

FIRST
DRIVE

Isuzu Trooper

Featured model: 3.0D Duty LWB



TIME MARCHES ON AND SO DOES Isuzu's rugged 4x4 Trooper. It was launched in the UK 14 years ago and has soldiered on with appropriate revisions since then.

The latest of these is the introduction of a new, three-litre diesel engine to complement the 3.5-litre V6 petrol unit. The turbocharged and intercooled oil-burner is unique in the 4x4 world in featuring common-rail, direct injection fuelling with unit injectors, twin overhead camshafts and 16 valves.

Isuzu's claim of 0-62mph in 16.5sec sounds yawningly slow, but, in fact, performance is perky between 2000 and 4000rpm. Fortunately the gearchange has a clean, precise action, so it's no chore to keep the revs within this narrow band. The new engine is a smoothly revving, quietly cruising unit, too, spoilt only by an underbonnet growl at about 2800 revs. Expect mpg to be in the mid-twenties.

Thanks to its armoury of four-wheel drive (at the touch of a button), five high and low ratios and a limited-slip differential, the Trooper is one serious off-roader that proves doggedly determined not to be cowed by treacherous terrain.

All the more credit to it, then, that this long wheelbase model bowls along comfortably on tarmac – the suspension fretful only on broken surfaces. It lacks the Discovery's more compliant ride and exemplary handling, however. The low-g geared steering isn't as vague as some,

but around bends and roundabouts the Trooper feels soggy and exhibits tyre-chirping understeer unless you adopt a more softly, softly approach. The brake pedal action could do with firming up, as well.

There's excellent vision from the lofty, comfortable driving position, but the modular-style facia looks dated. However, its commendable six-dial instrument pack is in clear view through the height-adjustable wheel. Most switches are high and easily reached, but the audio system's controls are fiddly.

Despite lacking much side shaping, the back seats are comfortable because the backrests recline, there's a lot of leg-stretching space, and both headroom and footspace are excellent.

Beyond the two back doors (divided 80/20) there's a spacious, carpeted luggage area, and that's before the split back cushions are folded forward to open up a huge cargo space.

VERDICT

Perhaps to its detriment, the Trooper is in no way given to lofty pretensions – what you see is what you get. What it needs is its clumsy cornering behaviour sharpened up and a restyled, more integrated looking facia. But even as it stands, beneath that self-effacing exterior lies a comfortable and competent all-rounder. Trooper by name but trouper by nature.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○○
Handling/steering	★★★○○○
Comfort	★★★★○○
Space/practicality	★★★★★○

THE TROOPER RANGE

size and type 3/5 door, short/long wheelbase off-roader (mid-priced)

trim levels Standard, Duty, Citation, Insignia

engines petrol: V6 cylinder/3.5 litre/212bhp, diesel: 4/3.0/157

drive "shift-on-the-fly" 2/4-wheel drive, with dual-range transfer box; 5-speed manual (4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter optional with both engines)

notable features Duty: DOHC 16v DI engine, 2/4WD, selectable low ratio 4WD, limited-slip differential. Insignia features: ABS, electric/heated foldable mirrors, heated electric front seats, leather, climate control, 4-changer CD, cruise control (petrol) alloy wheels, third row seats (LWB)

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (folded mirrors)	476x184
front - legroom	90-105
- headroom (no sunroof)	98
rear - typical legroom	109
- typical kneeroom	80
- headroom	98
- hiproom	135
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	655/23
load length (seats up/folded)	101/152
load width	102-135
load sill height (inside/outside)	0/76
boot/load aperture height	53/92

LIKES ...

big electric/heated door mirrors
rear headrests lower into seatbacks
nine sturdy grab handles
front seats padded at rear ankle level
good rear airflow from floor ducts

and GRIPES

some snatchy driveline "shunt"
two facia buttons for rear wash/wipe
rear centre seatbelt lap-type only
small, fiddly cubby holes
door locking "remote" is too bulky