



If you're thinking 'who's the new kid on the block?', think again. You're looking at Isuzu's version of the Rodeo, which has been sold globally since 2002 with great success. At first, the testers didn't know what to make of the 'new kid' and therefore tended to steer away from it to the better known makes like the Toyota and Nissan. Not many people actually realised that Isuzu had been making diesel engines for over 70 years and has made over 20 million diesel engines in this time.

After the drivers got to spend some time behind the wheel, it was hard to pry them out of the

Dmax and into another vehicle. As if it were contagious, the testing crew really took a liking to the ute. We had a case of 'Dmax fever' on our hands.

And with good reason too! The Dmax was the little ute that could. Throw an application at it, from nasty dirt roads to real tough low-range action, and the Dmax would handle it. To sweeten an already sweet deal, the Dmax boasted the best fuel economy of all the vehicles on the test. By the end of the test, the challenge became trying to get the Dmax to be less efficient than 9.5L per 100km. Do you think we could do that? We tried but failed.



On tracks like this dried-up creek bed, high clearance and a well-protected underbody give you the confidence you need

# ISUZU DMAX LS-M



This is one of the best oil-burners on the market

## OFF-ROAD

Off-road, the Dmax really shines on the tougher tracks with its awesome first gear low-range gear ratio of 40.017:1, which lets this 4WD crawl its way out of trouble. Driving down some of the steepest hills, the brakes were rarely used as the low gear ratios and engine braking controlled the ute and gave you real confidence in the vehicle.

To put that in perspective, some of these hills were steep enough that ABS brakes were heated up that much they were failing or becoming 'squishy' in other vehicles like the Navara and BT-50. The Dmax was the vehicle you wanted to be in when the going got tough, when you didn't feel like explaining why you broke something.

The five-speed manual gearbox has an awkward shift and position that really makes you feel like you're driving an old farm truck. As agricultural as it was, it wasn't surprising that Roothy really took a liking to this gearbox.

The dimensions of the Dmax are almost identical to the Colorado, so approach, departure and ramp-over angles are some of the best in the business. Not to mention the clearance and underbody protection make you feel like you can drive just about anywhere and not rip the transfer case or sump out on a well-placed rock. The Dmax is just

like the Colorado but slightly better.

We're seeing push-button electronic 4WD activation these days in more and more new 4WDs on the market. While they're easy enough to activate by pushing a button (like the Dmax), turning a lever or pushing an electric stubby lever, we are not convinced they will last the test of time and not become faulty. And if they do decide to give up the ghost when you're out in the bush, how do you fix them on the side of the track?

## THE VERDICT

The Dmax is a serious 4WD, a great touring vehicle and a real work-horse. It does everything a dual-cab ute is supposed to do, and the best news is that it does it well. It's a deserved winner of our 2009 4WDer's Ute of the Year award, as our testing crew all agreed this ute outperformed the other contenders.

Besides its off-road ability and great fuel efficiency, the thing that most people really liked about the Dmax was the price tag. At well under \$40K, it lets you save a bucket of cash or leaves you with some spare change to build it up with some aftermarket gear to make it a really capable vehicle.

It's not hard to imagine this vehicle will be a hit in the touring market once people become comfortable with the Isuzu name.

