

# Revving it up

The Isuzu D-Max V-Cross takes the pick-up truck format up a notch, with comfort, style and space

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Light pick-up trucks make for great commercial vehicles. You get a relatively comfy, SUV-like cabin for two or four people, and you can lug quite a lot of luggage around in it. As personal vehicles, however, the very idea of a pick-up truck comes across as too utilitarian, at least for Indian tastes. Then, there's the fact that you can get almost as much utility out of an SUV, but with better comfort and features. That hasn't stopped carmakers from trying to crack this niche, though. Tata has the Xenon XT, and Mahindra still sells the Scorpio Getaway. Japanese UV-maker Isuzu too kicked off its Indian innings in 2014 with the D-Max, and though it was very capable, it felt rudimentary and could only be registered as a commercial vehicle (CV). Now, there's an all-new, far more attractive D-Max, called the V-Cross, and you can buy and register it for your own personal recreational purposes. Here's what it's all about.

Under the skin, it's very similar to the Chevrolet Trailblazer SUV, and you'll notice some similarities, such as the doors and windows, which are virtually identical. It has incredible road presence, with its tall bonnet, huge chrome grille, meaty front bumper and massively-flared wheel arches. Unlike the previous D-Max, this one has a distinct 'dual-cab' stance, which means more of the vehicle's length has gone to the passenger area than the storage bed at the back. Speaking of which, the bed has been nicely integrated; it's lined with a waterproof hard plastic layer, and there are four neat hooks to help you tie down your stuff. Finally, to make the V-Cross that little bit more enticing to private owners, it gets



shift-on-the-fly 4x4, which should acquit it well to rurally sited farmhouses or factories.

If you've ever been inside a Trailblazer, the first thing that you'll notice when you step into the V-Cross is the familiar dashboard. In fact, the whole interior looks like a slightly toned-down version of the big Chevy's. Fit and finish is really impressive, and is easily on par with the Rs. 20 lakh-plus SUVs; though the plastics aren't the plushiest. The digital info display in the instrument console gives you a handy fuel/trip computer, and also tells which setting the 4x4 system is

in. There's also a slick seven-inch touchscreen with USB, aux and Bluetooth; it misses out on satellite navigation. What you'll sorely miss on the equipment list, however, are the rear parking sensors and a camera, because the V-Cross is a huge vehicle.

But it's nice to see that Isuzu has given the V-Cross ABS and dual airbags. The front seats are impressively large, comfortable and supportive. You get manual height adjustment for the driver's seat, and the welcoming driving position makes it easy to get used to this truck's massive dimensions quickly. Even the

rear bench is generously cushioned, supportive and comfortable, with more than enough legroom, headroom and width. There's even a fold-down centre armrest. The seat backs, however, are a bit upright and you also sit in a slightly knees-up position.

The V-Cross is powered by the same 2.5-litre diesel engine as the previous D-Max, and produces 136hp and 320Nm. It wakes up with a loud growl, but then settles down into a refined idle and stays that way at low to medium revs. The clutch is relatively light, the motor is super

smooth off the line, and even the transition between gears happens without a hiccup in power, all of which makes this enormous pick-up truck quite friendly to drive in town.

What takes away from this city-friendly experience, though, is the steering. It's heavy at low speeds, which only magnifies the vehicle's massive size when you're trying to park or manoeuvre through tight gaps. Also, it's also quite vague around the straight-ahead position.

Out on the highway, this 1.9-tonne truck will hold its line quite fervently and only feels a bit floaty at seriously high speeds. One more point of note — though the brakes feel strong enough in everyday use, step on them just a little harder, and the car feels more nervous than secure.

Around corners, there's loads of body roll, but do you really want to attack corners in a pick-up truck? No, what you want to do is go everywhere as the crow flies, and the big Isuzu truly makes you feel like you can. The V-Cross comes with road tyres as standard, but slap a set of off-road tyres on it, and the V-Cross would be truly unstoppable. At Rs. 12.91 lakh (ex-showroom, Mumbai), the new D-Max costs nearly twice as much as its predecessor.

But then, it's so much more car for your money. Where the old car was inexpensive than its rivals, this one is more expensive. In an already niche segment, a proposition like this had better be a strong one. What plays in the V-Cross's favour is that there's never been such a level of creature comforts or space in a pick-up sold in India before. If you are in the market for such a vehicle, it is certainly the best of its kind on sale here right now.