Isuzu ‘New Look’ D-Max V-Cross STEEL Edition Double Cab – Road Test

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Kim Henson assesses Isuzu’s D-Max Double Cab (five seater) pick-up, in special STEEL Edition guise – limited to just 300 examples.

In the spring of this year I tested the mid-range, comprehensively-equipped Isuzu D-Max

DL40 Double Cab during a week of mixed motoring, and was impressed by its build quality, toughness and comfort; built for hard work but easy to drive and to live with in daily use. For those who need a five seater vehicle that has a payload of 1,120 kg (2,469 lb) and a towing capability of 3.5 tonnes, it ticks all these boxes, and also features high and low ratio four wheel drive, so useful if the going gets really rough and/or slippery.

However the D-Max range includes a variety of other models, offered in three ranges, 'Business', 'All-Purpose' and 'Adventure', and with four trim levels, 'Utility', DL20, DL40 and 'V-Cross'.

I endeavoured to make my road test report on the DL40 (including the model hierarchy and differences in detail), as comprehensive as possible. This appeared on Wheels-Alive on 24th April this year. To avoid duplicating all this information here, if you would like to read more, please go to:
https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/isuzu-new-look-d-max-dl40-double-cab-auto-road-test/

The current D-Max line-up of 'New-Look' models arrived in 2023, and compared with their predecessors featured a new front grille, freshly-designed road wheels and a revised cloth/leather seat design.

Providing peace of mind for potential buyers, all new Isuzu models come with a 125,000 mile/five year warranty, plus five years U.K. and European roadside assistance.

The Adventure range luxurious 'V-Cross' variant tops the D-Max tree in terms of specification, incorporating a wide variety of practical everyday use/comfort/luxury features – yet remains as tough and competent, on and off road, as all its lower spec companion models in the line-up.

V-Cross STEEL Edition Double Cab



At the end of April 2024 Isuzu unveiled their exclusive, limited-edition D-Max V-Cross STEEL Edition, with just 300 examples being produced. Based on the top specification V-Cross model within the ‘Adventure’ range, the newcomer is said to be ‘engineered to exceed expectations’, and the standard equipment list is very comprehensive.

Among many other items, standard-fit are… automatic Bi-LED headlamps, auto operation screen wipers, ‘black chrome’ 18 inch aluminium alloy road wheels (and there’s a full-size spare wheel/tyre), cruise control (Adaptive system on auto variants) plus Intelligent Speed Limiter, engine Stop and Start system (to save fuel and emissions), front and rear parking sensors and a reversing camera.

Standard too is keyless entry, push-button starting, side steps, leather upholstery plus a

leather-trimmed steering wheel (which also has height and reach adjustment), an eight-way electrically-adjustable driver's seat and power-operated lumbar support adjustment. Further features are an automatically-dimming rear view mirror and automatic headlamp levelling.





Helping the driver and passengers enjoy their travels are dual-zone climate control, heated front seats, a nine-inch touch screen with DAB (plus a CD player), a 4.2 inch multi-information display, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, also front and rear electrically-operated windows, front and rear USB ports and a 12 volt power outlet.

There is under-seat base storage, map pockets built into the backs of the front seats, and the rear seat bases fold on a 60/40 basis. The rear seats can be folded flat too.

The vehicle also comes with a raft of up to the minute security systems.

However, this special STEEL Edition has many unique additional touches, including:

Exclusive Steel Grey Mica paintwork, electric folding door mirrors, a bespoke tailgate assist/damper set-up, and a ‘wheel arch fender flare kit’ in Dark Grey. Finished in the same colour are the rear arch extensions, roof rails and ‘Isuzu’ emblem on the front grille.

The following features all incorporate the special ‘STEEL’ moniker:

Embossed head restraints, bodywork side graphics, LED scuff plates, ‘STEEL’ illuminated puddle lamps, tailgate badge and luxury carpet mat set.



As with all the D-Max models, the V-Cross STEEL is deliberately based on a commercial vehicle chassis, thus retaining Isuzu’s renowned rugged features and inherent toughness. The vehicle has a 1-tonne payload and 3.5 tonnes towing capacity, a trailer sway control

system, ‘shift-on-the-fly’ four wheel drive and a rear differential lock (plus a harness protector for the diff lock), traction control, Hill Start Assist and Descent Control. Notably too, it can wade through water up to 800 mm (31.5 inches) deep – useful for watery on and off-road difficult conditions.

All the latest generation D-Max models – including the STEEL Edition of course – provide peace of mind in terms of driver and passenger safety, covered by the achievement of a maximum five-star rating in the challenging new Euro NCAP assessment. The D-Max is said to be the first pick-up in the UK to feature class-leading ‘Advanced Driver Assist Systems’ (ADAS) as standard across the line-up.

‘E-Call’ is found on all D-Max models, and operates without a connected phone, to send an emergency SOS call in the event of airbag deployment, or by pushing the SOS button on the overhead console. A ‘Multi-Collision Brake’ system applies the brakes automatically if the airbags have been activated.

Among the many other safety-related systems on our test vehicle were multiple airbags, Autonomous Emergency Braking, Forward Collision Warning, Traffic Sign Recognition, a lane departure warning/prevention system, ‘Lane Keep Assist’ (on autos only), Emergency Lane Keeping, Rear Cross Traffic Alert and ‘Automatic Transmission Misapplication Mitigation’ (on autos only), plus a blind spot monitor system.

The STEEL Edition is offered in two versions; with a six speed manual gearbox, and costing £38,495 or with a six speed automatic transmission, and priced at £39,995. These are ‘Commercial Vehicle On The Road’ figures. In other words they exclude VAT, which needs to be added unless, depending on individual circumstances, the buyer is eligible to reclaim the VAT (please also see my note at the end of this feature, about current double cab pickup legislation/taxation).

Our V-Cross STEEL Edition test car

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As with all the models in the D-Max line-up, the STEEL Edition is propelled by a 1.9 litre four cylinder turbo diesel engine, producing 164 PS, plus 360 Nm (265 lb.ft) of torque (between 2,000 and 2,500 rpm). It drives all four wheels via a six speed transmission – automatic on our test vehicle, although, alternatively, a manual gearbox is available too.

For the New Look models, like our test vehicle, fitted with Isuzu's six speed automatic transmission, the ratio changes are said to be 25 per cent faster than in previous generation D-Max vehicles, thus providing smoother progress.



To help save fuel and to reduce emissions, a Stop and Start system automatically cuts the engine when the vehicle is stationary in traffic, restarting it when moving off again.

Earlier D-Max models didn't require AdBlue additive, but for the New Look models, in order to achieve the latest Euro 6D emissions standard, a Selective Catalytic Reduction (NCR) system is employed, meaning that AdBlue is needed… (and the reservoir must be kept topped up).

The vehicle has standard-fit speed-sensitive power steering, intentionally lighter in operation at low speeds, helping manoeuvres, and heavier at high speeds for increased stability and controllability. There's a gradual transition between the lighter and heavier modes. The system is designed to transmit lower levels of impact through the steering wheel from road surface imperfections.

Head and leg room is impressive for front and rear seat occupants. Notably, the New Look D-Max models have a wheelbase 30 mm (1.18 in) longer than the previous (pre-2021) generation vehicles, allowing a more spacious passenger compartment. In addition, to further improve comfort, shoulder room has increased by 20 mm (0.79 in), 'hip' points are higher and the seat backs now recline further (24 degrees). The 'B' posts have been moved forwards by 25 mm (an inch or so), thus increasing the rear door aperture widths and allowing easier access.

All the latest D-Max models feature an integrated step built into the rear bumper, making it easier to reach the load compartment. The reversing camera is built into the tailgate handle, with its elevated position providing a large field of vision.



Strong chassis and drivetrain

A separate ladder type chassis frame is still used on the current D-Max models, and has been strengthened, providing greater rigidity than previous generations. This is thanks to an additional cross-member and larger chassis rails, which are up to 34% wider and 14% higher in sections. These upgrades have also improved side impact safety.

Performance levels are impressive too. The 1.9 litre four cylinder turbo diesel motor is powerful (164 PS), but crucially it also delivers torque in quantity, and from low engine speeds. It produces its maximum of 360 Nm (256 lb.ft) at between 2,000 and 2,500 rpm, and this strong performance from low engine speeds is useful at all times, especially when carrying or towing heavy loads (including in slippery conditions)…

For the record, our test vehicle has a claimed top speed of 112 mph, while the zero to 62 mph acceleration time, in our case with the six speed auto gearbox, is 13.0 seconds (compared with 12.7 seconds if the six speed manual transmission is specified).

The standard-fit rear differential lock is brought into play by pushing a button, and is said to be more effective in providing traction than a Limited Slip Differential (LSD). It can only be engaged when '4L' (low ratio) drive mode is engaged and the vehicle speed is below 5 mph, disengaging automatically when the vehicle speed reaches 19 mph.

For off-road use the Isuzu's underbody components are protected by a 1.6 mm thick skid plate at the front of the vehicle, a 1.0 mm steel sump guard (also protecting the transmission and transfer gearbox case) and a 5 mm reinforced resin underbody air deflector.

The four wheel drive system incorporates three drive modes, each engaged by using a rotary control, located beneath the central touchscreen and within easy reach of the driver. I did not take our STEEL Edition test vehicle off-roading, however I did select each of the three modes, and the control system is easy, rapid and logical to operate. (Please also see the 'Brief off-road foray' section later in this feature, about my recent short drive off-road in a mechanically similar V-Cross).

'2H' delivers drive to the rear wheels only, in a high gear ratio, and is used for on-road motoring, and is intended to provide optimum fuel economy.

'4H' sends drive to all four wheels, also in a high gear ratio, and helps progress on slippery surfaces such as grass or mud.

'4L' powers all four wheels using a low gear ratio, for additional traction when driving in extreme off-road terrain.

'Shift-on-the-fly' transfer between these three modes is now much faster, thanks to a new actuator.

All four wheel drive D-Max variants have a built-in trailer sway control system that uses sensors to detect the onset of ‘trailer swing’, reducing vehicle speed if it identifies swaying.

Hill Start Assist and Hill Descent Control are standard-fit too, helping the driver to negotiate hills smoothly and safely.

For the New Look D-Max models the front suspension has been revised (with high-mounted upper control arms), to reduce body roll and vibration, and to increase tyre contact with the ground.

The rear suspension has been improved too, with increased articulation and revised shock absorber/damper mountings.

The chassis cab mounts have been redesigned to minimise levels of Noise, Vibration and Harshness (NVH) entering the passenger compartment.

A week with the STEEL Edition



During my time with this special D-Max, many observers commented about the striking looks of the vehicle, and they also noted – favourably – the high standard of fit and finish, including the impeccable paintwork.

On our example, the pick-up load compartment was protected by an extra-cost Alpha SC-Z Sport Lid, useful for keeping dry, out of sunlight and out of sight, items being carried.



The pick-up bed area is of course smaller with a double cab than a normal pick-up, but still very roomy. Among the notable good points in this area on our test vehicle, were a tailgate damper, also the step built into the rear bumper, for easier access to the load compartment (this step is a feature of all the D-Max models).



I ventured underneath the Isuzu and took a good look at the chassis/underbody, and when viewed from underneath the vehicle’s inherent structural strength, by design, is evident. The underbody protectors, previously mentioned, are welcome too for off-road use, as is the additional rear differential lock harness protector.



Having been impressed by the DL40's interior in April this year, it was no surprise to me that the passenger compartment of our V-Cross STEEL edition test car was again welcoming and spacious, but also even better-appointed. The leather-upholstered seats, high quality 'soft furnishings' generally, plus careful attention to fit, finish and detail (complete with the 'STEEL' logos already mentioned), provided an upmarket feel more akin to that of a luxury saloon than a pick-up. I feel that this will appeal to the most discerning buyers seeking a plush interior within a vehicle that still has a huge capacity for hard work.

The interior was comfortable as well as looking good, for travellers in the front and rear (with excellent head and leg room throughout), and with accommodation for up to five adults within its ‘double cab’ construction.


STEELS



It’s always good to see an abundance of stowage spaces, and in this respect too this V-Cross didn’t disappoint, although during my test, and especially with a full complement of passengers aboard we found that a few larger compartments within the vehicle would have been welcome. All the same it features twin gloveboxes (one of which is lockable) ahead of the front seat passenger, plus centre console storage compartments, a small lidded box on top of the facia, usefully deep door bins including bottle holders, and a sunglasses holder built into the overhead console.

The many cupholders (including two built into the rear seat’s centre armrest) were useful too.

A further handy touch was the provision of a folding coat hook mounted on the rear of the front passenger seat, which, like the driver’s seat, features an elasticated pocket located on the rear face of the backrest.

The transmission controls are easy to use, although I advise that careful study of the vehicle’s comprehensive handbook is worthwhile to help familiarise yourself with the various functions (as with the many other standard-fit systems around the vehicle).

The colour touch screen gives much driver information, and through this the audio system can be controlled. Bluetooth and DAB radio is standard-fit on all D-Max versions, and the number of audio speakers increases in line with the model specification (two in the Utility, four in the DL20, six in the DL40 and eight in the V-Cross).

Interestingly, a CD player is found in all versions *except* the DL40. I’m told that the reason for this is that the Utility/CD20 models have the CD player as part of Isuzu’s lower-spec. radio system, and the DL40 is the first version in the line-up hierarchy to have an infotainment system, including Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

One of the main reasons why the V-Cross, like our test car, comes with a CD player in the glovebox is that it also serves as a DVD player which plays on the infotainment system (and is one of the benefits of the range-topping V-Cross model).

The rich, clear sound quality from the system in our STEEL Edition was excellent, and personally I was delighted that a CD player was incorporated, making it very easy to play my choice of music.

The V-Cross (also the DL20 and DL40) has two USB ports; one in the front and one in the rear, whereas the lower spec. Utility model has a single USB port in the front.

Like the DL40, the V-Cross features a dual zone air conditioning system, enabling the driver and front seat passenger to adjust the settings to suit their individual requirements. There's an additional separate control panel for rear seat passengers in these models. All good news!

Helping to keep the vehicle in its rightful hands, standard-fit security systems include an alarm with deadlock, and an insurance-approved immobiliser.

On the road

As mentioned, during my week with the V-Cross STEEL Edition I used it only on paved roads, in which role it was a willing performer. The torquey 1.9 litre turbo diesel engine pulled strongly from low engine speeds, and the vehicle cruised quietly and easily on long trips. At 70 mph on motorways the tachometer indicated just under 2,000 rpm, and at 60 mph, the needle showed approximately 1,600 rpm.

The six speed automatic transmission on our test car operated seamlessly, with smooth, rapid ratio changes both up and down through the gearbox. Manual control was easy to activate too, when required.

Under hard acceleration, and when hill-climbing, the engine was audible but not noisy. Travelling was pleasantly quiet in terms of wind and road noise too.

I found the power steering effective and perfectly-weighted, with minimal assistance at higher speeds but with more help provided during low speed manoeuvres.

Our V-Cross comfortably dealt with uneven road surfaces. The substantial, large diameter wheels and tyres simply shrugged off potholes, also tarmac dips and ridges that often adversely affect the ride quality in smaller vehicles. Of course the suspension is ‘heavy duty’ as the vehicle has to be capable of carrying and towing heavy loads, but even with just me on board and an empty load compartment, the vehicle provided a more compliant ride quality than imagined. When loaded more heavily, the V-Cross was smoother still over bumpy sections of road.

During my time with the Isuzu I completed a one day round trip of about 250 miles with a total of five adult passengers on board, and all commented favourably about the comfort of the seats and the Isuzu’s ride quality.

On another occasion during my week-long test I was required to shift a large quantity of logs, locally. I first covered the load compartment with tarpaulins, ‘just in case’ to protect the surface of the load bed – although on our test vehicle this was lined with a very tough-looking protective covering anyway.

I was delighted to find that my large load of logs was easily loaded/unloaded with the tailgate down, and all the wood was transported in one go. The load was quite heavy (although nowhere near the truck’s payload capacity of one tonne) but the vehicle still performed very willingly, as if unladen.



Handling and roadholding characteristics were more positive than might be imagined for a tall, large vehicle – in fact I found it easy to control and enjoyable to drive on winding roads. The high driving position also provides a good view of the road ahead.

At all speeds the brakes were reassuring and progressive in use, and I liked the ‘traditional’ mechanical handbrake lever; the parking brake worked very well on various test slopes.

Of course by its very nature this Isuzu is a large vehicle, so, as with any sizeable pick-up, it can take up much of the available width in narrow lanes. In addition, finding a parking space large enough to accommodate the vehicle can be challenging. However, I found it

easy to manoeuvre, helped greatly by the generous door-mounted rear view mirrors and the reversing camera (which I feel is essential as otherwise rearward visibility is restricted by the high rear quarters). The compact (for a large vehicle) turning circle of 12.5 metres or 41 feet, kerb-to-kerb was also a boon in tight/slow situations, as was the assistance provided by the excellent power steering system.

I am a big fan of the instrument panel on this V-Cross (and the DL40 tested previously). Notably, I liked the unmistakable clarity of all the readouts, the fact that the vehicle's speed is shown by means of a conventional speedometer needle *as well as* a large digital display, and in addition the speedo face is marked in 10 mph increments, which I always find helpful.

Night-time journeys were enjoyable, with clear, well-lit instrumentation, and with effective headlamps on both dipped and main beams, giving good reach and spread – and without dazzling oncoming drivers.

I liked the way that the heating/ventilation settings can be controlled independently of the central touch screen, via a series of 'buttons' beneath the screen; far safer this way.

The air conditioning/ventilation system worked very well and kept the interior cool during some very hot days experienced during my week-long test.

The windscreen wipers and washers were very effective too, with the screenwash liquid delivered to the screen via the wiper arms, thus providing first rate cleaning power with minimal fluid use.

The vehicle's spacious load compartment was very easily accessed, initially by lifting the cover/'lid' – an extra cost option on our vehicle.

Items could then be loaded into or out of the back of the vehicle, over the tailgate and with the bumper-mounted integral rear step aiding access.

For loading and unloading large or heavy items, the vehicle's lower main tailgate was easily lowered; opening/closing operations were 'damped' on our test V-Cross (bear in mind that of course the tailgate, when open, covers the bumper-mounted step).

The official 'Combined' fuel consumption figure for our V-Cross STEEL Edition test vehicle is 30.7 miles per gallon, but in mixed motoring, including local trips and long distances, the on-board computer recorded an overall average of 36.7 mpg over 350 miles… Excellent for a vehicle of this size (and, driving normally, beating the 'official' Combined figure by exactly six miles per gallon, equating to almost 20 per cent!). Importantly, with a large fuel tank this translates into a real-life potential range of comfortably more than 600 miles…



Brief off-road foray

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As mentioned, my driving of the test vehicle was carried out entirely on tarmac roads. However, by a strange chance coincidence, the day before the V-Cross STEEL Edition arrived, I had the opportunity to briefly drive a V-Cross (mechanically identical) on a short but challenging off-road route. This included steep gradients up and down, tall 'humps' and deep gulleys, and the vehicle acquitted itself well.

I was particularly impressed by the compact turning circle, enabling obstructions such as trees to be negotiated (avoided!) very easily, and the long-travel suspension/axle articulation, helping deal with the ridiculously steep 'hills and valleys' encountered.

All the while, and equally impressively, with 'low ratio' four wheel drive mode engaged, the engine pulled strongly and smoothly, and the automatic transmission did its job imperceptibly, ensuring good, steady, safe progress and keeping the vehicle moving, regardless of the terrain.

Double Cab Pick-ups and legislation…

All versions of the New Look D-Max (including extended and double cab variants) weigh less than 2,040 kg (4,497 lb), and thus are subject to normal passenger car speed limits. The goods vehicle limits applicable to heavier pick-ups mean a speed limit reduction of 10 mph on single and dual carriageways.

VITAL NOTE: The vehicle prices quoted in this feature exclude VAT. The taxation situation for double cab pick-ups (DCPUs) has been the subject of much debate and was due to change. However, in a reversal from 19th February 2024 HMRC stated that double cab pick-ups with a payload of more than one tonne will now continue to be treated as goods vehicles rather than cars. They said, "This will ensure a continued generous and consistent treatment of DCPUs for capital allowances, benefit in kind, and VAT purposes, maintaining simplicity in the tax system."

(Note that double cab pick-ups with a payload of less than one tonne are treated as cars).

For more information, please consult your Isuzu dealer and go to this link (below), bearing in mind that this was published under the previous government:
https://www.gov.uk/government/news/update-on-hmrc-double-cab-pick-up-guidance

VERDICT

A terrific vehicle! It's designed for heavy duty work in terms of load carrying and towing, but cleverly incorporates a spacious, luxuriously-trimmed and comfortable five-seat interior. It's equally at home doing leisure pursuit duties as working in a field (for example).

For a large pick-up our road test STEEL Edition also achieved excellent fuel consumption figures during my week with it.

Yes, for many reasons, I loved it.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Isuzu D-Max DL40 Double Cab Auto pick-up



Total On The Road ‘Commercial Vehicle’ price before extras: £39,995. This figure includes: Delivery and number plates, plus DVLA first registration fee of £55 (VAT exempt), and first year’s road tax of £320 (VAT exempt).

Note 1: The vehicle price excludes VAT, where applicable. Please also see main text for latest government information on taxation on double cab pick-ups, at April 2024).

Note 2: Our test V-Cross STEEL Edition was equipped with a selection of very useful extra-cost accessories, including the following (prices quoted exclude VAT and fitting):

Lazer Lights (7 in Sentinel Elite x2)	£624.00
Sportguard Under-Rail Liner	£365.00

Alpha SC-Z Sport Lid (covering load bed) £2,465.00

Bed Lights £217.50

Engine: Four cylinder, turbodiesel 1.9 litre (1898cc), Euro 6d compliant.

Power: 164 PS @ 3,600 rpm.

Torque: 360 Nm (266 lb.ft) @ 2,000 to 2,500 rpm.

Transmission: Six speed automatic; all wheel drive .

Performance:

0 – 62 mph: 13.0 seconds

Top speed: 112 mph.

Fuel consumption (‘Official’ figures):

WLTP figure: Combined, 30.7 mpg).

Actual overall figure achieved during our Wheels-Alive road test: 36.7 mpg over 350 miles.

Fuel tank capacity: 16.7 Imperial gallons

Projected mileage range on a full tank at our overall consumption figure: 610+ miles

CO2 Emissions, WLTP: 241 g/km.

Warranty: 125,000 miles/five years

Annual road tax: £320

Dimensions:

Length: 5,270 mm (17.29 ft)

Width: 1,870 mm (6.14 ft)

Height: 1,790 mm (5.87 ft)

Wheelbase: 3,125 mm (10.25 ft)

Ground clearance (rear axle): 240 mm (9.45 in)

Kerb weight: 2,010 kg (4,431 lb)

Wheels and Tyres: 18 x 7.5J wheels, shod with 265/60R18 tyres

Load bed dimensions:

Length: 1,495mm (58.86in)

Width: 1,530mm (60.23 in)

Depth: 490mm (19.29in)

Payload: 1,120 kg (2,469 lb)

Towing capacity: 3.5 tonnes