

# truckin'!

Isuzu Truck NQR 7.5 with NEES 2

## NEES one, son!

**L**ittle known fact - in Japan, there are no roundabouts. Impossible question - how many roundabouts does a British CV driver negotiate in the course of a working day?

Inscrutable stuff ... well, not really, but a bit of a poser when Isuzu's Japanese designer of the new NEES 2 automated change gear box arrived in UK to observe the first tests.

There's a world of difference between manoeuvring for traffic lights and roundabouts, and NEES 2, calibrated in Japan, was misbehaving on the roads around Ware. No problem, the Japanese visitor spent the night reprogramming the Engine Control Unit computers (ECUs) on gearbox and engine; next day, NEES 2 was moving down on approach and allowing an increased rev getaway like a local.

Not many months later, and Home Counties-based distributor Isuzu Truck UK is getting ready for a UK launch of the system, to be included in 70% of new 6.2 and 7.5-tonne trucks, in mid-October.

Van and small truck manufacturers are increasingly offering a semi or full automatic option, but Isuzu Trucks is taking a more positive stance. Marketing director Keith Child told me: "We're telling our customers this is the way forward. It's easy driving and it's fuel-efficient."

"OK, it costs a bit more (£1000, but with no loss of payload), but how much are you going to spend on a clutch over the life of a truck? We would also hope that the extra cost would be reflected in the sell-on value of the vehicle."

NEES 2, which will become known as Easyshift in its UK format, offers a fully mechanical five-speed gearbox with changes taking place through electric solenoids. A claimed unique feature is the multiplate wet clutch, like on a motorbike, combined with a



**Isuzu Trucks' new marketing strategy calls for a shift in driving habits. Has the company's NEES 2 automated change gear box got it what it takes? Tony Wenham tried it out ...**

hydro-kinetic fluid coupling with lock-up clutch - unlike the conventional gear box with torque convertor.

Mr Child added: "We believe this system will be as fuel-efficient as a mechanical gearbox. In Japan, they've sold 100,000 units so it's a proven driveline."

Easyshift comes with Reverse, Neutral and Drive with sequential shift facility; there is also an economy mode and "crawler" gear.

On a drive through the flat Fens, including some urban work, I found the prototype system initially sluggish in the pull-away and over-sensitive to accelerator pressure. But, over a 90-minute journey, I got used to the workings.

Like all clutchless transmissions, it soon becomes "more-ish" - once you stop instinctively pushing down the left foot and reaching for the gear stick, it's a breeze.

In town (the Huntingdon ring road), the changes were smooth at lights and roundabouts, and it was easy to forget that I had three tonnes of sand loaded in the dropside body behind me. Also available is a manually operated electric exhaust brake.

I was driving the new model NQR 7.5t

Isuzu Truck, with new body and cab, premiered at the CV Show in April.

The vehicle is powered by a 5.2 litre Isuzu common rail diesel engine, producing up to 150PS and 404Nm at 1500-2600rpm. Currently, models with manual shift get more power, 175PS, as well as a six-speed box; by October 2006, in time for Euro 4 emissions regulations, the Easyshift models will get the same output and six speeds. Mr Child also expects the ratio of Easyshift to manual to increase up to 90% of orders within six months. He forecasts also the system will be available on 3.5t models by 2007.

Outside, the truck range has a new streamlined cab, including steel bumper. Inside, the cab has a comfortable driver's seat and adjustable steering wheel. A hefty left foot rest is also a feature. There are two passenger seats, the middle one with lap belt and lacking headrest but offering a fold-over facility.

Storage is limited, with two side door pockets, a small mid-seat box, a cab-wide overhead roof shelf with lip and a concealed drinks holder.

The vehicle is built on a parallel ladder type channel section with straight side rails. The suspension uses alloy steel leaf springs on the front and parabolic alloy steel leaves with shock absorbers and anti-roll bar. ABS braking is standard with disc brakes on the front and drum on the rear.

### Verdict

An easy-to-drive addition to the market place, which brings a positive new approach to the manual-auto-semi auto debate.



### PRICE LIST

NPR 6.2t	manual 4X2 Rigid	£18,145
NPR 6.2t	NEES 2 Easyshift 4X2 Rigid	£19,145
NPR 6.2t	crewcab manual 4X2 Rigid	£20,750
NPR 6.2t	crewcab NEES 2 Easyshift 4X2 Rigid	£21,750
NQR 7.5t	manual 4X2 Rigid	£19,495
NQR 7.5t	NEES 2 Easyshift 4X2 Rigid	£20,495
NQR 7.5t	crewcab manual 4X2 Rigid	£22,250
NQR 7.5t	crewcab NEES 2 Easyshift 4X2 Rigid	£23,250