

DRIVEN

DRIVING MISS DAISY

THE NEW DAF LF IS EVERYTHING A TRUCK SHOULD BE AND MORE,
AS CHRIS MULLETT FOUND DURING A DAY'S DISTRIBUTION RUN AROUND SYDNEY

YOU know those days that start with a cold morning, you peer out in the dark ahead of the dawn and it's misty, bordering on raining and you know that driving around a major city is going to be fraught with idiots. The wet weather brings out the worst in driving ability, with hatchbacks swerving in and out of your lane and filling up your braking distance at the last minute.

That was pretty much the scenario recently when I headed out the door ready for an early morning start in the dark and a temperature indicator on the dash that showed a snowflake, suggesting that there could well be ice on some of the corners where the sun was simply not shining.



Despite my unending enthusiasm for this job of driving other people's brand new trucks and not having to load and unload (someone else has already done that), I have to say my spirits were lifted within minutes of being introduced to my steed for the day, a brand new 280 hp DAF LF. In all its orange glory, this was a 4x2 rigid with a 6,250 mm wheelbase and fitted with a 12-pallet curtainsider body.

The weighbridge ticket showed the gross weight of 14.64 tonnes was not too far off the maximum GVM of 18 tonnes, and with 6.10 tonnes over the steer and 8.54 tonnes over the drive everything was already nicely sorted and tied down. Thanks to the heated elements in the ISRI seat I warmed up almost faster than the 6.7-litre, six-cylinder Euro 5 emissions rated engine, and, with a highly efficient heater/demister system, the windscreen, side windows and mirrors cleared of mist and stayed that way throughout the day.

The cab for the New LF is actually shared with a Renault product, although the cabs for the CF and premium XF models are purely DAF by origin. It's called the New LF because of the cabin upgrades with the upgraded frontal styling and a more modern look. The chassis is also slightly different but apparently retains the same ease of fitment for bodybuilders. DAF has optimised placement of components such as air reservoirs and electronic brake control systems, now positioned on the inside of the chassis rails, creating more space on the outer side of the rails for toolboxes and spare wheel fitment.

The cab seat and its relationship to the dashboard controls, dials and switchgear is excellent, showing that this new cab transplant is not just cosmetic. In the small sleeper-cab unit I was driving there are three storage bins across the back of the cab, deeper on the two outer bins than the centre bin that copes with the engine tunnel. There are also two coat hooks, just above where the sleeper bunk mattress secures when it is folded upright, flush against the back wall.

Across the top of the windscreen are more storage bins, plus there's a dug out area in the centre of the dash to take clipboards or docket books to prevent them moving about. The steering wheel has audio and controls, buttons for cruise control and engine braking, meaning that everything can be controlled while your hands stay on the wheel.

The New LF comes in three GVM ratings of 12, 16 and 18 tonnes, all powered by the same capacity 6.7-litre engine, but in two ratings, 250 hp and 286 hp (184 kW and 210 kW), and with matching torque outputs of 950 Nm and 1,020 Nm, both rated from 1,200 rpm.

The 18-tonner, as you might imagine, takes the higher output engine, and, like its sibling, it achieves Euro 5 emissions matching through the use of SCR (Selective Catalytic Reduction) requiring a weekly top up of AdBlue/DEF. Matched to either engine is a choice of a ZF six-speed AS-Tronic AMT (Automated Manual Transmission) or a nine-speed manual, again by ZF.

If, like me, you are wondering why DAF Australia didn't take the opportunity to launch the New LF complete with Euro 6 emissions ratings (already available and in service in the UK and Europe and parts of Asia), you can pretty much blame the lack of interest in lower emissions and a greener environment demonstrated by our current government.



There is no date yet tabled for the introduction of Euro 6 legislation, and, until it does get gazetted, only a handful of truck makers will take the initiative into their own hands to introduce the lower emissions option. This is despite *PowerTorque's* testing that shows there are TCO savings to be made by reducing the use of AdBlue/DEF, in some cases by 50 percent.

So, with a full load on board, full fuel tanks and a clear day ahead of me, I headed out from Gilbert & Roach's Huntingwood, Sydney, service and sales centre towards the Blue Mountains.

There's a certain satisfaction of heading west as you watch all the morning commuters heading east on the other side of the median strip, and I soon became accustomed to the ride, handling and feel of this mid-range Dutchman.

Good is not a big enough word to describe how refined and lovely to drive this DAF has become. With really low interior cabin noise, little wind noise coming off the mirrors and a very comfortable ride, this really is a truck you'd be happy to spend your day or week in as you deliver goods around the state.

The road feel through the wheel keeps you connected to what's happening under the truck, but the steering is light and doesn't show any signs of shudder or kickback. Manoeuvrability is also excellent, with a steering wheel cut of 50 degrees on the 18-tonner and an even greater 53 degrees on the lighter GVM models that really give a tight turning circle.

There's little more to mention about the ZF-AS Tronic that hasn't already been clearly stated. This six-speed unit promotes quick and easy gearchanges, enabling the driver to maintain traffic flow with little effort. Switch on the exhaust brake switch, and downhill descents take the engine rpm upwards and assist in retardation.

With a turnaround destination of Springwood in the Blue Mountains, the descent back into Sydney was accomplished with the exhaust brake holding the descent speed at 60 km/h on the appropriate sections of the highway. Apart from very occasional service brake application it held the truck at a safe descent speed, without generating intrusive engine noise, even at close to full payload.

Deciding to upgrade your fleet to DAF from other workhorse alternatives may well add to your purchase price. The benefit comes from a swag of reasons that I am sure any driver will be able to advance in support of looking closely at the New LF.




Standard safety features include front and rear ventilated disc brakes, Electronic Braking System (EBS), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Anti-Slip Control (ASR), Hill Start Aid (only with the AS-Tronic transmission) and front under-run protection (FUPS). A driver's airbag and seatbelt pre-tensioners are available as an option.

The front suspension uses parabolic leaf springs, with a front axle rated at 7500 kg. The rear axle rating is 11,500 kg, while at the back there's a DAF four-airbag setup with ECAS (Electronically Controlled Air Suspension) to raise or lower the deck height to match different loading docks. The 18-tonner runs on 295/80R22.5 tyres.

One final inclusion, and I'll mention what DAF calls the Driver Performance Assistant (DPA). This is an electronic assessment system that monitors the performance of the driver and provides polite comment on how smoothly or fuel efficiently the driver and the vehicle are performing. Linked to an on-board trip computer and vehicle monitoring system, it passes the time on the highway for the driver to challenge his or her own performance on the day. It may sound a little pointless, but in reality it's interesting to use and in the end should provide a noticeable return in fuel saving.

Summing up: The New DAF LF is a delight to drive and a truck that any driver would appreciate. Fuel economy, thanks to the DPA readout, came in at 3.9 km/litre for a route that has long climbs up into the Blue Mountains amidst constant traffic flows. If you are looking to justify a step up in quality, comfort and safety, take into account the service schedules of 40,000 km for a reduction in TCO.

Although *PowerTorque* has not driven the nine-speed manual, the six-speed ZF-AS Tronic AMT is so good you would tick the box the moment you see it on the order sheet. 

The bunk folds upwards against the rear wall leaving plenty of storage behind the seats. The dashboard and controls are impressively easy to use.

