

PROJECT PERENNIAL

The Australian Army is currently evaluating five new vehicles as light cross-country support vehicles. In the 0.75-1.00 tonne payload class are the diesel Mercedes-Benz 300GD and the automatic, petrol Jeep M10. In the 1.50-2.00 tonne category, Mercedes and JRA are once again battling it out with the Land-Rover 110 6x6 and the Unimog U1300. IAN GLOVER takes a look at the Leyland hopefuls.

WAY BACK in the days when some of us were wearing Moratorium badges and others, 'lucky' in the Government ballot, had to swap them for Lance-Corporal's stripes, the Australian Army was toying with the idea of finding a replacement vehicle for the then ageing GP Land-Rover. Now, thirteen-odd years later, it's gotten around to it, and whether that replacement will be another Land-Rover or something totally different again is a matter of hot contention by the companies involved: JRA, Mercedes-Benz and Jeep. It is not a matter of straight replacement, either. The Army's categories of vehicles have been expanded.

Until fairly recently, the Army operated three categories of cross-country vehicles. The 0.75 tonne payload class was occupied by the 2.6 litre diesel Series III Land-Rover. Then there was a huge jump to the 2.50 tonne payload International 4x4, and another leap to the 4.00 tonne payload Inter 6x6.

International Harvester has now been completely neglected in favour of the 4.00 tonne payload Mercedes Unimog U1700 and 8.00 tonne payload Mack 6x6, with the lower-end contest still to be run.

The Army's tests, which began in early October, will be run over 12 months. Shortly after, the 'winners' will be announced, and the contracts issued. It's not worth all that much: 2600 one-tonners over a five to six-year period and 400 two-tonners over a two or three year stretch. Then again, it's not chickenfeed either. Let's look at the costs of the contenders.

The Land-Rover, fully engineered to

Army specs, has a price tag of \$21,044. (All companies have currently sold, not lent, three vehicles of each type to the Army for tests.) Should it be successful, that's \$54.7 million over that five or six year period. Jeep's M10, at \$17,592, would net the company \$45.7 million, and the 300GD, at \$24,748 (how come the civilian buyer pays almost \$40,000 for a 300GD?) would earn \$64.3 million for Stuttgart.

The heavier vehicle contract is not quite so spectacular. JRA, at \$29,600 per unit, would earn \$11.8 million while Benz, with a price of \$45,806 per unit, is looking at an \$18.3 million contract.

JRA executives are quietly confident that they'll score at least one of the contracts, and if good, solid engineering is anything to go by, they certainly deserve to. Already, enquiries have been coming in from all around the world about this Australian-built vehicle, both in 4x4 and 6x6 configuration. Many have come from Third World countries.

Local engineering, development and testing has taken the form of installing the Isuzu 3.9 litre 4BD1 direct injection diesel engine into the 110, which comes normally equipped with the 3.5 litre V8, as powering the Range Rover; and the entire development of the 6x6. JRA's Geoff Stubbs takes you over the engineering details of the 6x6 rather like Michelangelo showing Julius II the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Land-Rover (UK) set up the test parameters, provided specialised design assistance, supplied special components, and funded the project. Judging by British reaction, we could be selling the 6x6 back to the Poms!

D and D

Land-Rover 3.9D owners will be no strangers to the engine of the military 110, for they are powered by one and the same unit, the tough four-cylinder heavy duty unit fitted to Australian Landies since September 1981. Though a little noisy, the engine is a very hard working unit, with plenty of both power and torque and one of the most thorough fuel filtration systems we've seen. And the noise in cabin has been cut down by better sound proofing.

It's interesting to note that the Isuzu diesel engine currently accounts for around 70 per cent of current Stage 1 Land-Rover sales in this country: JRA execs are confident that will be a minimum percentage of civilian 110 sales, given that the vehicle will be made available with a number of engine options, including, of course, the 3.5 litre V8. Of even more interest is that there's a turbo version of the Isuzu motor due next year, with preliminary publicity boasting a 20 per cent increase in power and a 25 per cent improvement in torque, with JRA engineers confident it would match well to the Isuzu gearbox and the Leyland transfer case.

Of course, there are quite a few changes under the bonnet between the military and civilian Land-Rovers powered by the 4BD1. The air intake, which creates the distinctive round mesh hole in the 3.9D mudguard, has been moved up to the top section of the guard on the 10, for even more height in the event of water crossings.

Another glaring difference is immediately evident in the double pulley and belt running to the Army-designed alternator — a giant unit which created quite some fitting



in short, a practical, brilliantly thought out and executed approach to a series of logistical problems.

Steering

The 6x6 is a real joy to drive, both on the highway and in the rough, and

much of the credit must go to power steering — something not available on the Army 4x4, but which will be offered as an option on the civilian version. It's modified Range Rover steering. There's a dampener on the shaft, offset with universal joints.

Power assist comes from an Isuzu pump married to the Range Rover power steering box. It is a gear-driven, as opposed to belt-driven unit (there'd be no room in the engine bay for more belts), and is hence very much more reliable. Another positive aspect of this unit is that it is a variable power steering system. There's very little assist dead ahead, but it comes on progressively while turning. It's not a 'ram' type, constant ratio system as you normally find on American vehicles, and hence exhibits nothing of the twitchiness we often expect in vehicles equipped with power steering.

Summing up

The Land-Rover 110 is a brilliant vehicle. Given an Army-specced price of \$21,044, it's to be hoped the 110 in civvies can be sold for less than \$20,000. For the man on the land, the contractor, the heavy duty user of any kind, it will give any competitor more than a run for its money.

As long as Leyland (UK) doesn't put too high a premium on that very competitiveness and put the 110 beyond the wallet of the people it would suit most.

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