



Townsville has gained a Mahindra franchise

Indian brand hits NQ

THE Indian badge Mahindra is the latest to join the growing number of brands on North Queensland floors, with Autowerx becoming the local dealer.

“First impressions have been very positive,” dealership spokesman Paul Ransom says.

“We showed the vehicles for the first time at the NQ Field Days and enquiry and interest was substantial.”

Ransom says the Mahindra pricing was a factor in Autowerx taking on the franchise, but was not the only reason.

“We took Mahindra on firstly because of the competitive pricing for a very sturdy 4x4 but after meetings with TMI Pacific — who are part of the Tynan group of companies and the National distributor for Mahindra — we were impressed by the back up for service and spare parts,” he says.

“This means that we as a local company can retail these vehicles with the backing of an extremely professional network.

“With the feedback that I have received from customers who have test driven these PikUps the future of Autowerx and Mahindra in Townsville is looking very good.”

Ransom says the vehicles are priced to suit a wide customer base, and “with a three-year warranty and 12 months roadside assist, our customers will have peace of mind with full factory back up”.

“Mahindra has filled a large gap in the market by supplying 4x2 & 4x4 dualcabs and single cabs for under \$30,000 and we as a company based in NQ can see the potential for families, tradesmen, farmers and companies.”



Fit for the job

Mahindra has entered the NQ market with a capable, well-priced workhorse

ALMOST a year has passed since Indian car maker Mahindra launched the Pik-Up in Australia as their spearhead back into our market after an abysmal first flirtation in 1990.

The general feeling last year was that this time the jig was up for Korea, which would be forced to step aside for Mahindra to become importer of the cheapest 4x4s and SUVs.

But today Mahindra still remains largely unknown in Australia, and their Scorpion SUV is yet to reach our shores. However they can claim to produce the cheapest ute available here - the Pik-Up.

VARIANTS AND DRIVETRAINS

The Pik-Up is available in two single cab and two dual cab variants, one of which was our test car. All models are powered by a four cylinder 2.5-litre turbo-diesel engine that develops what on paper seems to be a minuscule 79kW at 3800rpm but an adequate 247Nm of torque at 1800-2200rpm, which gets to the wheels via a five-speed manual transmission.

For offroad versions, there is an automatic locking system for the front hubs, a genuine dual range transfer car, with part-time four-wheel drive and the ability to switch to high-four 'on the fly'.

WORK CAPACITY

With a one tonne payload for the 1489 x 1520 x 550 cargo box and a 2.5 tonne towing capacity, the Pik-Up competes well with more expensive vehicles in its class.

EXTERIOR

For a car this size - at over five metres long and nearly two metres high and wide - it has a distinct lack of gentle angles, making look even bigger than it is (if that's at all possible) and giving

it a harsh, boxy, somewhat ungainly appearance. But the cargo tray is large and deep, and promises to cope with large amounts of either weekday tools or weekend toys.

INTERIOR

The interior styling is basic and mostly dark greys, with the main styling feature two large almond-eye shaped vents that might have fallen off an alien costume in the Bollywood wardrobe department. There's no real sense of style, and it's no surprise they left interior shots out of the brochure.

But the front seats are supportive and there's sufficient room in the back for two medium-sized adults to sit comfortably without fear of giving the driver or passenger an impromptu Swedish massage.

There's also quite a bit of storage space scattered around - cupholders, door

bins and the like - although the centre arrangement doesn't allow for a lidded bin that can become an armrest.

But the main lack is that the steering is tilt-change only, which made finding the right driving position difficult without the benefit of reach adjustment on the column.

EQUIPMENT

The standard list includes all the usual

powered bits, plus alarm, immobiliser, foglights, delayed shut-off headlights and side steps.

The audio system is CD/MP3 compatible with USB and SD card ports and an ipod jack. It also comes with a remote control which may initially satisfy a desire for novelty in an otherwise plain vehicle, but will probably soon get lost and/or become the catalyst of endless bickering among the kids.

TEST DRIVE

Mahindra Pik-Up

by KARLA PINCOTT, ROD HALLIGAN
and JONAH WIGLEY

LIVING WITH IT

Pincott says

In urban areas, the Mahindra's size turns you into a far more careful driver. You become very aware of how close you are to walls, bollards and other cars when parking or in multiple lanes.

But this size also makes for a lot of usable interior room, and a startlingly high roof that the agents pointed out would easily accommodate an Akubra-hatted head. And that kind of feature will probably be one of the main keys to Mahindra sales here. Sure, you can use it around town for leisure or household chores. But it's natural habitat is the worksite and the farm.

The load area is massive, which will be attractive to anybody who has to lug a large amount of tools or cargo - and at the same time you could easily picture a jetski, motocrosser or family of bicycles in there.

The fit-out is utilitarian, and there's no point in pretending that the surfaces are prestige materials. But it's well equipped, and touches like the USB interface and remote control are not only novel but can add to the safety factor by keeping the driver's hands on the wheel when the family is on board.

The diesel engine sounds very agricultural, especially at idle, but there was no lack of effort to push the ute around - albeit we didn't get the chance to load it up. The shift action on the long throw gear lever is likewise

unsophisticated. But at the end of the day, this is a light commercial vehicle rather than a passenger car. And one that is priced and equipped to attract the market.

VERDICT: 7.4/10

Wigley says



The Pik-Up has good visibility for its size and feels like a substantial car for the money. There are no noticeable rattles but road noise is a little loud coming in through the cabin floor from the tyres. The side mirrors also catch the wind and on the freeway, it becomes difficult to hold a conversation without repeating yourself.

The engine won't get you around at speed but it will do the job sufficiently without you having to want for too much more.

Although the gear changes were generally easy and smooth, we did have a few crunches dropping down to third. The long gear stick gave the car a rural quality – like driving the tractor at grandads farm – but in a good way.

Steering was responsive and true but on the odd occasion, the front wheels yelped on take off from an incline, and tended to bleat if cornering too fast.

Generally though, the drive was a pleasant surprise – smooth, responsive and comfortable.

The Pik-Up doesn't pin its hopes of success on styling. But the positive you take from that is a quiet confidence that the important stuff – the engine, the ride

and handling, the payload and towing capability – that really should matter in a car like this, is a bargain for the outlay.

For a basic workhorse utility, it competes respectably with other vehicles in its

class and it's cheap. It doesn't need to be attractive but it certainly wouldn't hurt.

VERDICT: 6.9/10

Halligan says

It was hard to miss the Mahindra's bulk in the car park. My initial impression – utilitarian and spacious. It reminded me of a G-Class Benz from many years ago, before they became trendy and moved upmarket. Navigating my way out of the car park, which admittedly is more of a rabbit warren than most, I thought I was going to take out a few fire sprinklers. This thing is tall.

I had to take two bites at the exit ramp, proving that the steering lock is not overly generous but then again I suspect no worse than any of its competitors.

I've often wondered why the hell anyone would want to drive a 4wd in the city – or the burbs for that matter. A run in the high and wide Mahindra revealed one of the attractions is that you can look down at others, giving you a wonderful – but false – sense of security.

The diesel accelerates well, torque seems good and it tracks well. It's a 4 door, 4WD tradies' ute and I'm driving it the same way I drive everything else, as if it's a sports car. It's coping OK.

Accelerating showed it's amazing what you can get out of 79kw. The ute feels fine and if my mind starts to wander I have to make a concerted effort to keep my speed down.

There's not a great deal of wind rush even with the window down, but quite a bit coming from the heating system. But then again, this thing is basically a truck.

It's comfortable enough, and the seats didn't give me a hard time although – again trucklike – it has me sitting much more upright than I like to be.

My wife likes 4WDs because she feels safe in them. I feel the opposite. More room to hit your head with more time for your head to accelerate before it touches anything – and less effort in design from the engineers.

Overall, the Pik-Up is competent, nothing bad to report except a little understeer on fast curves and the tail is a little prone to move out when taking a tight intersection turn too quickly. But this was more to do with my driving outside of the normal envelope of the vehicle.

It fits its purpose well, but that purpose is specific. It's a tradies' work vehicle that can be used on occasions to transport the family around locally.

I wouldn't buy one however for the same reason I wouldn't buy a Hi-Lux, Navarra, Patrol, Landcruiser, I don't feel safe in them and I worry about how much damage they can inflict on others.

But if you are in the market for a workhorse I would definitely put it on your research list.

VERDICT: 7.1/10



