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## Isuzu D-Max Space Cab Arched Deck First Drive Review

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**The recently launched Isuzu D-Max pick-up truck is a revelation and holds a lot of promise for light commercial vehicle operators in the country. It's also on the wish list of many a private buyer!**

When I first heard that Isuzu is coming to India, that too to retail pick-up trucks, I was both happy and concerned. The reason for my happiness was simple – I like pick-up trucks and the convenience that they offer. On the other hand, my concern stemmed from two issues, the first being that lifestyle pick-up trucks is currently a very small segment and secondly there is a serious amount of red tape involved with getting a pick-up registered as a private vehicle. Having said that, I have always believed that pick-up trucks have a lot of potential in our land, considering the amount of estate owners and prosperous farmers out there and I was definitely interested in seeing how the Isuzu story would unfold.



While these are still the early chapters of the story, Isuzu seems to have made all the right moves so far. Taking it from the top, the company has laid the foundation stone for their factory which shows commitment to the Indian market, not to mention the amount of jobs it will create in the area. Meanwhile, in order to get the bean counters ticking, the company has also worked out a deal with Hindustan Motors to assemble CKD units. Isuzu has already opened 10 dealerships across the country and have a target to open 60 such outlets in the next year and a half. Another key factor is that Isuzu has managed to price the three pick-up trucks rather aggressively despite being superior products to their competition in just about every department. All of these indicate that Isuzu has done their homework well and are taking well thought out steps on building their brand in India. It is still an upward journey from here and a lot has to be achieved, but one this is certain, the product itself has all the makings of a winner.



The Isuzu D-Max is a handsome vehicle. It's got all the right design cues that one would associate with a nice lifestyle pick-up truck. The large clear lens headlights flank the large chrome grille to offer a rather butch looking front end. The contoured hood has a neatly integrated hood intake that also adds to the vehicle's presence. Viewed from the side, the pronounced wheel arches add a dash of dynamism and the proportions of the vehicle become immediately apparent as the neatly integrated rear deck comes into full view. Sitting nice and squat, the D-Max looks tough and set for some heavy lifting. While it comes on standard steel rims right now, there is no doubting the fact that some nice alloys would make a world of a difference in enhancing the D-Max's already good looks. Unfortunately alloys will have to wait for when this vehicle is available for private buyers for steel rims would be preferred by private buyers who will undoubtedly use this vehicle with more than a full load on board.





Being the top of the line variant, the Isuzu D-Max Space Cab arching deck comes with a foot and a half of space behind the front two seats making for a rather spacious cabin and living up to its name. The space behind the seats can be used for additional storage, however it is too narrow for seating. The eight way adjustable seats are nice and comfortable and finished in fabric and there is enough headroom even for tall drivers. In terms of equipment on offer, the D-Max comes with power steering that is adjustable for tilt, power windows and air conditioning. The dashboard is all plastic, but finely crafted and uncluttered. Overall the cabin is extremely car-like and you really can't find a reason to complain.



Powering the D-Max is a 2.5 litre four cylinder common rail direct injection diesel with a variable geometry turbocharger that pumps out 134hp @3600 rpm and makes 294Nm of torque between 1800-2400 rpm. Mated to a smooth five speed manual transmission, the D-Max returns an ARAI tested efficiency of 13.7 kmpl and is capable of touching `160km/h. Capable of carrying a 1.1 ton payload, the D-Max also comes fitted with a 76 litre fuel tank which allows you to travel almost 900 kilometers on a single tank which works as a big boon especially when you consider the benefits of not having to tank up regularly and thereby reduce vehicle down time resulting in faster turnaround times and hence more money for the owner.

Power up the Isuzu D-Max and those 134 horses are unleashed in a smooth linear fashion as the truck hustles its way up to three digit speeds. The ride quality is reasonably good for a pick up as the coil spring independent front suspension and 7 leaf heavy duty semi-elliptical leaf springs do their job. Having said that, the set-up is customized for a fully loaded vehicle and if this truck is ever to come for the private buyer Isuzu will have to give it a softer ride. The D-Max handles surprisingly well and despite its size, the truck manages to take corners without too much roll. Of course the anti-roll bars do their bit to aid handling and the bottom line is that you will walk away impressed.



What isn't so impressive is the lack of safety features on board the D-Max. It doesn't get ABS, EBD or airbags. I do understand that this was done to keep costs low and cater to the light commercial vehicle segment as most of the competition doesn't offer these features either, however when you are ushering in change, I honestly feel that Isuzu could have at least included 2 airbags and ABS as standard. Hopefully this will get corrected once these vehicles go into production in India. I also am keeping my fingers crossed on Isuzu offering a Crew Cab 4x4 version of the D-Max for private buyers sometime in the near future and I hope this dream turns into a reality for there are a lot of takers out there who would happily opt for such a vehicle.

Unfortunately, the D-Max is currently only available as a light commercial vehicle on yellow number plates, which also means that to operate it you would need an LCV license! For a vehicle that is easier to drive than many cars and MUVs on our roads, this is a bit of a shocker and our archaic rules really need to change. The company is looking into the matter and are hopeful that the 5-seater crew cab version should get the same treatment as the Tata Xenon –which can be registered on private plates. It is a little frustrating for those who want a D-Max today and the wait is going to take the better part of a year, however it might just be worth it.

#### **THE FLAT DECK**





Isuzu also offers the D-Max with a flat deck. Available in both a single cab and a space cab, the flatbed D-Max is a built-for-India product – in fact the flat deck is built in India by a vendor in Pune! Isuzu incorporated this design of a load bed based on extensive feedback from fleet owners and operators of light commercial vehicles. No doubt, this model is more stripped down than the high end version featured in the review. What remains the same is the engine and transmission, however the Flat Deck versions don't get chrome garnish, body colored bumpers, air conditioning or power windows.