



Test location: Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Isuzu D-MAX Space Cab

Can the newest entrant to the pick-up arena be a game-changer?

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PICK-UPS ARE IN GREAT demand for their utilitarian attributes around the world, but in the Indian automotive arena they are more sought after for commercial purposes. Rising sales graphs have spawned a new lifestyle pick-up segment that caters to those looking for a getaway vehicle that can also serve as a load carrier. These vehicles that can tackle

rough terrain, are loaded with adequate creature comforts for day-to-day use. Indian manufacturers Tata Motors and Mahindra have dominated this segment, with their Xenon and Scorpio Getaway respectively, but sales are nothing to write home about owing to these vehicles' high price tags. Enter the Isuzu D-MAX, the newest entrant in the Indian pick-up arena.

Isuzu Motors, a light commercial vehicle

and diesel engine maker, entered India in early 2013 with their MU-7 SUV. Isuzu vehicles are known for their reliability. The latest offering, the D-MAX pick-up is available in three trims, including a single cab, Space Cab, and top-of-the-line lifestyle variant.

Single and double cab pick-up variants are common-place but the space cab concept is relatively new to India. It is an extended version of the single cab, freeing up space behind the seats to ferry goods, in the safe confines of the cabin. The D-MAX has been sold in the Middle East, Thailand and Australia for over a decade, valid credentials for it to fare well here in India. And costing ₹3 lakh less than the Tata Xenon, will certainly boost its prospects.

A test track means limited space, and the lack of vegetation hampers the scope for photography. Therefore what we generally resort to is going around in a loop or between a set of cones at crawling speeds. This in turn restricts the scope of gauging a vehicle's potential.

But we are in for a pleasant surprise. We are at the WABCO test track near Chennai. Spread across 200 acres, the track has a high-speed asphalt blacktop with a 1.3km plus back straight. And there are our three test cars parked on the back straight.

The Isuzu MU-7 design cues are carried over to the D-MAX, which is a good thing. The large grille has chrome accents on the top-end version, while the base and mid-variants feature a black matte grille and front bumper. The vertical trapezoidal headlamps and chrome grille combo are reminiscent of the previous generation Cadillac Escalade, probably a fallout of the platform sharing with GM. The large scoop on the bonnet has more to do with function than form, feeding air into the intercooler flat-mounted atop the engine, to boost efficiency. Fuel efficiency is an ARAI-claimed 13.26kmpl and with the humongous 76-litre tank, gives the D-MAX an impressive 1000km range, adequate to undertake intermetro journeys on a tankful.

All three variants get 15-inch steel pressed wheels, with no alloy option. Aside from keeping up with the competition, alloys would have endowed them with an upmarket feel.

The commercial variants' loading bay is a flat deck to maximise space, while the lifestyle variant gets a flush fitting low-loading arched deck, with the wheel wells accommodated inside the bay. Rated payload capacity is 1.2 tons. Vertically tail lamps and chrome tailgate handle make up the rear on



Above: The D-MAX remains extremely composed over rough terrain. **Below:** Thanks to the torquey engine the tail can be made to step out on a whim

the top variant.

On a first come, first serve basis, we have the track to ourselves on this Saturday. We do a customary slow lap around the track in the base single cab variant that lacks some interior luxuries and body shell types, but features the same 2.5-litre common-rail diesel engine. The 2499cc mill produces 134bhp at 3600rpm, and a peak 294Nm of torque at 1800-3200rpm.

The engine is refined and pulls cleanly with minimal lag thanks to the VGT turbocharger, the D-MAX getting up to speed without fuss. The short throw gearbox exhibits customary Japanese precision, though shifts are a bit notchy, especially from third to second.

The top-of-the line Space Cab is in stark contrast to the spartan interiors of the single



cab, featuring air-con, a full centre console and a large diameter steering with chrome accents. Overall fit is impressive and plastics feel built to last, but somehow a premium feel is lacking. The space behind the cabin can hold several duffel bags but the cup holders are placed way back.

The ladder frame chassis incorporates a K-brace to increase rigidity and load-carrying capacity. Coupled with independent front suspension with MacPherson struts and anti-roll bars set-up at the front, the D-MAX is stable at high speeds. Body roll is present but it's not scary. Ride is stiff at the rear owing to a leaf spring set-up. Steering is light but

Specification ISUZU D-MAX SPACE CAB

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 2499cc common-rail diesel
Transmission	5-speed manual
Power	134bhp @ 3600rpm
Torque	294Nm @ 1800-3200rpm
Weight	1630kg
0-100kmph	NA
Top speed	175kmph
Price	NA

evo rating: ★★★★★

- High-speed stability, built-to-last feel
- Interior lacks premium feel, features

Isuzu D-Max Space Cab



vague. Brakes offer loads of bite, the vehicle maintaining its line under hard braking. We wish ABS was available as an option at the very least.

Owing to the leaf springs, the rear end steps out at the slightest provocation on dirt. Step on the gas and the rear will slide out and some control and discretion were necessary lest we ended up in the shrubbery at the side of the track.

Isuzu has played the value-for-money card in the pricing aspect. The Space Cab variant is priced at ₹7.09 lakh, ex showroom Mumbai, significantly lower than the Mahindra Scorpio Getaway (prices starting at ₹8.6 lakh) and the Tata Xenon (prices starting at ₹10.2 lakh). It misses out on the 4WD and ABS option the competition offers, but makes up for it in terms of ride, stability and overall quality.

Starting with the competitive pricing and a range of attractive, customer-pleasing attributes, we reckon Isuzu has a potent contender to stake a claim in the lifestyle pick-up segment in India. ☑



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Top: Interiors have a built-to-last feel. **Above left:** Bonnet scoop feeds air to the flat-mounted intercooler. **Above:** 2.5-litre engine is refined with loads of bottom end torque