

QUICK FACTS

Price Rs 7.09 lakh
(ex-showroom, Mumbai)
On sale Now



Space behind seats gets padded 'backrest'.



Wheel arches intrude in this version.



Good fit and finish; not a lot of frills though.

CAB FORWARD

Isuzu says India will be the world's biggest pick-up market a decade from now, and wants to get in on the action early with the D-Max.

FIRST VERDICT

Handsome, well-built load-lugger, but not quite a lifestyle vehicle.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

SO GOOD

- Quality, fit and finish
- Strong, efficient engine

NO GOOD

- Needs a CV driver's license
- No 4x4 option

THE D-MAX IS far from the first pick-up in India, but it is the first one from an international manufacturer. Isuzu believes pick-ups will soon take off in a big way here and wants to establish itself early with buyers.

A workhorse 'flat deck' model with zero frills is also available, but let's focus instead on the top-end 'arched deck' - which is aimed at the lifestyle buyer as well.

There's garnish like a chrome grille, wing mirrors and door handles; body-coloured bumpers; and a deck integrated with the cab. It's got the classic pick-up proportions, but it's not as butch as, say, a Tata Xenon. We also wish it

had the option of alloy wheels or at least full wheel covers; hub caps on steel wheels are what you get.

The arched deck version is available only as a 'space cab', which means while there are two doors and two seats, there is a generous area behind them for stuff you don't want to leave in the exposed cargo deck. It's too small for seats, but the thin cushioning on the back wall suggests Isuzu knows people will sit here anyway, much like the middle front 'seat' in the Datsun Go.

The cabin doesn't have a lot of frills. The dash design is shared with the MU-7, but it's all black and grey plastic, rather than faux wood and silver trim. It has to be said, however, that the quality in this cabin is fantastic for the segment, with fit and finish that surpasses its local competition. The plastics feel hard-wearing, but not rough-edged.

This version gets power windows, central locking, steering rake adjust, air-conditioning and a day-night rear-view mirror. But there's no ABS or airbags, and no seat height adjustment either. However, the driving position is really good; not overly high up, but enough to see where the bonnet ends. The fabric seats are a touch firm, but supportive

and comfy on a long drive.

Isuzu is synonymous with diesel engines in India, and the D-Max's 2.5-litre motor has a lot of punch. Its 134bhp and 29.97kgm feel more than sufficient to haul a potential 2,850kg, should you load it up to its limit. More in tune with Indian sensibilities, though, the D-Max claims to do over 1,000km on a single, 76-litre tank of diesel.

The engine roars to life, is fairly audible at idle, but smoothens out in the mid range. The lag lasts until about 2,000rpm and then the boost comes in quite cleanly. However, in the interest of getting your cargo moving easily, first and second gears are frustratingly short. In higher gears, with an empty deck, overtaking is pretty effortless. But you do need to slip the clutch a bit when setting off, or else it is quite easy to stall.

Like all load-luggers, the D-Max has leaf-spring rear suspension, and when the deck is empty, the rear skips over every single bump. If the road is smooth, it does just fine, and high-speed stability in such conditions is good too. It doesn't roll as much as the MU-7 because of its lower centre of gravity, but of course, it's a UV, not a sports car.

Isuzu wants to tackle both the entry-level and lifestyle ends of the pick-up market. But when it comes to the latter, it hasn't quite hit the mark. There's no 4x4 option, and the bouncy ride won't go down well with private owners. Cabin quality's good, but some colour and creature comforts wouldn't go amiss. The biggest problem, by far, is that the D-Max must be registered as a commercial vehicle, and thus needs a CV license to drive. It's a smart-looking truck with a solid engine and great build quality, and it's bound to handle utility duties well too. At Rs 7.09 lakh (ex-showroom, Mumbai) the arched cab also undercuts the Scorpio Getaway and Xenon XT. But while it might be great for commercial use, having to get a CV license just to drive one is a big deterrent for private buyers.

GAVIN D'SOUZA

ISUZU D-MAX ARCHED CAB

Price	Rs 7.09 lakh (ex-showroom, Mumbai)
L/W/H	5030/1720/1655mm
Wheelbase	3050mm
Engine	4 cyls, 2499cc, turbo-diesel
Power	134bhp at 3600rpm
Torque	29.97kgm at 1800-3200rpm
Gearbox	Five-speed manual