



PRODUCT TEST

EFS SUSPENSION KIT

SHOCKTASTIC

Our long-term D-Max has left for Fraser Island with an EFS spring in its step

STORY AND PICS BY RENNIE SCAYSBROOK

Project D-Max has done its first trip to Fraser Island, sporting a new EFS suspension kit thanks to the crew at Carrolls Suspension. With the body now sporting a 40mm lift and the whole show running on new Maxxis 674 Bighorn rubber, the D-Max looks like its ready to take on the King's Army.

The first point of contact came in the form of the Premium shock absorbers. EFS has been developing and constructing shocks for years and has the use of its own specialised shock dyno facility, where each shock is fine tuned to not just its own demanding specifications but the specific needs of each individual 4X4 it's destined for.

The Premium Elite shock features a 35mm piston with twin tube construction for better control of the spring during rebound and compression, with the 51-60mm external tube offering a greater oil capacity to keep the valve at a lower operating temperature. The long travel design is a part of all EFS shocks and will

help maximise wheel articulation when hitting a rock or a gnarly trail.

The EFS torsion bars give a 25-30 percent increase in strength over the standard Isuzu units and give a dramatic increase in towing stability as well as keeping the Isuzu planted yet nimble when carrying an increased load. The bars are prestressed to ensure longevity, plus they're bar peened and rolled to help the units retain their strength for the life of their service.

Out the back EFS has fitted its Elite Comfort 150kg to GVM leaf springs with EFS pins, shackles, U-bolts and bushes.

The EFS leaves are made from high-quality Japanese grade SUP9 and SUP9A alloyed carbon spring steel. The shot-peened and scrag tested leaves offer not just greater wheel articulation and durability but give a more comfortable ride over the rough stuff. The tapered leaf ends reduce the inter-leaf friction and improve pressure distribution over the bearing area.

The EFS pins and shackles are made

from medium- to high-grade carbon steels which are then case hardened and gold cadmium plated for increased strength and corrosion protection against the elements while the carbon steel U-bolts are powder coated to ensure longevity.

Overall the new suspension package has turned the D-Max from a workhorse with 4X4 capability to a machine to go anywhere. The ride is firmer yet more compliant, and it'll now tow heavy loads even easier than it did before. Plus it doesn't look half bad, either! **4x4**



Uplifted with EFS suspension confidence

PRICE

■ POA, according to vehicle

CONTACT

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4x4 117

IT'S AN INSIDE JOB
WHAT LIES BENEATH THE FJ'S NEW LOOK
RETRO

										
SUZUKI 3 year/100,000km www.suzuki.com.au										
JIMNY SIERRA										
The latest version of the smallest off-roader on the market has revived the once popular Sierra nameplate. This is the ultimate off-road machine for those on a budget.										
	PRICE	ENGINE	TRANS	TORQUE	POWER	WEIGHT	LOAD	TOWING	FUEL	LAST TESTED
Sierra	20,490	L4/1.3	M5	110	63	1060	360	350/1300	40	oct 10
Sierra	22,490	L4/1.3	A4	110	63	1075	345	350/1300	40	

										
GRAND VITARA										
The Grand Vitara has two powerful, petrol donks to complement its off-road capability. The big bopper, though, is the awesome turbo-diesel, with our long-termer proving an ideal compact tourer option.										
	PRICE	ENGINE	TRANS	TORQUE	POWER	WEIGHT	LOAD	TOWING	FUEL	LAST TESTED
3-door	25,990	L4/2.4	M5	225	122	1444	426	500/1600	55	nov 08
3-door	27,990	L4/2.4	A4	225	122	1459	537	750/1850	55	nov 08
5-door	29,990	L4/2.4	M5	225	122	1552	522	700/1850	66	nov 08
5-door	31,990	L4/2.4	A4	225	122	1567	507	700/1850	66	
5-door	35,990	L4TD/1.9	M5	300	95	1645	425	750/2000	66	feb 09
5-door Prestige	37,490	L4/2.4	A4	225	122	1677	417	700/2000	66	nov 08
5-door Prestige	40,490	V6/3.2	A4	284	165	1645	425	700/2000	66	aug 10

										
TOYOTA 3 year/100,000km www.toyota.com.au										
PRADO										
The new Prado has grown slightly and copped new styling and (in Kakadu) off-road tech, however purchasers now need to specify hardware for an off-road option pack in ZR and Kakadu models.										
	PRICE	ENGINE	TRANS	TORQUE	POWER	WEIGHT	LOAD	TOWING	FUEL	LAST TESTED
SX	55,990	L4TD/3.0	A5	410	127	2095	805	750/3000	87	
ZR	65,904	L4TD/3.0	A5	410	127	2145	755	750/3000	87	oct 10
GX	55,990	L4TD/3.0	M6	410	127	2205	785	750/2500	150	
GX	58,490	L4TD/3.0	A5	410	127	2205	785	750/2500	150	dec 10
GXL	60,990	V6/4.0	M6	381	202	2240	660	750/2500	150	
GXL	63,490	V6/4.0	A5	381	202	2240	660	750/2500	150	
GXL	61,990	L4TD/3.0	M6	410	127	2205	785	750/2500	150	feb 10
GXL	64,490	L4TD/3.0	A5	410	127	2205	785	750/2500	150	
VX	74,490	V6/4.0	A5	381	202	2355	545	750/2500	150	
VX	75,490	L4TD/3.0	A5	410	127	2435	555	750/2500	150	
Kakadu	87,990	V6/4.0	A5	381	202	2355	545	750/2500	150	
Kakadu	88,990	L4TD/3.0	A5	410	127	2435	555	750/2500	150	feb 10

										
LANDCRUISER 200 SERIES										
With two beaut V8s – petrol and twin-turbo diesel – the 200 Series LandCruiser has loads of performance. It's still one of the best off-roaders around.										
	PRICE	ENGINE	TRANS	TORQUE	POWER	WEIGHT	LOAD	TOWING	FUEL	LAST TESTED
GXL V8	76,240	V8/4.7	A5	410	202	2555	745	750/3500	138	jun 08



■ We've had plenty of pics of the FJ Cruiser retro inspired wagon from Toyota, but finally the company has offered a peek inside. Due for arrival in March this year the FJ features aircon, bluetooth, reversing camera and an eight-speaker CD sound system with steering-wheel controls.

For playtime, Toyota has installed easy to clean rubber-like flooring, dirt camouflaging dark upholstery with water repellent seat facings. The five-seater's rear pews fold flat with removable cushions for extra gear space. All we need now is to get hold of one after the long wait. – Tim Scott

GXL TDV8	86,240	V8TD/4.5	A6	650	195	2630	670	750/3500	138	nov 10
VX V8	87,000	V8/4.7	A5	410	202	2610	690	750/3500	138	jan 08
VX TDV8	97,000	V8TD/4.5	A6	650	195	2675	625	750/3500	93	apr 08
Sahara V8	103,240	V8/4.7	A5	410	202	2665	635	750/3500	138	feb 08
Sahara TDV8	113,240	V8TD/4.5	A6	650	195	2720	580	750/3500	93	jan 08

										
LANDCRUISER 70										
The 70 Series Cruiser's torquy TDV8 makes it a load-hauler extraordinaire. Available as long-wheelbase Troopie or five-door mid-wheelbase wagon. Now has standard airbags.										
	PRICE	ENGINE	TRANS	TORQUE	POWER	WEIGHT	LOAD	TOWING	FUEL	LAST TESTED
TroopCarrier 3-st	61,390	V8TD/4.5	M5	430	151	2320	980	750/3500	180	
TroopCarrier 11-st	63,940	V8TD/4.5	M5	430	151	2320	980	750/3500	180	
TroopCarrier GXL 5-st	65,440	V8TD/4.5	M5	430	151	2335	965	750/3500	180	feb 08
Wagon w'mate	57,940	V8TD/4.5	M5	430	151	2220	780	750/3500	90	
Wagon GXL	61,440	V8TD/4.5	M5	430	151	2190	810	750/3500	90	feb 08

“ When you're on a good thing stick to it is Toyota's approach with its best-selling HiLux. Rather than change too much ... Toyota is looking to simply reinforce the defences against any fresh opposition – Matt Raudonikis ”

D-MAX TEASER WETS ITS TEETH

■ We've been itching to challenge our long-term Isuzu D-Max now that we've finally got round to installing some bush-ready mods for what we had in mind. So, with Queensland experiencing some of the most godforsaken weather in its history, there was plenty of opportunity to test out the mods given to our long-term D-Max before Christmas as we headed up to Fraser Island. It may have not been the best choice of holiday destination, but it was booked and, hey, we love a challenge.

Once we veered off the Bruce Highway in search of, well, mud, the new and very chunky Maxxis 674 Bighorn muddies now adorning the D-Max held up admirably in the quagmire conditions found along the Bruce. Thick clay as slippery as wet ice was effortlessly crossed as we powered along through the pine forests on the road to Maroochydore, and it was a similar situation when we hit the sand at Fraser.

There wasn't an instance in either the soft sand of the beach or the seemingly endless river crossings that the Bighorns didn't take in their stride. And to top it off, after nearly

4000km of driving on all manner of surfaces, there's hardly any wear on the tread, so I think we've made a wise choice.

The EFS lift kit acquitted itself equally. Not only does it make the D-Max look utterly badass, but it served to take us places I would've feared to tread otherwise. There was quite a tricky section within the rainforest on Fraser that had me thinking twice about my options but the extra 40mm height that the body now sports made for easy manoeuvring over the rocks and sand peaks.

One area I was concerned about was on-road comfort but these issues never eventuated. Despite the extra lift and the stiffer EFS Elite shock absorbers, on-road comfort was never compromised, although the back-end is a little on the stiff side, but as we weren't that heavily loaded, it's nothing of major concern.

We'll bring you a full story of our adventure in an upcoming issue, plus some individual product reviews of the gear we've added and how it went. – Rennie Scaysbrook





IN THE SHED

Long-term Isuzu D-Max

STORY BY TIM SCOTT | PICS BY BRENDON THORNE

CABT'N

Our long-term D-Max is going home. We wrap up with an appraisal of the first ute we've held on to for more than a week

BEEFHEART





- 1. Winter bogs presented no problems
- 2. A couple of rocks were required here
- 3. EFS at full droop on the rear right
- 4. Tyres add weight to the arsenal



While not exactly hiding its light under a bushel, the Isuzu D-Max has been one of the quiet achievers of our long-term test vehicles over recent years. The strong, silent type, if you will.

Some of our fleet try to hog the spotlight with more glamorous bodywork or vocal overtures than the humble Isuzu ute – the V8 HEMI Grand Cherokee springs to mind, but that’s all, as no-one has yet managed to wrest the keys from JW – but the D-Max has always been there, waiting, generally when somebody wants something *done*. And therein lies the beauty of the ute’s appeal. And not just the D-Max; utes are the Aussie perennial favourite, as being closer to one’s mate than a wagon probably ever will. (Deniliquin, yearly, anyone?)

Isuzu Ute Australia is right behind its one-vehicle base, with test programs being widely used in the media. Indeed, Isuzu seems keen for us to flow right into the next-gen D-Max as soon as it becomes available. That should have been around now, but the catastrophic natural disasters that ravaged Japan on so many levels have played havoc (albeit quiet, reserved havoc) with production schedules. Amid a rapidly changing game in the ute arena. Any lengthy delay puts Isuzu at a disadvantage as manufacturers, like, say, VW and Toyota play lift the bar and catch

up, respectively. Toyota will react later in the year with a revised HiLux.

Isuzu has expanded rapidly in Australia and recently surpassed the 10,000 sales mark. A successful new model now would cement that growth, leaving the shadow of any badge-fuelled perceptions between it and the Holden Colorado. The D-Max

The D-Max has been one of the quiet achievers of our long-term test vehicles

needs an update, but what of the long-term test ute? Here’s what our D-Max has impressed on us.

To improve the wallowy factory set-up, the suspension was the first modification. As you’ve seen from previous updates, the D-Max was fitted with an EFS kit from Carrolls Springs, in Smithfield, NSW. The 35mm big-bore Enforcer shocks, with 40mm lift, and Elite Comfort leaf springs firmed up the Isuzu; gone was the pitch and roll, and the massive imperfections in the concrete roads in south-west Sydney made less of an impact on the ride home. Sure it was firmer,

but we knew what was in store would test that firmness in regular use.

Matho had some proper commuting to do, now with the acres up at Mudgee, and the ute was involved (as they all are) in the relocation process. So how was that mix of broken bitumen? “This ute is a pleasure to drive on the road,” Matho said. “Still a ute, yes, but with the suspension we had it was very good on long trips on the tar, even with the family on board. I was impressed by the ride quality.”

Of course the D-Max had an off-road purpose, that’s why we fitted heavier-duty suspension and Rennie Scaysbrook was the first to head off the bitumen in earnest with a trip to Fraser Island for the Christmas break. “The extra rigidity of the new suspension didn’t mean Annabelle and I were unduly uncomfortable over the 4000km trip,” Rennie said.

But the D-Max acquitted itself well on the sand of a wet and windblown east coast. The leaf packs and underpinnings were treated to a protective spray coat for the salty regime at Fraser. However, since having a good bath, the leaf-sprung rear is making no noise, meaning it has beared up to its treatment well.

Meanwhile, Matho had been cutting tracks on the new property, touring back blocks NSW and hauling an MQ Patrol for a mate, subjecting the EFS suspension to the full round of likely duties that you would

likely do. He said: “Truly one of the best all-round set-ups I’ve experienced. I drove the ute in all conditions, on- and off-road, with everything from no load to hundreds of kilos and even towing large masses. Naturally, it felt stiffer when unloaded and did sag at the rear under heavier loads, so I’m not saying it was somehow miraculous, but short of adding airbags, you won’t get many suspension set-ups working better than this.”

Combining well with the suspension was the new set of Maxxis Bighorn 674 muddies that we opted to try. Proven in tough rally conditions the Big Horn rubber is also part of a broad involvement at global level for Maxxis in many forms of off-road sport. We’ve had the tyres from the vehicle’s first service, so they’ve travelled around 13,000km, so far without rotation... or so to speak. With a slight hike in profile and a rather aggressive tread pattern, they certainly add to that fit for purpose attitude, although the massive raised white lettering on the sidewall may cause some owners to have the tyres flipped at fitting if they’re not so bold. The thrum of the muddies was evident, but at an expected level – the noise not as intrusive as the lettering.

“Tyres were a bit vague on well-formed dirt roads,” Matho said. “It was hard to pick whether or not they were beginning to drift as you rounded a bend. But for M/T tyres, they gripped well enough on wet tar, were fine on dry tar and coped with mud and sand nicely. We didn’t have the vehicle long enough to get a handle on wear, though.”

We haven’t suffered any punctures and the overall condition of the tyres is spot on but, as Matho pointed out, another 20,000km would be a better indicator. The main issue for us has been that the added weight of the heavier muddies has given rise to a rather uninspiring brake feel. The brakes definitely feel overworked and the rotor size may need upgrading if this is a long-term proposition for you, or see what the new model D-Max has in store.

Internally, the D-Max is in need of rejuvenation. In this day and age of the dual-role requirements, the ute needs to step away from that tradie TAFE Certificate III a little more than, say, only five years ago to fit in with the modern family tour bus duties. The rear seat needs more room. Although its folding capability is flexible, it’s for freight not for passengers. Securing an over-strap child seat is a pain. The

cupholders are too far forward of the gearshift. What!? Yeah, that may be better for not spilling your drink as you throw an arm full of stuff from the hardware store on the passenger’s seat, but it’s less convenient for your ‘civilian’ passengers.

Around town the Isuzu was easy to live with apart from awkward reversing manoeuvrability with compromised vision (more later). Again, Mick Matheson comments on the open-road aspects. “The noise isn’t bad, though you can hear the effect of the M/T tyres and it’s no Rolls-Royce. The engine’s noise isn’t intrusive. The cabin is comfortable, and the teenage kids didn’t complain about leg room in the back. I like dual-cab utes. Packing them for treks is easy and logical: clean stuff goes in the cabin, dirty stuff out the back (though of course when you add the kids it’s not that easy).”

Preferences for packing utes threw up the problem of, and a solution to, the canopy/visibility compromise. If you don’t have a canopy, rearward vision is not terrible; you can see out to the tray’s extremities and mostly see pedestrians. Though we know it’s a personal need versus want with the canopy, we only really mention it for the problem

Round town the Isuzu was easy to live with, apart from awkward reversing



1. Willing and able; could be more of both
2. Canopy window caused optical drama
3. Still a bit of slip at road pressures
4. Racks a boon for home-building ex-Ed





1. Traction and stability controls are now in order
2. Cab is workmanlike, but not uncomfortable
3. Polaris shows the way, screen tilt would help us find it
4. Reverse camera is a boon with a canopy installed

1



2



3



4

we had with the vision offered through the rear windows. The combination of triple layer optics (sliding window on the canopy) caused some interesting imagery in low-light conditions and darkness. It ranged from the red glow of the high-mount brake light on the bulkhead, to reflections from the instrument panel.

To solve the rear vision issue we had a Polaris reversing camera installed in the rear step area. Normally, it would have been mounted on the canopy, but we were due to change our lid and so opted for the lower spot. We knew it will be more susceptible to dirt, but it's coped well with some serious dunkings.

The camera came linked to our Polaris GPS NG7700 in-dash fun house that has seen the factory Isuzu centre console relegated to the top of my fridge. The large HD touchscreen replaces the radio, CD system with its large dials and leaves one very small knob for on/off and volume. Scrolling through the menus is straightforward for radio and all mp3 iPod/iPhone compatibility. The satnav can be set up with as many features/alerts as you need, and voice guidance was fine. Except that no system seems to be able to utter Parramatta Road as a smooth flow of syllables.

The off-road mapping is on a moving map basis with Ozi Explorer 1:250,000 scale topo software. Waypoints and plotting your way in and out of a location are well executed. The full collection of Hema's off-road mapping is on board. Although, we found the on-road guidance coped well with finding a route through the woods on the extremities of its detail level, before we switched to the topos, which were detailed and the zoom function climbed right on in.

Internally, the D-Max is in need of rejuvenation

So far, the only criticisms are the need for tiny fingers to use some of the functions, especially the on-screen keyboard, and the reaction speed to commands could be sharper. For the D-Max, and its near vertical dash, a screen tilt function would help as legibility becomes a real issue. Even after playing with the backlight functions, the touchscreen is still reflected through the canopy window into your rearview mirror.

With high-power options now lighting up the ute market, how does the decidedly low-tech Isuzu stand up to scrutiny?

"Fuel economy was pretty standard for a TD one-tonner with raised suspension and heavy-duty tyres: typically around 12L/100km on average in varying conditions," said Matho. "The modifications certainly took their toll compared with its original showroom set-up, and that goes for performance as well, but these are the compromises we make."

"There are some steep hills on my regular drives and the longest would knock it back to about 90km/h, but the engine is willing, with lots of torque, and the gearbox handles the task well for an auto. I'd often put it back to second or third up slow, winding hills to keep it in the top of the rev zone when the box wouldn't do it by itself, and this'd keep the pace up a bit better. The gearbox seems a bit reluctant to change down sometimes, when you feel it should. It has the grunt to willingly overtake slower traffic, not leaving you out on the wrong side of the road for too long."

More miles would have been better and the D-Max has been a valued performer, but considering the opposition it now faces, D-Max II needs to make its debut. **4x4**