

LOVE 'DAT VAN

THE ARRIVAL OF THE DELIVER 9 TAKES THE CHINESE BUILD LDV BRAND INTO A WHOLE NEW VAN SECTOR, UP AGAINST THE MARKET HEAVYWEIGHTS SUCH AS THE MERCEDES BENZ SPRINTER, RENAULT'S MASTER, FIAT'S DUCATO, THE FORD TRANSIT AND THE VW CRAFTER. WE LIVED WITH THE LDV FOR A WEEK AND WE CAME AWAY IMPRESSED.



The LDV brand has been around on the Australian market for almost a decade now and has found a degree of popularity with the original V90 van offering, as well as the smaller G10 model, but the new Deliver 9 large van takes things to a new level.

The Deliver 9 has hit the market with an extremely attractive price tag and a raft of high specifications, safety features and technology that match the far more expensive Euro counterparts.

That is exactly where the local distributor, Ateco is aiming the new LDV. It has the Euros in its sights and it is leaving nothing on the table in the quest to take a big share of the lucrative van market.

Along with a range of sizes in the large van, LDV is also offering a cab chassis range along with both an 11 or 14 seat minibus.

We have long pondered the way some new brands take on the tough Australian market and in particular brands from places like China, as LDV is. As students of history we remember when the Japanese started to arrive here in the 1960s and we are often amazed at how the latest of waves of companies arriving to conquest the market are either ignorant or reject the lessons of history. Aussie buyers proved all those decades ago with the Japanese that they are willing to take a chance on a new brand from a new country, if the value proposition is right.

If the price gap is wide enough then buyers here will give it a try. They proved that with the likes of Toyota, Nissan, Mazda and Mitsubishi in the 60s and 70s and with Hyundai and Kia in the 80s and 90s.

This works if the new cheaper brands from new places deliver on reliability and performance. We reckon if the price gap is about 20 to 25 per cent lower than the established brands, then enough people will give it a try. Again this has been shown with the Great Wall when it first started selling its utes here, interestingly also through Ateco, the same distributor now flogging LDV. It worked in the beginning because the price and dealer network was right with Ateco.

Since then Great Wall started its own operation, prices rose and the sales plummeted and the value proposition was not good enough to prise buyers away from the established Japanese utes.

That is a long winded explanation of where LDV sits in the market and also to underline that its price point and value proposition establishes a rational and cogent reason for buyers to consider what is still an unproven and emerging brand.

LDV claimed during the launch that the Deliver 9 costs 60 per cent less than the MB Sprinter price wise, even though it boasts an array of features, technology and size specs that put it on the same footing as the market leading MB Sprinter.

LDV has justified this figure by using an equation that divides the van's cubic capacity and payload by the recommended purchase price of \$42,095 for the long wheelbase Mid-Roof model, coming up with a cost of \$3,837 per cubic metre of volume and \$25.21 per kg of payload, which makes it something around that 60 per cent more cost effective mark compared with the Benz Sprinter. That is a pretty compelling number, in fact it is a compelling factor when compared on price alone.

The Deliver 9 pricing undercuts key rivals by some considerable amounts, with the \$42,095 entry price for Deeliver 9 LWB Mid Roof manual and LWB cab chassis manual under cutting the entry level

Renault Master by \$3395, the entry level Fiat Ducato by \$4205, the Peugeot Boxer by \$5395, Volkswagen's Crafter by \$7195, the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter by \$7625 and Ford's Transit by a whopping \$8595.

Power comes from LDV's own two-litre, four-cylinder turbodiesel which pumps out maximum power of 110kW and torque of 375Nm from 1,500rpm. The turbodiesel is available with stop/start engine technology, and is mated to either a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission, while power is fed to the road via the rear-wheel drive layout. For the test we had the six speed auto, and despite the fact that it has either one or three gears less than the autos in the



Benz Sprinter, depending on model, it does a pretty good job.

The power and torque is more than adequate, although we only had a relatively small load in the van at any time during our test. The engine proved to have excellent response, very good flexibility and ample torque to cope with Sydney's hilly suburban streets.

The LDV's value proposition is bolstered by an extensive suite of safety equipment including Autonomous Emergency Braking (AEB), (which only operates at a speed of up to 30km/h), it also has Bosch's latest generation Electronic Stability Control (ESC) system, Lane Departure Warning and an extensive array of six airbags, all features that fleet managers and companies are demanding in these times of stricter OH&S standards.

The Delivery 9 also comes with heated electric front mirrors, air conditioning, a multifunction steering wheel, adaptive cruise control on auto models, a three-seat cab layout, an eight-way adjustable driver's seat, rear fog lights, halogen headlights, and a wide view rear overhead reversing camera.

The huge 10.1 inch Infotainment screen is the centre piece of the audio system, HVAC controls and other functions and comes with Apple CarPlay, although interestingly no Android Auto at this stage. This all works OK but is not exceptional.

We say it all works OK because while it all works, there are times when the

infotainment screen interface is a little clunky and lacks an intuitive feel. This is compared with its Euro opponents, but we have to say the advance on this LDV is a massive leap ahead of its predecessors and other Chinese machines, including LDV's own ute the T60. Having said that the Chinese electronics gurus at parent company SAIC are clearly working hard because the similar Infotainment system in the latest MG we drove recently is a leap ahead again compared with the Delivery 9.

There is also the obligatory Bluetooth phone and audio connectivity, as well as two USB ports, and a 4.2-inch multifunction instrument display in front of the driver with a digital speedometer and large and easy to read instruments.

The load area is very versatile with a 1.2m wide side door, and 180° opening rear doors. However one small design flaw we discovered to our own pain and a large gash on our schnoz, is the LDV badge on the rear barn doors. Problem is the rear LDV badge, which is a large oval emblem doesn't split down the middle. The consequence of this was a busted nose when this boofhead opened the rear doors and didn't compensate for the large badge jutting out, which whacked so hard it almost brought the NRL HIA doctor out to assess us! Most other vans split the badge down the middle so that when the doors are closed the badge appears whole but when open both sides are contained in the door, so they can neither break someone's nose or be accidentally snapped

off. Small point but blood was spilled!

Our test van was equipped with the \$1,500 Option Pack that adds rear doors that open to 236°, along with Blind Spot Detection, Lane Change Assist, and keyless entry.

The load area is really well configured and will take two standard Australian pallets between the wheel arches, and three Euro pallets. The long wheelbase Mid Roof Deliver 9 offers a cubic capacity of 10.97cubic metres and a payload of 1,670kg for the manual and 1640 for the auto version as we tested (it's 1500kg for the MWB, 1670kg for the LWB mid roof manual, 1640kg in the LWB high roof manual and 1620kg for the LWB high roof auto).

The cargo area is fitted with eight tie-down points, plus really tough rubber chequerplate flooring and LED lighting which gives great coverage and lights up all corners of the massive load area.

When it comes to choice of colours you can have Blanc White or Pacific Blue , the latter setting you back an extra \$500. That is it there are no other colours, but LDV reckons that most van buyers choose white and fleets wrap vehicles these days

In terms of appearance, it is a van and as such it could never be considered a piece of automotive sculpture, however it isn't ugly and has a passing resemblance to the Ford Transit, but does have its own individuality.

The cockpit area is well designed. It is comfortable, neat, well laid out and in terms of ergonomics and controls is



easy to use and live with, save for the aforementioned infotainment system and its minor foibles.

The cabin has plentiful storage space which is to be expected in a vehicle that is often operated as the mobile office for many a tradie or delivery driver. It has huge door pockets incorporating bottle holders and additional storage, while the middle seat back flips down and is equipped with an elasticated strap for documents and a pair of cup holders, making it quite practical. On the top outer edges of the dash there are a pair of high-mounted cup/bottle holders, because after all you can never get enough places to hold the coffee cups and drink bottles.

Above the windscreen there is also a shelf for holding folders and paperwork etc. although there isn't an indented tray to hold papers on the top of the dash as there is in many vans and utes these days.

The driver's seat has eight way adjustment which makes up to a small extent for the fact that the steering wheel has only rake and tilt adjustment but lacks reach adjustment. We didn't have too much trouble getting a comfortable position but it may not be the same for everyone.

The driver's seat has a fold down and adjustable arm rest on its left hand side, while the The bench seat on the passenger side is ample for two adults and under the seat cushion there is another handy, hidden storage box, which can be accessed by folding each of the two seats up independently.

On the road the Deliver 9 is fuss free and easy to drive. It's not a daunting vehicle to drive despite its size and is surprisingly manoeuvrable and agile, and the steering and ride are well tuned and sorted.

The Deliver 9 uses Macpherson struts on the front and a leaf sprung rear end although we only drove a relatively short distance with a load onboard, the ride quality didn't change very much laden or unladen, it still handled bumps and dips well either way and is the equal of any van in the segment when it comes to road manners.

The six-speed auto worked well, shifting smoothly and easily fitting the engine's torque band on uphill climbs and under acceleration.

At the fuel pumps the Deliver 9 was reasonably impressive and for the week we had the van it recorded a respectable average of 10.4 ltr./100km, which given the frontal area of a van like this was a good result. With the 80 litre tank you should eek out a range of around 800 km between refills, and being a Euro 5 it doesn't need AdBlue, which is convenient if not as environmentally friendly as it could be.

This could be the part of the story that stops you from considering an LDV. Why? Because it comes with a shorter warranty than most of its rivals, and that may matter to you if you intend to hang on to your van for a longer period of time.

LDV distributor Ateco has given the van a comprehensive Capped Price Servicing program and specifies the first

service at 5000km, with all following services at 30,000km or one year, whichever comes first. LDV says that for three years or 95,000kms the Deliver 9 will cost about \$1,895 to service. The van also gets the protection of a three year/ 160,000km warranty.

That is not as long as some of the other vans in the sector with five-year/ unlimited kilometre coverage for the Ford Transit, the Mercedes Sprinter and VW, while the Renault Master boasts five years/200,000km and Fiat's Ducato a three year/200,000km coverage.

Even factoring in the warranty differences and potentially lower resale values you would have to have a lot of breakdowns and repairs and lose a lot on trade in for the price advantage to be eroded. If you plan to turn the LDV over every three years under its standard warranty, we reckon you could be a long way in front on price alone.

The fact is the LDV is well priced, doesn't give anything away to the other more expensive vans in terms of driveability and practicality.

It is a whole lot cheaper, but doesn't feel cheap to sit in or drive, and has some features that are ahead of its opponents, in particular the load area floor covering and linings.

The LDV Deliver 9 is certainly worth consideration if you are after a large van, this just could be the first 'unChinese' Chinese van to arrive and could save you a lot of money. 