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## TRAILRIDER

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FEATURE

# TRAILRIDER

*Chinese utes get better every year and LDV is setting the trend*

Regular readers of *Delivery Magazine* will know of past concerns with Chinese products that dated back to the days when imports from China were generally replicated versions from other manufacturers.

While the idea of copying may be considered flattering by some, when it comes to vehicles it usually results in a sub-standard product that suffers from lack of development prove-out and consequently the company falls on its own sword as bad publicity mounts and affects sales performance.

Problems with the products are generally compounded by a lack of commitment by the importer or distributor, resulting in a limited supply of replacement parts and stories of long waits with a vehicle off the road and out of service. When this occurs the resale value drops through the floor, leaving those that bought the product with something they can't sell and can only really hand it around the family members until it expires totally.

Brands that have come and gone include JAC and JMC, both of which disappeared completely. Great Wall came and went, then resurfaced and now offers a much-improved product than its original concept under the management of Haval. Foton is another brand that despite good engine credentials (courtesy of Cummins in Beijing), appears to be failing in its resolve to establish a manufacturer-owned import business in the Australian market.

The Chinese vehicle manufacturing industry has been interesting to watch from a comfortable distance. Knowing the potential size of the market focussed the attention of the Western manufacturers that were quick to form joint ventures in order to operate in the Chinese market.

It wasn't long before European and American auto makers were setting up factories and sharing their expertise in production, quality control, styling, design and engine technology. There comes a time though that the person who needed to share in order to advance wants a greater piece of the pie. That has led to a contraction in the appeal of joint ventures, with Chinese automakers now having bought in the talent in order to continue in their own right as a fully-owned Chinese operation.

There is little value in a country importing vehicles from China in trying to climb to a higher moral ground and bemoaning the fact that its own local auto-making business has all but disappeared. That's been a developing situation since Japan started its own auto manufacturing, again after initially setting up joint-venture operations with European manufacturers, followed by exactly the same scenario with South Korean and then Indian vehicle manufacturers.





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Today, when discussing the Chinese automakers, there's very little that's open to criticism. Styling and design are carried on by the Chinese manufacturers in studios located in Europe that are staffed by Europeans in order to capture the European flair rather than relying on the Chinese functionality to get them through. Engine and drivetrain technology now stand on equal terms with the long-established competition, as does the ongoing development of alternative fuels such as hydrogen fuel-cell technology, hybrid and electric propulsion.

All this explanation brings *Delivery Magazine* to the status of LDV, a division of SAIC (Shanghai Automobile and Industrial Corporation) which is the largest and oldest automotive manufacturer in China as well as being the largest auto company on China's share market. SAIC is a Fortune Global 500 company, and the 36th largest company in the world. SAIC sold over 6.9 million vehicles in 2018 and has formed joint ventures with Volkswagen and General Motors.

SAIC Motor's business covers the research, production and vehicle sales of both passenger cars and commercial vehicles. It also covers components including engines, gearboxes, powertrains, chassis, interior and exterior and miscellaneous electronic components, and logistics, vehicle telematics, second-hand vehicle transactions and auto finance services.

In the light-commercial vehicle segment LDV sells its 4x4 T60 ute, together with the G10 medium van with a payload of just over one tonne, and the slightly larger and V80 van that takes a payload of up to 1.4 tonne.

In the first six months of this year, LDV sold 1819 T60 utes, 580 G10 vans, 326 G10 people movers and 240 versions of the V80 van. Volumes are down YTD by 3.5 percent, hardly surprising given the influence of COVID-19, which tended to over-occupy the minds of vehicle buyers of all segments. Great Wall, probably the closest Chinese origin competitor, managed 544 4x2 utes and 280 4x4 versions of the Steed ute.

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The LDV T60 4x4 has been quietly ticking away as it made an impression on buyers, thanks to its competitive pricing combined with a very high level of standard inclusions.

The importation of LDV products is handled by the long-established Ateco Automotive operation that has a wealth of history handling the set-up and integration of relatively unknown brands, understands the Australian market and has the ability to set-up and oversee an effective parts supply and customer support service. The same company also handles RAM Trucks Australia, arguably the fastest growing ute brand with its Australian Special Vehicles nameplate and remanufacturing centre in Clayton, Melbourne where it converts US-made vehicles to right-hand drive.

After LDV kicked off with the T60 ute, last year it trialed an Australianised version of the T60 called Trailrider, comprising suspension settings better suited to Aussie expectations. This has now become a separate model in its own right and 2020 sees it adopting an all-new diesel engine with increased power and torque, and lower fuel consumption.

This next-generation Trailrider is the second LDV vehicle to showcase a version of SAIC's first in-house designed D20 diesel engine, following the recent release of the D90 seven-seat family SUV.

For the new Trailrider 2, the D20 diesel features a single scroll turbocharger for the 2.0-litre, four-cylinder unit that produces 120 kW at 4000 rpm and 375 Nm from 1500 rpm. The drivetrain options include a six-speed manual or automatic transmission. With disc brakes all round, the front suspension is the industry-standard double wishbone, with the rear hosting semi-elliptical springs. Expect fuel economy of 8.5 l/100 kms (combined figure) with CO2 emissions of 223 g/km running at Euro5 standards.

Together with the now standard suspension tune specifically for Australian conditions, a 5-Star ANCAP rating, five-year warranty, ABN driveaway price from \$37,990 and a raft of features to facilitate the best work/life balance, the new Trailrider 2 makes an attractive package to all those that can be bothered in making direct value comparisons with its competitors.

"We continue to develop our product offering throughout our fast-growing range, so we're delighted to announce the arrival of the next-gen Trailrider," says Dinesh Chinnappa, General Manager, LDV Automotive.

"With the addition of the lighter and more efficient 120 kW diesel engine, Trailrider 2 is a formidable ute, as



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***“Trailrider 2 is a formidable ute, as comfortable on the worksite during the week as it is towing jet skis at the weekend”***

comfortable on the worksite during the week as it is towing jet skis at the weekend,” he added.

The new engine offers improved refinement and drivability thanks to Bosch’s third generation, high-pressure common rail direct fuel injection technology. The interior layout stands comparison with any of the Japanese brands built in Thailand with high-grade plastics, leather-trimmed seats, Apple CarPlay, smartphone connectivity and one of the biggest touchscreens in its class mark.

The 5-star ANCAP safety-rated Trailrider 2 has blind-spot monitoring, six airbags, 360-degree camera, lane-departure warning, tyre-pressure monitoring, ESP, ABS, EBA, EBD, hill descent control, hill-start assist plus Fatigue Reminder and Attention Assist. Payload is 895 kg for the manual, 865 kg for the auto and the towing limit for a braked trailer is 3000 kg.

Outside, black trim accents, blacked-out logos and badging, and a new sports roll bar combine for a tough new look. The Mountain Top roll cover for the tray returns following strong praise from customers of the original Trailrider, as do 19-inch 12-spoke black alloys, side steps and a nudge bar. Also included is a robust, heavy-duty spray-on tub liner.

The range of colour options now include Blanc White, Metal Black, Lava Grey, Jewel Blue and Vivid Red.

Priced at \$37,990 (ABN holders) for the manual and \$39,990 (ABN holders) for the automatic, the new Trailrider 2 joins the product range that includes T60 Luxe Mega Tub, offering the longest wheelbase and longest OEM tub in its class (aside from the RAM 1500), longer than both the SsangYong Musso LWB and upcoming VW Amarok XL.

Launched in December of last year, the T60 Mega Tub is priced from \$34,990 drive away for ABN holders – just \$1500 more than the regular T60.

With an extra 315 mm in the wheelbase and 275 mm in the tray, the T60 Luxe Mega Tub has a total tray length of 1800 mm, meaning bikes can stand upright and a typical six-foot tradie ladder fits neatly in the back. It comes standard with an inner tray liner, while hard lids and roller tops will also be available.

The Luxe variant boasts a plethora of standard equipment including blind-spot monitoring, six airbags, rear on-demand differential lock, keyless entry and start, leather-trim seats and is backed by a 5 year / 130,000 km warranty. **LDV**

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