THE AUTOMATIC CHOICE

Isuzu Truck UK has revamped its successful N-Series 6.2 and 7.5 tonne trucks.

A restyled cab exterior creates a more modern appearance and the interior has been smartened with new colour trim, but the real improvement comes with an automated transmission as standard.

Called Nees 2 Easyshift, the new automated box uses a conventional manual transmission with gear selection by electro-magnetic shifter. A fluid hydrokinetic coupling with lock-up clutch allows for gear changes. The lock-up clutch minimises power loss through slippage.

The automated gearbox adds £1 000 to the price of the truck, which is much cheaper than automatic boxes, but the big advantage of automated transmissions over automatics comes in fuel economy. Isuzu's Nees 2 Easyshift will, when used in the economy mode, provide better fuel consumption than achieved with a standard manual gearbox according to test results in Japan. The use of automated boxes brings more consistent fuel consumption over a vehicle fleet regardless of driver skill. The automated box also minimises transmission shocks and clutch wear through poor driving technique so contributes towards lower maintenance costs.

But best off all, from the operator's perspective, Isuzu's automated box carries no weight penalty so the Isuzu N-Series remains extremely weight competitive for a 7.5 tonner with a body and payload weight allowance of up to 4.94 tonnes depending on chassis and cab options.

There is a growing trend in the waste and recyclables collection sector to opt for smaller and smaller vehicles. Once you get down to 7.5 tonnes, chassis payload becomes critical, which is where the Isuzu chassis scores over competitor chassis weighing in at 2.56 tonnes. With a LinkTip refuse collection body, for example, you are talking about a 2 tonne payload with the Isuzu.

We took a NQR vehicle with dropside body from Derek Jones, laden to just under 7.5 tonnes, for a test run across the Hertfordshire countryside. Inside the cab layout is straight forward with a separate driver seat (a suspension driver seat is available as an option) and single cushion two-passenger seat, all cloth covered as standard. The dashboard is in hard wearing matching trim with a lockable cubbyhole for storage. A radio with CD player is standard and mounted centrally. Instruments including Lucas Kienzle tachograph are clustered in a car style display in front of the driver. The seating and driving position is similar to that of a small van and belies the size of the 7.5 tonne vehicle.

Dean Stiles
Editor

Gear selection: move the selector to the right to engage automatic and forward or back to change ratio in the five-speed gearbox

TESTER VERDICT

THE N-SERIES excels in urban environments. For a 7.5 tonner this is a very compact and easily manoeuvrable truck, handling and driving more like a van than a truck. Ease of cab access and the convenience of automated transmission make this the perfect machine for urban, multi-drop or stop start operation.

Our verdict – take one for a test-drive now.

The N-Series trucks are available with 130, 150 and 175hp Isuzu engines. The 150 or 175hp engines power the 6.2 and 7.5 tonne vehicles and are of 5193cc displacement with common-rail fuel injection. These new engines are lighter than their predecessors so reducing chassis weight on the new face-lifted range.

Gear selection is via a small lever located in the usual gear lever position to the driver's left. The engine is started with the sprung gear lever in neutral and with brake pedal depressed.

To move, the driver selects reverse, first gear or the automatic mode, releases the handbrake and depresses the accelerator pedal. The vehicle takes off in first or in reverse very smoothly and the gear changes are almost imperceptible.

The automatic selection system relies on electronics to select the gear according to engine speed. The driver is able to use the manual selector to make gear changes according to road conditions. When approaching roundabouts we found manual selection useful to drop a gear or two on approach to be ready to accelerate out of the roundabout.

There are two other function buttons: a first gear lock for crawling speeds and an economy mode. The latter minimises gear changes and will keep the vehicle in a higher gear on a hill climb, for example, with engine torque maintaining speed. It prevents that irritating habit of all too frequent gear changes on hill climbs.

Within half an hour we were comfortable with the automatic controls as well as the engine exhaust brake, fitted as standard and engaged by flicking a lever on the steering column. With exhaust brake on and manual selection to keep the revs up, the truck can be held at constant speed on descents making for safer driving and reduced break wear. ■