

on test on test on test

D-MAX UTAH

So we have 48 hours to get from Boy's Toys HQ in Staffordshire, via Shropshire to pick up our resident astronomer Edwin Quail and his associated telescopes and cameras. Then transport them to the north eastern tip of the Isle of Skye before the moon carelessly blocks the sun - (well 96.8% of it anyway) through some of the most staggering scenery the UK has to offer and then get back again in time for our pyrotechnic engagement.

We have kit to carry, mud, rain and snow to do battle with and 1200 miles to cover - what better time for Isuzu to deliver their latest range topping D-MAX UTAH!



DIESEL, MAP, CHEESE, RAINCOAT WE'RE READY FOR THE OFF

The D-MAX's storage space is impressive, if like many you will be using the motor for car and work duties one of the covered rear bed options is a must - giving capacious, lockable and dry storage space, some are much higher giving an even larger headroom space, this one, the AeroKlas is well made and suits the D-MAX well, max payload in here is an impressive 1060KG.



As you board the D-MAX for the first time you are met with a neat and practical solid interior, it is stylish and understated, the door closes with a pleasing solid thud and the materials are of solid quality. The engine is Isuzu's new 2.5 litre twin turbo common rail unit delivering a very smooth 168HP and 400Nm of torque. All of which gives a reassuring sound, a combination of gruffness and refinement as it eagerly breathes to life, think of it as an expensive pair of wellies.



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Reversing down the drive past the building materials is simple thanks to the excellent large mirrors and rear camera fitted to this UTAH spec vehicle.

With the tank full of derv the on board computer gives an estimated 450 mile range as we head through town. Like its rivals the D-MAX has a commanding position on the road giving excellent vision of roundabouts and junctions with particularly good visibility at oblique country junctions thanks to well designed rear windows and pillar arrangement.

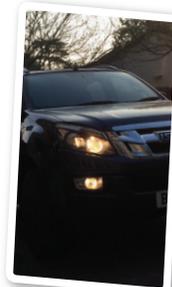
No sooner out of town and we hit the inevitable slow moving traffic and are thankful of the 5 speed auto fitted, changes are smooth if frequent considering the huge torque of the twin turbo engine.

Next stop, Shropshire - we pit here to collect resident astronomer Edwin Quail. Thankful that the load bed is covered with an aero top we pile it full, telescopes, tripods, cameras, mounts and more join the diesel cans and other paraphernalia in the large load area, it all fits with ease and we launch north. There has been a great deal of thought into various aspects of the design of the vehicle and the simple things really do count here, the ease of use of the interior lights and the storage areas around the cabin are well thought out, the only niggle being the lack of illumination on the window and mirror buttons aside from the drivers window.

45 miles in and through mixed town traffic and fast dual carriageway we are averaging 32 mpg with around 400kg on board, arriving in Grange Over Sands for our overnight we hit 33.5mpg average after a steady run up at lane 3 motorway speeds.

We wind in through the tight lanes around the hotel and pull up outside Abbot Hall reception and the D-MAX looks good, this vehicle is as comfortable here as in the mud and receives compliments from the reception staff.

Even the tight courtyard of our hotel is navigated easily with decent lock and some cheating from the camera and sensors. Off to bed



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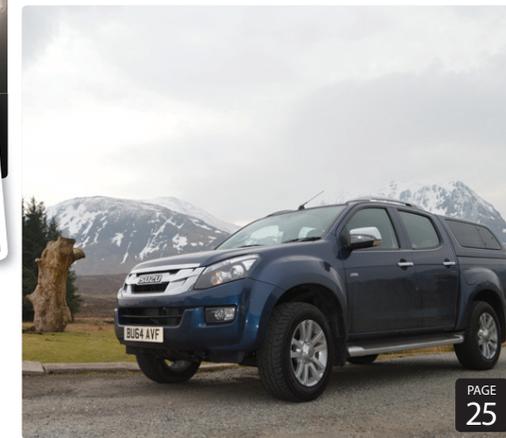
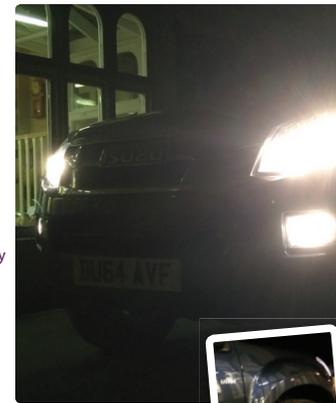


Up at the crack of dawn for an early breakfast and we pile back in for a day on the road, 425 miles to go today, friendly Twitter followers of our jaunt tease that the weather only gets worse the further north we go.... trying not to think about this we rejoin the M6 and are quickly passing Glasgow.

The D-MAX is more comfortable at speed than I was expecting and offers a well damped, controlled but firm ride - it certainly eats the miles well and long journeys seem no problem for the humans inside - a testament to the ergonomic design of the interior and chassis set up.



As we peel off the motorway into the Scottish lanes off comes the cruise and we can explore the handling, it certainly grips with surprising levels of lateral grip and controllable handling. The gearbox is eager to change when you meet and incline under partial throttle and offers a very different driving experience to the manual, but the power is always there when required and overtaking is handled safely and quickly. Power delivery is smooth and has no traditional turbo lump of torque just near seamless ummph, using shift lock you can force the box to stay put if you wish or you can control it manually - handy for descending mountains without giving the brakes a hard time. As we climb into the Highlands we reach Glencoe and the scenery is breathtaking. We stop to consider the view and the D-MAX, it looks at home here and the number we see up here is testament to the rugged build quality of this machine - life is hard for machinery up here and the 5 year warranty is reassuring, even the deer seem interested.



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down by the river

Leaving our new furry friends behind, a riverbed with rough track down to it proves irresistible and after a chat with the landowner in his digger, off we go.

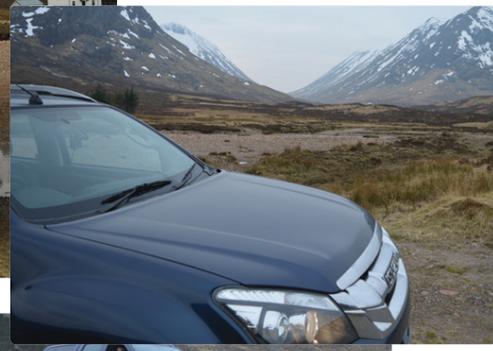
The D-MAX transmission has on the fly shift, this means with the turn of a knob at up to 60mph you can shift from 2WD high ratio into 4WD high ratio (but not low range), this however must not be done on tarmac or solid surface as you can lock the transmission up if the surface is too grippy. In any case we need low range so into neutral and select and hold down 4WD Low - this quickly engages.

Down the deceptively bumpy rockstrewn track we go and we handle it with ease, next up the slope through a small ford and into the rocky riverbed. At all points the D-MAX remains composed and feels solid, we purposefully pause on the wet slippery grass and gravel bank, restarting is no issue - not even one wheel slips, a testament to the transmission.

Although nowhere near wading here the D-MAX can wade up to 500mm depth in standard form. Departure and particularly approach angles are very good and ground clearance is 225mm - really useful if you are of the off-road persuasion, with practice you can use the reversing sensors and camera to judge this, which is handy for keeping your tow bar in one piece.



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TRAILER TIME - IT'S GOOD TO KNOW TOWING, PULLING, SWERVING AND CONTROL

The D-MAX's TOWING capability is superb, 3500KGS rated capacity. We were invited to try the stability of a fully loaded D-MAX at a recent Isuzu off road event, to our amazement a plant trailer was loaded with a second D-MAX and put through a slalom at high speed then immediately into a braking and swerving manoeuvre to a dead stop from motorway speed. The D-MAX handled the weight perfectly and despite the aggressive driving the trailer remained safe and in control, this is some of the most impressive trailer control I have ever seen and inspires great confidence in the truck's chassis as well as control systems. Even at the edge of grip the tow vehicle and trailer remained sure footed - good to know when you are out on the road facing a real emergency.

A quick pause to watch a Sea King exercise and some high altitude skiers and we hit the road north again, nearly 200 miles of twisty scenic roads lie between us and Skye. Toe down we are soon making good progress towards the bridge to Skye at Kyle of Lochalsh, mpg now around 32 combined for the trip and time for some re-dieselling, not bad range on one tank. We pull up on Skye and the only parking at our hotel is a small triangle between a skip, vans, huge rocks and the harbour... drizzle and cloud linger over the island and we squeeze in using the large mirrors and camera - the vision pack is a worthy option and certainly helps us stay out of the sea. Over dinner we look at the weather - every conceivable weather outlet shows a doom-laden rainstorm and low level blanket cloud for the following day along with 45 mph wind - not ideal for our eclipse viewing as we could do with seeing the sun. A trip back south is suggested where we would see a much less impressive percentage but it would be more likely - I have no doubt the car would easily do the 1000 or so miles with us in comfort but we would be asleep before we hit Carlisle, so we ponder over the radar and decide to stay put, hoping for a break in the clouds on the headland. With that we head to bed. Dawn breaks over Skye and a wet D-MAX looking over the North Atlantic, amazingly there are breaks in the clouds and deep blue matching the Isuzu is visible through them.

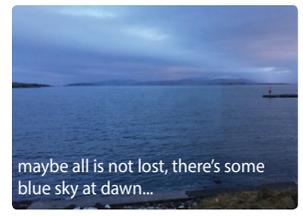


2 Hours to go we pile in for the last 50 miles north, we are against the clock as the moon isn't hanging about, we are soon out of Broadford on the breathtaking A855, this road has everything from tight switchbacks to sudden crests accompanied by severe drops down to the sea below sandwiched between the jagged peaks and the ocean. Not hanging around, we are surprised to be overtaken by locals, in manual mode we push on up. The D-MAX grips very well on the wet tarmac as we drive through rain squalls, clouds, fog and unless I am very much mistaken - locusts. We unintentionally become temporarily airborne over a small severe crest at the national speed limit and with no drama at all the chassis handles the landing smoothly, I'm really starting to like the D-MAX. We near our chosen location and leave the road in favour of a rutted, rock strewn track toward the edge of the cliffs overlooking the north west and with excellent views toward the sun.



the night before - just look at the rain..

We stop and quickly unload from the load bed and rear seats, the powerful brakes steaming from the backsplash from the torrents running down the track as they cool, we frantically assemble the telescope and equipment as the sun breaks through the moody sky and we get our first glimpse of the eclipse, the upper right sector of the sun now missing from the view.

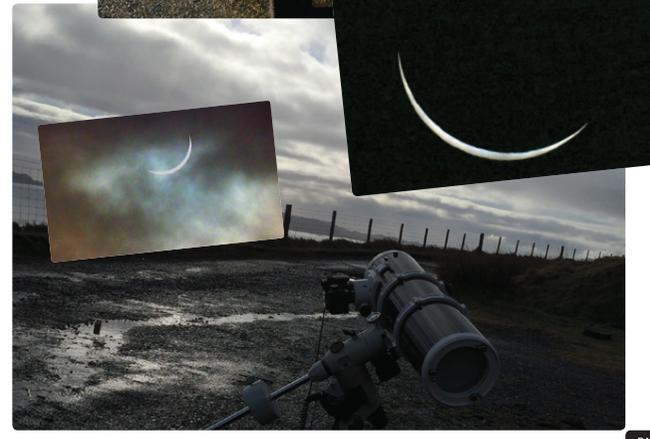


maybe all is not lost, there's some blue sky at dawn...

Now set up, we watch in awe from the solid and very handy tailgate of the D-MAX as the rest of the sun slowly disappears blocked by the moon and the light becomes a curious shade of pink and the primeval parts of your brain begin to awaken, no matter how much you know what is happening, part of you it seems does not.



Unbelievably, despite the odds we managed to experience the eclipse in between cloud bursts and snapped images of the maximum cover at around 09:35 before the clouds returned almost immediately afterwards.





The D-MAX handles our test well

the range offers a model to suit most - here's our verdict on this one



Would we buy one?

“If you need a tough, solid, powerful and well made pickup that can just as easily climb off road into the hills as the school run, you could do a lot worse than the D-MAX, it's pick of the bunch”

If you need a tough, solid, powerful and well made pickup that can just as easily climb off road into the hills as the school run you could do a lot worse than the D-MAX, it's pick of the bunch, the manual is very good and the anti-stall feature works beautifully. The auto tows well and is superb for manoeuvring a heavy trailer or crawling through traffic, on the move we found the auto eager to change down despite the huge torque from the engine and this may take some getting used to however it drove very well and returned excellent fuel consumption at some points higher than stated figures on our long trip.

Our preference would be the automatic as it suits the vehicle well but we recommend you try one of each before you take the plunge. All guises of the D-MAX come with the 5 year 120,000 mile warranty giving excellent piece of mind.

These are well built machines designed for heavy use, cabin quality and body are also very well finished as well as thoughtfully laid out, all controls are easy to use and tactile.

The only exception being the Pioneer touch screen SAT NAV system fitted to our demonstrator, which whilst functional was not very intuitive to use, it felt out of keeping with the excellent design of the interior, requiring a little too much attention to operate. This is of course easily solved with a trip to Halfords or some friendly negotiation with your dealer.

Now, so you want one - OK, so here's a quick guide to the range,

The D-MAX is available in several variants, these are split into utility and premium designations, ranging from around £15K upwards

The utility section of the range offer extreme value for money and all but the entry level are 4x4, they feature rubber floor covering and hard wearing functional interiors - if you're a tree surgeon, power line engineer or just need your motor to be washdown friendly and bullet proof the utility D-MAX is a tempting proposition. If you enjoy the knowledge of all that toughness and capability underneath but enjoy some plush surroundings the premium range including Eiger, Yukon & the range topping Utah tested here are equipped with more of the luxury kit you expect in a premium car, including cruise control, automatic transmissions, electric windows and power fold mirrors, heated leather along with premium entertainment & rear camera. Look out as well for the special edition Blade and Fury models offering a good selection of extras and a high impact look.

