transmission and a dual-range 4x4 transfer case.

The Hino N04C engine is Euro 5 ADR 80/03 emission compliant and utilises a Diesel Particulate active Reduction filter (DPR), which has proven its reliability in Australian applications over the past 10 years.

The Hino DPR is said to capture 95 per cent of exhaust particulates and is designed to be automatically self-cleaning (regenerating) without the need for driver intervention.

The Hino transfer case comes from the larger GT 4x4 model and, with low range

gearing of 2.2:1, the Hino 300 series 4x4 has the widest spread of ratios and the lowest crawl speed in its class. Overall reduction in low-low is 65:1.

A bonus of using the GT's air-shift transfer case is an on-board electric air compressor that can be upgraded to act as a tyre inflator and to power air tools.

Free-wheeling hubs are standard and are manually locked. Once the hubs are engaged 4x4 can be selected on the move by the driver, via a button on the dashboard.

Standard equipment includes Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) – a first for a Japanese-built truck in this category – four-wheel disc brakes, driver and passenger SRS airbags and a reversing camera.

Working in conjunction with the brake and engine control systems, VSC helps prevent the truck from rolling over after entering a corner too fast by monitoring the steering angle, wheel rotation speed, yaw rate and lateral G forces. VSC can take the appropriate action: reducing engine power and/or applying individual brakes with the intent of keeping the vehicle upright.

VSC is also able to enhance vehicle stability on loose or slippery surfaces by

reducing engine power and applying the brakes to individual wheels.

The new Hino 4x4 uses a novel chassis layout that features a straight-rail ladder frame, with a supplementary frame bolted underneath it from around the mid point all the way to the rear. The rear suspension bolts to this lower frame.

This unique layout provides straight upper rails, for ease of mounting bodywork and accessories; a high-set forward chassis to accommodate a drive axle underneath it and rear suspension hangers that don't need to be complex and heavy dropped types.

As a result, the 817 has the highest tare weight in its class, but the upside should be great inherent strength. It gives away around 300kg to the Isuzu NPS 4x4 and that may be critical in such vocations as fire-fighting, where every litre counts.

Although there's no plan for a factory-built, single-tyred version to tackle the burgeoning 4WD motorhome market the prototype had inbuilt front hub spacers, to widen front axle track to better match the wheel track of the rear duals.

Although Hino has pulled up short of providing a wide-single-tyre package,



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VSC IS ALSO ABLE TO
ENHANCE VEHICLE
STABILITY ON LOOSE OR
SLIPPERY SURFACES

wide-singles will be available as a dealer-fit option, probably using All Terrain Warrior wheels.

Likewise, there's no rear axle differential lock in the specification, but an Eaton No Spin self-locker is also a dealer-fit option.

The extensive Australian testing that the Hino 4x4 has undergone underpins its 'Made 4 Australia, Made 4 Work' positioning.

Developed specifically for the Australian market, the 817 4x4 has undergone extensive testing in some of the country's most rugged operating conditions. Selected Hino customers have been evaluating prototype trucks on and off-road in some of the harshest Australian bush-tracks, trails and roads since 2014.



"In addition to developing the truck on test tracks in Japan, three prototype 300 Series 4x4 vehicles have also undergone years of real-life infield testing," said Daniel Petrovski, the manager of product strategy for Hino Motor Sales Australia.

"The test vehicles have operated flawlessly across various types of terrain from the deserts of Australia's interior to the rain forests of Queensland's Cape York.

"Given the success of the Hino 500 Series FT and GT 4x4 models and the record breaking results we have seen by Hino at the Dakar Rally, the new 300 series 4x4 models come with a champion 4x4 pedigree.

"With this and the extensive Australian field testing, we are extremely confident





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that it will be a popular choice for our customers," concluded Mr Petrovski.

The Hino 300 Series 4x4 comes with a three-year/100,000km warranty.

Getting in and out of 4x4 trucks can be an awkward climb, but Hino has made the task relatively easy. The three access steps are arranged in a 'staircase' layout that puts the bottom step outboard of the upper ones. The front tyre can also serve as an additional step. Two grab handles flank the door opening, so it's always possible to have three contact points when getting in and out.

A standard suspension seat with magnetically variable damping is standard, but, unfortunately, a single-passenger suspension seat to replace the standard two-place bench is not. That's another dealer-fit option.

Ergonomics are generally good, but we reckon the 4WD and High-Low range switches are too far from the driver. There's vacant switch space nearer to the steering column and that's where they should be.

The heated, power-adjustable rear vision mirrors are 'big truck' types that give excellent flat-plane and spotter images. The swing-away brackets are strong and

easy enough to fold in while on the move, to reduce the chance of mirror damage from tree branches.

The Hino six-speed main box is stirred by a stubby lever that has short throws. The test trucks were brand new, so shift action was a tad tight. We like the gate layout that puts first gear and reverse directly opposite - essential for quick shifting when 'rocking' a stuck vehicle out of rut hollows.

The four-litre diesel did its job quietly, with mechanical noise evident only with revs above 3000rpm. That red band was useful only for engine braking, because the torquey donk did its best from around 1400rpm up to 2800rpm, climbing most highway grades in fifth or sixth cog.

Ride quality isn't the strong point of Japanese 4x4 trucks, but the loaded Hinos we drove rode better than their Japanese-made competitors, thanks to their longer front springs. A set of top-quality dampers should improve that even further.

Obviously, the driver's suspension seat damped out more bump action than the fixed passenger perches, but ride quality in the passenger perches - without suspension seating - was acceptable.

Fatter, lower-pressure tyres would improve it even more, but there are payload compromises with the single-tyre option.

Handling was flat and steering was accurate with good road feel on bitumen surfaces, but the skinny front tyres showed some side slip and understeer on pea gravel roads.

The ABS disc brake system worked effectively on sealed and dirt roads, but the ABS function was deactivated when 4WD was selected.

Selecting 4WD and low-range was done with the simple press of dashboard buttons and the action was instantaneous. High-range-4WD could be selected on the run, provided the front free-wheeling hubs were locked. The system is part-time-4WD, so it's not intended for full-time use on high-friction surfaces. For low-range selection the truck needed to be stopped and in neutral.

With overall reduction of 65:1 the Hino 300 4x4 climbed and descended very steep grades effortlessly, including a testing 1:1.5 concrete ramp.

We'll have a test vehicle for a week's evaluation in the very near future. Watch this space. 