

# LCVS: what pick-up? Which van?



Selecting the right vehicle for the right application at the right price starts with an entrepreneur looking around to see who drives what before he or she approaches a properly qualified transport consultant, writes UDO RYPSTRA

**R**ub a dub dub, Three men in a tub,  
And who do you think they be?  
The butcher, the baker, The  
candlestick maker. They all sailed out to sea.

So goes a recent version of an old English language nursery rhyme, of which numerous meanings and interpretations have been imparted over the years. Early 19th century versions tell of three maids in the bath, and the three men jumping out of a rotten potato. Some of the lines were changed during the prim and proper Queen Victoria era, when the maids were literally removed from the bath and replaced by the three bath fellows who went to a fair together...

Funny or disjointed as the poem may be, the occupations of the men have remained untouched over the years. In creative advertising material it not only denotes the bewildering choices people face regarding what to do with their lives, but also the wide range of applications for which a particular product can be used, with or without product modifications - which van? Which pick-up?)

Van and truck dealers love the phrase because they believe the three men belong to a

category of professionals all sharing the same freight transport needs. They use the term in the showroom and at exhibitions because, like the wide range (choice) of vehicles they sell, these workhorses can be used in numerous commercial and industrial applications by people who started out as young butchers, bakers and other entrepreneurs who have to produce, sell and deliver. In the process they become entrepreneur private hauliers.

In fact, some people believe this choice goes beyond vans and pick-up trucks, originating with the old station wagons and bakkies with canopies (before the European minivans arrived), and has crossed over into some SUVs and 4x4s below 3 500 kg gross vehicle mass (GVM) as well.

You just have to glance around you. In the city you'll see how adept South Africans are at using these little workhorses in numerous entrepreneurial and well-developed business enterprises. Take stock of these multi-purpose vehicles with side and rear-end advertising to indicate - to you, that is - who your competitors are and what they use to deliver.

Unless you're into heavy haulage, small

businesses usually use small vehicles. But businesses grow and so do the payload needs of entrepreneurs, forcing them eventually to migrate from the light commercial to the low-end sector of the medium commercial sector, which consists of bigger freight carriers and Sprinter type panel vans. And this is where the warning lights come on. Go over the maximum LCV 3 500kg GVM borderline and that's where additional cost factors come in - and it is not just in terms of vehicle purchase, insurance and maintenance costs. It denotes higher annual vehicle registration fees (which differ from province to province and can have a significant impact if the fleet increases sizeably). Also to be taken into consideration are the exorbitant toll fees proposed for Gauteng (to be rolled out nationwide) if the vehicle has more than two axles.

Regular shop or office staff can do the delivery rounds as part of their overall employment duties on a Code 8 licence. But go over 3 500 kg GVM and the staff member would have to progress to a Code 10 driver's licence (or higher) and a PrDP (professional driving permit), or be replaced



Remember, the more LCVs on the road, the higher overall transport costs are likely to be, especially when it comes to increasing fuel costs and toll fees. The converse is true about medium and heavier vehicles as you go up the payload ladder.

Obviously, with professional drivers coming through the back door, there is another consideration. They will be followed by unions instructing drivers when to go on strike whether they want to or not. With drivers demanding higher wages and better working conditions at the drop of a hat lately, this has also become a major consideration in whether to cross that 3 500 kg borderline or not.

All these factors come into play even more

back-up (dealership network), parts availability, parts pricing, and resale (trade-in) values, just to name a few. Table I (February 2011 LCV sales figures) reveals what the top-selling brands and models are.

Apart from sales to government departments, Naamsa figures don't reveal to the general public what commercial or industrial sectors these brands and their model variations dominate. Here you have to rely on the sales consultant and his (or her) blue chip client list or references. Again, look at people in the same business you are in – which vehicle have they chosen? Give them a call to find out why they like it, or why they want to get rid of it.

Another major fact to be considered is one that is applicable to every commercial vehicle sector. This is that size matters – in this case not only in terms of length, but in width and height as well. It actually starts in the LCV sector and depends on the type of cargo to be carried. LCVs can go where MCVs and HCVs can't, or are not allowed to go, such as townhouse complexes and places such as Cape Town's Waterfront and Randburg's Brightwater Commons, shopping malls where manoeuvrability of large vehicles could be a problem.

The next question is whether the cargo is feather-light and voluminous, and needs to be under cover – for which a bakkie with canopy or a proper van would suffice? Or is it compact

and heavy, in which case a bakkie with or without a canopy would be exactly right? Minivans with a payload of less than 500 kg, and predominantly petrol-driven, have become "fashionable" because of the low fuel consumption, car-like front interior, wind and rain-protected cargo space, high manoeuvrability, speed, and their versatility in carrying small items such as express parcels, flower arrangements and boxed computer equipment. For some, they also project a better corporate image than the "old bakkie".

A florist may also choose a standard or high-roof European panel van in order to avoid damaging tall, exquisite flower arrangements and plants, and to protect them from the



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by a professional driver who is required to have them (but often doesn't, as forgeries are accessible).

As business expands, it also presents a further choice relating to fleet management, of which route planning is a crucial part. Do I go for two small pick-ups/vans (two ordinary Code 8 drivers) which can cover a large delivery area at the same time with short delivery times? Or do I go for a single van or freight carrier over 3 500 kg GVM (with one professional driver) covering the same area but with more vehicle stops, meaning long delivery and turnaround times? This dilemma faces not only small enterprises, but big operators in the express (parcel) and FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) sectors as well.

than before as a result of transport operating costs expecting to escalate at an alarming pace this year and probably the next as well. Having decided to stick to LCVs, one faces the next consideration. Petrol or diesel? For many, it is a personal choice in the LCV category, but look at maintenance costs and fuel consumption.

A further consideration is which brand? And which model? A major indication of the overall popularity of pickups and vans is to look at Naamsa sales figures for this market sector, and the brands and models listed, plus their ranking in terms of units sold. You will find that those in the top ten are usually not the cheapest, but are selling well because of product quality, vehicle productivity, service



elements, or even to hang them from the roof interior. In contrast, garden service specialists tend to go for the pick-up – still South Africa's main workhorse – to carry one or two labourers, implements, fertiliser and garden refuse, provided that they don't sit on top of the load. Seating above the side-railing is now illegal as there is no prevention against falling off. Fines are now enforced for this practice.

Professional gardeners and landscapers are following a new trend towards single or double cab pick-ups which have a combined vehicle mass (CVM) higher than its GVM, provided by an engine which is strong enough (and qualifies) to legally pull a trailer so that the labourers can sit in the pick-up truck's loadbox. Some entrepreneurs will then use the double cab on its own as a family car as well.

The single cab pick-up and trailer is also an option for fruit and vegetable traders, many of whom cannot afford a medium sized truck. I have seen several sagging, crawling bakkies being stopped on the M2 on their way from Johannesburg's City Deep municipal market, and fined for being heavily overloaded.

Pick-ups are preferred by those whose



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kitchens, and even army vehicles (with radar and water purifying equipment) as seen at last year's Aerospace and Defence Show at Ysterplaat, Cape Town.

Both weight and height considerations typically apply to our small-time butcher, who will probably go for a 1-ton pick-up fitted with a refrigerated van body because he will need to hang heavy meat carcasses inside.

Alternatively, In Europe, a growing development is that of vehicle rental companies hiring out small refrigerated vans such as the Renault Kangoo on a three-year contract basis for £275 sterling per month. This is obviously for smaller consignments of perishable commodities, ranging from vacuum-packed cold meats and fish to medicine. When will we

become familiar with mobile workshops which can be based on a bakkie with a van box or a proper panel van. A recent development seen on our roads are small panel vans converted into mobile ATMs. What's next? Mobile slot machines outside the pub?

As stated, the choices and decisions are numerous, a veritable minefield to the uninitiated. Fortunately, the major, reputable commercial vehicle dealerships employ truck and bus consultants armed with industry application experience and laptops with which they can work out all the "what if" permutations in order to supply their clients (not just another customer) with transport solutions to move goods (and people) at a cost depicted in cents per kilometre (CPK).

This explains why some manufacturers, like Mercedes-Benz, sell panel vans like the Sprinter through their commercial vehicle divisions, staffed by people who look beyond vehicle ownership costs to include operating costs over the lifetime of the vehicle as well. They will even coach you, a lightweight, to move up the ladder and get into the middleweight and heavyweight divisions as your business grows, and if they think it is the wise and proper thing to do.

In a way the consultant represents the candlestick maker, according to this interpretation posted on the internet recently: Throughout history there have been three kinds of people necessary to facilitate major change in any given society. The "butcher" is the person willing to take whatever action necessary, despite the implications or nature of the act, in order to cause or further change. The "baker" is the person who takes what he has, despite how little or how much that may be, and uses it to support the others in the cause. And last, but by no means least, the "candlestick maker" is the person who illuminates the darkened path leading to change, and who keeps a beacon of light constantly burning to light the way for others to follow. ■

Table 1: February 2011 LCV sales figures

Light CV < 3501kg	RSA	EXP	RSA	EXP	RSA	EXP		
CHANA	87	0						
CHANA Maxi	1	0	CHANA Rainbow	4	0	CHANA Star	82	0
FIAT GROUP	34	0						
FIAT Strada	34	0						
FMC	1,638	160						
FORD Bantam	603	0	FORD Ranger	731	160	MAZDA BT-50	304	0
GMSA	2,783	93						
CHEV Corsa Utility	1,442	1	CHEV Lumina UTE	21	2	ISUZU KB	1,363	90
OPEL Combo	14	0	OPEL Corsa Utility	2	0	OPEL Vivaro	11	0
JAGUAR LAND ROVER	88	0						
L-R Defender	58	0						
MAHINDRA	180	0						
MAHINDRA Bolero	40	0	MAHINDRA Scorpio Pick-Up	109	0	MAHINDRA Xylo	1	0
MERCEDES-BENZ SA	200	0						
MERCEDES Vito	31	0	mitsubishi Triton	169	0			
NISSAN	1,866	429						
NISSAN Hardbody	0	420	NISSAN Navara	293	0	NISSAN NP200	816	1
NISSAN NP200 Hardbody	838	2	NISSAN Patrol PU	6	0	NISSAN Primstar	2	0
PCSA	9	0						
CITROEN Berlingo	1	0	PEUGEOT Expert	1	0	PEUGEOT Partner	7	0
TATA	128	0						
TATA Telceline/Worker	28	0	TATA Xenon	97	0			
TOYOTA	4,309	6,780						
TOYOTA Avanza	34	0	TOYOTA Hilux	3,040	6,700	TOYOTA Landcruiser PU	238	0
TOYOTA Landcruiser SW	43	0	TOYOTA Quantum	963	0			
VOLKSWAGEN GROUP SA	685	0						
VW Amarok	492	0	VW Caddy	129	0	VW TS Transporter Cr-Bus	22	0
VW TS Transporter P-Van	14	0	VW TS Transporter PU	28	0			

overriding consideration is maximum weight of the payload. These come in short wheel base (SWB) and long wheel base (LWB) versions and are also widely used in the construction, electrical and plumbing market sectors, as they can be fitted with lightweight frames to carry long ladders, steel rods and plastic pipes - as long as the overhangs are indicated by the usual red flags. Furthermore, the little chassis cab can now also be converted – ambulances (with special body), tow-trucks (with a crane), waste removal vehicles (with a skip), water-tankers (eg on farms), mobile

see this here!

Where palletised commodities have to be transported, the width of the space on the load deck between the protruding rear wheel hubs and the width of the entrances to a van once the back or sliding doors have been opened, will have to be taken into account. The latter is a strong selling feature of the super-long Toyota Quantum panel van, most of which can be loaded by forklift.

The versatility of panel vans to carry a wide variety of small goods and perform special tasks appears to be endless. We have