

Ten years at the top

For the 10th year in a row Isuzu has secured the number one position for overall truck sales in the New Zealand market. The brand puts this continuing success down to its network of dealers, innovative technology and impressive product range.

Words by Gemma Bridge
Images by Andrew Bright



The hardest thing about being number one is staying there, but Isuzu New Zealand must be doing something right – it has led the market for overall truck sales here for the last 10 years. In 2009, it accounted for 22.8 percent of the light, medium and heavy truck market, and came in ahead of its nearest competitor by a huge 141 sales.

This achievement is all the more impressive when you look at the state of the transport industry over the past few years. Volatile exchange rates, increasing running costs and a slump in transport movements have resulted in a 48 percent drop in the total market.

David Swain, General Manager, Isuzu New Zealand, says that Isuzu's dealer network has played a vital role in the brand's success in such a difficult environment. Isuzu's New Zealand Sales and Marketing Manager, Colin Muir, agrees.

"There's a lot we do in the background involving what products we offer, but the day-to-day business is done by the dealers. They're the people who go out there and find customers, develop relationships, do demonstrations and sell on the features and benefits," he says.

Once a customer does buy, Isuzu's dealers supply parts and service, knowledge and training, deliver the vehicle, and make sure that the build is done on time and to the right specifications. It is this dedication to customer service and appetite to be number one, Muir says, that has made it very difficult for the competition to make significant headway into Isuzu's market domination.

"Customers know that if they buy an Isuzu not only is it a good truck at a reasonable price that does what they want it to do, but if it breaks down, no matter where in New Zealand, the Isuzu dealer network is professional, with the training and tools to do the job," he explains.

Product range and innovation

Isuzu's impressive product range has been another key to the brand's success. While Isuzu trucks have been in New Zealand since 1972, they have come a long way from the three models of "Bedford by Isuzu"; today the company strives to improve its products with every upgrade.

In 2008, the brand launched the Gen 6 range of light and medium

trucks, a model with variants to suit any requirements and industry leading features like Automated Manual Transmission (AMT), Diesel Particulate Diffusers (DPD), and ISRI air suspension seats.

This continual innovation and improvement, along with such a versatile vehicle, keeps the company at number one in New Zealand.

"We want features that are beneficial for our customers- things that improve productivity, address environmental concerns and increase driver comfort," Muir says.

AMT is a tiptronic style manual gearbox without a manually operated clutch, which can also be used as a full auto. It delivers comparable fuel economy to a manual but without the power loss normally associated with conventional autos. From a parts perspective, there is no dry clutch to wear out, so customers can reduce costs in this area. Another feature of the Gen 6 range is the DPD exhaust, which is the cleanest available and emits the least amount of NOx of any truck in NZ.

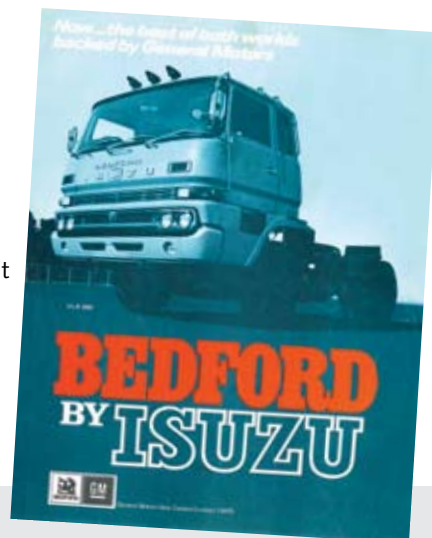
"Probably in the last few years one of the most important factors in any truck has been the emissions compliance," Muir says. "All vehicles sold in NZ are required to meet emission regulations set by the Government, so continual development of our engines and exhaust technologies is crucial."

Driver comfort is another area that Isuzu NZ continues to develop, along with safety features like ABS, Hill Start Aid and driver airbags.

Specifically designed for NZ

NZ has a very different set of requirements from any of the other markets that Isuzu produces trucks for. In Japan, for example, roads are six lanes wide, flow well and have no potholes or odd cambers – and instead of going over mountain ranges they go through them. In NZ, roads are very different and the driving style can range from highways to stop/start (especially in cities like Auckland).

Muir says Isuzu NZ works very closely with Japan to source the best design for NZ, even getting people from Isuzu Japan to come to NZ, "where we can actually take them for a drive over the Kaimais or down on the West Coast of the South Island – and their eyes just light up! They can't believe what we do with trucks here. They suddenly realise quite quickly that if they try to supply vehicles that were designed for the Japanese or Australian markets they are not going to stack up."



1973 Bedford-Isuzu

There were three models of the Bedford-Isuzu offered: the SLR450 long wheelbase chassis and the VPR290 and VLR290 tractors. The SLR and VLR had a 205hp six-cylinder diesel engine of 621in³, and the VPR was a 734in³ unit offering 256hp. The transmission was a five-speed in all models. They were presented by General Motors New Zealand Ltd as "The best of both worlds".

Specifications 1973 Bedford-Isuzu

Model	SLR450	VPR290	VLR290
GVM (lbs)	31,360	31,360	31,360
GCW (lbs)	N/A	73,000	63,000
Engine	621in ³ Diesel 6 205bhp @ 2300rpm	734in ³ Diesel 6 256bhp @2300rpm	621in ³ Diesel 6 205bhp @ 2300rpm
Wheelbase	175in ³	114in ³	114in ³
Transmission	Five-speed direct top Short 4th	Five-speed direct top Short 4th	Five-speed direct top Short 4th

Looking to buy?

Isuzu's Sales and Marketing Manager, Colin Muir, has some simple tips for truck buyers:

1. When buying a truck it is worth remembering that your decision could be with you for five, seven or even up to 10 years and either be profitable for your business or possibly lose you money. Be diligent.

2. Talk to people whose opinion you trust and get feedback about brands or companies you are analysing. They may have invaluable insight on their experiences with a brand or model.

3. Don't simply make your mind up in the sales office or after looking at a specification sheet. After you sign on the dotted line the truck will only perform as well as the parts, workshop and service department if there is a problem. It's great to get a cheap deal but if your truck is off the road waiting for parts, or the mechanic is poorly trained, you'll be no further forward and you risk upsetting your customers. Make sure you ask about parts availability; go and look at the workshop and the parts department and see if they live up to your expectations.

4. Price up a sample of service parts and see if they compare favourably or not between brands.

5. Consider the brand's resale value. If it is a low-selling model or a low-selling brand ask yourself how easy will it be to sell or trade when you are finished with it or if you can get someone to trade it what will it be worth. I am hearing, especially in the current climate, that some brands are exceptionally hard to shift and many dealers won't trade "odd balls", low-selling brands or brands that have exited the New Zealand market.

6. Above all, this is a business decision, so do your homework. Think about cost over the life of the vehicle including parts and servicing; is it a quality brand; will you be stuck with it when you want to upgrade?

So what do New Zealand truck buyers want? Well, we are well known for wanting lots of options and all the "bells and whistles" according to Muir. However the preferences between regions can differ greatly, which is where Isuzu's large product range is its advantage. The brand can cater for buyer's different requirements or adapt existing trucks to suit.

"If you sell a 400hp 6x4 tipper in both Invercargill and Auckland," Muir says, "chances are they will look quite different as regionally buyers preferences change."

Furthermore, Isuzu NZ ensures it has high stock levels of genuine Isuzu parts so if something does go wrong it won't take long to get up and running again, as well as comprehensive warranties.

Looking towards the future

In 2010, Isuzu is launching its Euro 4 and New Long-Term (Japan 05) compliant trucks in the Giga range (>23,000kg GVM). This range of vehicles will be class leading in emissions output, and feature a redesigned cab. There will be additional models and features to the range added as well.

These vehicles will go into production from August 2010 for Euro 4 and September for New Long Term (Japan 05) and will be available in NZ later in the year.

Muir says they have been in development for quite some time however the company was waiting on Vehicle Dimension and Mass regulations to be passed by the Government before finalising specifications.

The Isuzu F Series



"Delaying the release will ensure that NZ customers get the right product, and that is competitive in the market," he explains.

This wait-and-see approach is one of the ways the company reshaped the way it sells trucks over the past few years. As General Manager David Swain said in the inaugural Isuzu newsletter, "Isuzu Overdrive", "When you have the experience of a decade at the top you know what it takes to make it in any conditions". This meant resizing the business appropriate to the size of the market.

"In the 'good years' when Isuzu NZ was selling 1000 vehicles a year it was alright to hold 400 trucks in stock at any one time. However 400 trucks in 2009 would have been 80 percent of total sales, which is not economically viable," he says.

Isuzu NZ now focuses on what its



Isuzu trucks can cater for buyer's different requirements

customers need and when.
 "We have vehicles arriving 'just in time', which is the cornerstone of the best stock management systems in the world. This way cost savings can be passed onto customers."

The marketing of Isuzu trucks is evolving as well, with a segmented, more focused approach to stock management.

Muir says understanding the market is the key to the new marketing direction.

"I've got this model here, traditionally it would be a construction tipper – what if I put air suspension on it, could it become a freight vehicle as well? Then access a new avenue for selling this vehicle." ■



Isuzu Overdrive

As part of its new marketing direction, Isuzu launched its inaugural issue of its newsletter, "Isuzu Overdrive" in June. This features product and services information for Isuzu owners as well as stories of general interest and will be available from your local Isuzu dealer.



Endless options with Isuzu – what does a customer say?

Downer has a long and proud history in New Zealand having built and maintained a large portion of the countries critical infrastructure from dams through to roads, as well as water treatment plants. This tenure dates back to 1870 when the NZ Public Works Department was established and has included the very well known "Works" brand.

Since that time the company has extended its coverage to include activities in the Transportation, Energy, Facilities Management, Resources, Water and Telecommunications sectors. The company has also gone through a few names changes and is currently in the process of phasing in the Downer brand for all activities in New Zealand.

Being such a thriving business means quality vehicles are a necessity, which is why six years ago Downer chose Isuzu as its preferred supplier. For as long as Graham Walker, Downer's Regional Plant Manager, Northern Region, can remember, the company has been buying Isuzu's.

To prove its commitment to the brand, it still has a 1987 Isuzu CX7167 TC on its books. The truck is working in Canterbury and has done a whopping 552,000km...so far.

Graham believes this alliance with Isuzu is down to its reputation for reliability, its broad range of trucks and its supreme service.

"In this business, we require a range of trucks for varying assignments in diverse conditions. Isuzu offers everything from small double cab NNR250C series to the heavy 8x4 530hp, so they cater to our needs."

Today, Downer operates 1125 trucks nationwide and of these, a mammoth 630 are Isuzu's. The most popular models include the CXZ400 Tip Truck and the NPR 350C Crew Cab. With such a large fleet of trucks spread across New Zealand, Graham says it's important to have a solid foundation of support and Isuzu has successfully provided this.

"A strong Isuzu dealer network throughout NZ has meant our vehicles are maintained to a consistency level whether the truck is in Kerikeri or Invercargill. The commitment and reliability from the team at Isuzu has been exceptional."

Graham says Isuzu's service is also backed by technicians in Japan who personally visit Downer at least a twice a year for feedback.



Downer's old Isuzu NPR450, first registered September 2000, and the latest Isuzu NPR450 L

"Our key focus is reducing our carbon footprint, so we make the technicians aware of this vision. They then look into the design, weight and aero dynamics in order to improve these areas."

Over the past 10 years Graham says driver feedback has been hugely positive, due to the vast improvements in driver comfort.

"Our drivers are forever praising the comfort of the Isuzu trucks and they're less fatigued by the end of the day."

Isuzu NPR450L

This is a popular model that has many applications, including tipper, service vehicle, delivery truck and local parcel/freight.

MAIN SPECIFICATIONS				
Model	NPR450M	NPR450M AMT	NPR450L	NPR450L AMT
Code	NP117	NP118	NP119	NP120
Configuration	4 x 2			
Gross Vehicle Mass	7,500 Kg			
Gross Combination Mass	11,000Kg			
Maximum towed mass braked	3,500 Kg			
Maximum towed mass unbraked	750 Kg			
Gradeability at GVM/GCM (1st gear)	29/18%			
Est. Engine RPM @ 90 Km/h	2060			
Turning circle kerb to kerb (m)	12.4		15.3	
DRIVELINE SPECIFICATIONS				
Engine Model	4HK1-TCN			
Type	4 cylinder 16 valve, gear driven SOHC. Euro IV exhaust emission compliant			
Displacement (cc)	5,193			
Compression ratio	17.5:1			
Max power (DIN Nett)	114kW 155PS (JIS Gross 118kW, 160PS) @ 2600 RPM			
Max torque (DIN Nett)	419N.m (JIS Gross 434N.m) @ 1,600 – 2,600 RPM			
Transmission model	MYY6S			
Forward gears	6			
KERB MASS* (kg)				
Front	1,760	1,800	1,800	1,840
Rear	890	910	910	930
Total	2,650	2,710	2,710	2,770
* Cab chassis as supplied from the factory and including 10 L of fuel				
DIMENSIONS (mm)				
WB: Wheelbase	3,365		4,175	
OAL: Overall length	5,985		7,338	
EA: Rear of engine to rear axis	2,680		3,490	
CE: Cab to rear of frame	4,302		5,655	
ROH: Rear overhang	1,510		2053	
RT: Rear track	1,650			
ORT: Overall rear tyres	2,115			
FW: Frame width @ Rear	850			
RFH: Frame height at rear axis	795			
BOC: Back of Cab Clearance	112			



Downer's 10 year old Isuzu with the latest Isuzu addition to its fleet



Isuzu Master Truck Dealer Network

There are 10 independently owned and operated dealerships that promote the Isuzu brand in New Zealand.

TCL Isuzu (Northland/Auckland)
61 Lady Ruby Drive
East Tamaki
Auckland
Ph 09 526 4866 or 09 918 1940
Web www.tclisuzu.co.nz

TCL Isuzu (Tauranga)
138 Totara St
Mt Maunganui
Ph 07 575 5399 or 07 928 4399
Web www.tclisuzu.co.nz

Commercial Autos (2008) Ltd
(Hamilton)
State Highway 1, TeRapa
Hamilton
Ph 07 847 5110
Web www.commercialautos.co.nz

Shorland Isuzu (Rotorua)
79 Old Taupo Road
Rotorua
Ph 07 348 3179
Email tonys@shorlandholden.co.nz
Web www.shorlandholden.co.nz

Deakin Motors LTD (Hastings)
1400 Omaha Road
Hastings

Ph 06 879 7176
Email johns@deakinmotors.net.nz
Parts parts@deakinmotors.net.nz
Web www.deakinmotors.co.nz

Moller Johnson Isuzu (Hawera)
250 Waihi Road, Hawera
Ph 0800 887 166 or 06 278 7166
Web www.mollerjohnson.co.nz

Cable Price (Palmerston North)
7 Bisley St
Palmerston North
Ph 06 536 1880
Email wade.lorimer@cableprice.co.nz
Web www.cableprice.co.nz

Cable Price (Wellington)
3 Tunnel Grove
Gracefield
Wellington
Ph 04 568 4283
Email wade.lorimer@cableprice.co.nz
Web www.cableprice.co.nz

Wadco Commercial Vehicle Centre Ltd (Blenheim)
10 Horton Street
Blenheim

Ph 03 579 2975
Email trucks@wadco.co.nz
Web www.wadco.co.nz

Blackwells Isuzu (Christchurch)
Corner Waterloo and
Racecourse Roads
Stockburn
Christchurch
Sales ph 03 344 3522
or 027 438 0606
Email davewilson@blackwells.co.nz
Web www.blackwellsisuzu.co.nz

Smallbone Bros Isuzu (Ashburton)
Archibald St
Tinwald
Ashburton
Ph 0274 778 059
Email bobgrant@smallbones.co.nz
Web www.smallbones.co.nz

Cooke Howlison Isuzu
(Otago/Southland)
52 Teviot St
Dunedin
Ph 03 456 0507
Email jeremyk@cookehowlison.co.nz
Web www.cookehowlison.co.nz