

LIGHT FANTASTIC

After more than ten years Fuso has delivered the first major overhaul for its popular and highly capable Rosa light duty bus, a move that should heat up the battle with Toyota's Coaster as well as light bus offerings from Chinese makers Higer and Yutong in the sector.



In a growing and increasingly important part of the bus market, the light duty sector has been a success story for Rosa, and Fuso has captured plenty of loyal customers over the time it's been sold here.

It's difficult to get a handle on Rosa's carbon dating, but it seems the Rosa as we know it arrived here in 1997, before getting a serious update in 2010, with a new engine being introduced. So the latest overhaul could be seen by some as being due at the very least and overdue by most.

As well as updated styling, a new engine and a swag of other features, Daimler has thrown its cupboard full of electronic safety features at the new gen

Rosa, claiming it now features the most advanced safety features ever in the light duty bus class.

Given the fact that safety has become a battleground in the light truck market in recent times, one would imagine, given a more precious cargo of up to 25 passengers, it might come into sharper focus, as operators look to buy new light buses.

The safety suite in the new Rosa reflects the same safety strategy Fuso has adopted with its truck range, offering a comprehensive range of safety features anchored by Advanced Emergency Braking, which can perform full emergency braking in the event of a potential collision.

This radar-based system can detect,

and begin braking for moving pedestrians, other vehicles and obstacles.

Along with that, Rosa also gets a Lane Departure Warning System as standard, along with Electronic Stability Program, driver and front passenger airbags, height adjustable LED headlights, Hill Start Assist and a reversing camera.

Rosa's chief rival in the light bus sector is of course Toyota's Coaster, which after many years of having the sector to itself, then had to play second fiddle to the more stylish and practical Rosa in terms of sales when it arrived on the market. Coaster has fought back somewhat over the past two years, since Toyota introduced a new model in 2018.



Finding exact sales numbers for the light bus sector is like trying to track down next week's winning lotto numbers. Toyota's numbers are listed on the Federal Chamber of Auto Industry's VFACTS data and in 2019 it showed that there were 282 Coasters sold in Australia. However Rosa sales numbers aren't listed in the VFACTS numbers, nor does it make the Truck Industry Council's commercial vehicle sales results.

Daimler wouldn't comment on sales numbers for Rosa, keeping their cards very close to the chest, but we understand that Toyota may have just edged the Rosa in 2019, and could be sitting ahead this year as well, with year to date figures showing Coaster having sold 232 to the end of August 2020.

The arrival of the new Coaster in 2018 clearly sparked interest in the model and the new Rosa is Fuso's counter punch in a battle for the sector, which by conservative estimates accounts for around 600 to 700 sales a year for new sales, or around \$60 million to \$70 million a year in Australia.

It's clear Fuso believes the safety suite is a major plus up against the Coaster which does not have the same level of safety equipment, save for a couple of safety airbags.

On a punch for punch basis, the Rosa also outpoints Coaster on power, seating capacity and its transmission.

New for Rosa is its three-litre four-cylinder turbo diesel common rail engine which has more power and torque than the Coaster's four-litre engine. The Rosa now boasts 129kW of power against the Coaster's 110 kW, while the Rosa's 430Nm is higher than its opponent's 397Nm.

Fuso says the new powerplant is an advanced unit, that is smaller and lighter than the engine it replaces meets Euro 6 emission standards, and features a variable geometry turbocharger among other goodies.

The 3.0-litre 4P10 meets the Euro6 standards by using Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR) as well as a Diesel Particulate Filter (DPF) along with Exhaust Gas Recirculation (EGR).

The new Rosa also gets Daimler's Duonic six-speed dual clutch, automated manual which is claimed to deliver fuel efficiency improvements as well as faster and smoother shifts. Another feature is a creep function, which makes low-speed manoeuvring a whole lot easier. If you don't want the AMT you can also choose to self-shift with a five-speed manual.

From the outside the Rosa has been given a major styling facelift that is the first real overhaul of its looks, apart from a few minor cosmetic changes, since 1997.

The revised Rosa now has a more contemporary Daimler family front end treatment, along with LED headlights. None of this takes away from the quite well proportioned overall look it has always had. We know it's a bus, so styling is a bit of a moot point, right? Well sort of, but we know more than one operator who has purchased the Rosa over the Coaster because of its sleeker styling, proving that looks may well matter in the light duty bus market.

Just as some of Fuso's trucks these days have a second 'transom' window in the lower part of the front passenger door, the new Rosa has received one of these as well, the theory being that the driver gets a better view of pedestrians and potential obstacles on the left hand side of the bus.







Fuso has also significantly upgraded the interior of the Rosa, with a new-look dashboard that looks to be both practical and stylish. It now incorporates a passenger side airbag, as well as a new climate control display and new switches for key controls that are within easy reach of the driver.

Significantly there is a new high-resolution 7-inch touchscreen display with internet and digital radio, along with a new electronic instrument cluster that presents a range of bus data for the driver including fuel efficiency information, maintenance status, current date and outside temperature.

The handbrake lever has also been

repositioned, and now sits to the left of the driver's seat. Fuso has also taken the opportunity to move the transmission shift lever from the floor on to the dashboard for easier control.

For passengers, bright LED lamps have been introduced into the cabin of the Rosa, while the rear air-conditioning system has been retained with integrated roof vents. The Deluxe versions of the Rosa also feature new high-backed cloth seats.

Fuso engineers and designers have given the Rosa a new flat floor design, that not only makes it easier for passengers to get in and out of their seats, but also allows for simpler aftermarket wheelchair lift installations.

The new Rosa continues to feature independent front suspension for optimum comfort and handling as well as rack and pinion steering for more precise feel. One of the results of that is the Rosa's claimed class leading turning circle of 12.6 metres for the 22 seater and 14.2m for the 25 seater.

Significantly for safety and better performance, we think, the Rosa now also features disc brakes on all four corners as well as rear suspension stabilisers. Four wheel discs are a big step up for consistency of braking performance and reliable stopping power.

Fuso is offering Rosa in two trim levels, as mentioned earlier, either Standard or



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Deluxe, allowing operators the ability to choose the level that is right for them.

Standard Rosas are equipped with manual air-conditioning and heater, low back passenger seats trimmed in vinyl, equipped with two-point seat belts and an auto foldable entrance door.

The Deluxe models are equipped with full auto air conditioning, high back cloth trim passenger seats with three-point belts, front window black-out, an automatic swing entrance door, LED fog lamps, cornering lamps and Alcoa alloy wheels.

Daimler Truck and Bus Australia boss, Daniel Whitehead, told C&B that the safety features of the new Rosa are at the heart of its appeal, with the company clearly taking

the strategy to give the Rosa the weaponry to fight off the rival Toyota Coaster.

"These buses carry our most precious cargo, whether it be on school runs or nursing home day trips, so it is imperative fleet operators consider their safety features or lack thereof," Whitehead said.

"There is only one light duty bus in Australia with Advanced Emergency Braking, only one with Lane Departure Warning and only one with Electronic Stability, and that is the new Fuso Rosa," Whitehead proudly boasted.

"There are many other benefits introduced by the upgraded model, but nothing as important as the features that will help protect the ones we love,"

Whitehead added.

With a five year/200,000km warranty, and extended 15,000km service intervals the updated Rosa has certainly been given an even more compelling purchase rationale.

Fuso has managed to further improve uptime and help reduce running costs by increasing Rosa's service intervals to 15,000km.

Does the new Rosa have the goods to re-assert its ascendancy in the light bus market? We reckon it just might and from what we can see Daimler is throwing plenty of resources at making sure that it will. We look forward to driving the new Rosa in the very near future for a full road test here in Coach & Bus. 🚐