work horses for courses

Mazda’s BT-50 and Mitsubishi’s Triton are among the most popular Crew Cabs around. We put the latest to the test.

STORY BARRY GREEN

A UTE WITH part-time four-wheel-drive and a low-range, turbo-diesel engine and four doors takes some beating as a work horse. Mazda and Mitsubishi have two of the best going – the BT-50 and Triton.

The SDX tops the BT-50 range of seven four-wheel-drive variants in two trim grades and three body styles. Our test vehicle was the standard five-speed manual, equipped with Boss Pack (canopy, bull bar, alloy tray, ladder rack, tool box and water tank).

The GL-R is one of five four-wheel-drive Triton variants. Like the SDX, it comes with five-speed manual or optional auto, in this case a four-speed unit as opposed to the SDX’s five-speeder.

VALUE FOR MONEY

In manufacturer’s list pricing, the BT-50 is nearly $1500 cheaper but Triton claws some back in projected running and repair costs over five years, which favour Mitsubishi by about $600. Given the Mazda’s 10,000 km service intervals compared with Mitsubishi’s 15,000, this is not a lot of difference.

Calculations take into account likely consumable parts, comprehensive insurance and servicing and parts to 75,000 km (or, in the BT-50’s instance, 80,000 km). Triton is subject to Mitsubishi Diamond Advantage Capped Price Servicing for the first four years or 60,000 km of driving.

Residual value figures provided by Glass’s Guide extend to just two years for the Triton GL-R, but in comparing those for its sibling GLX, BT-50 buyers could expect to drop a further four and three percent in the fourth and fifth years of ownership.

According to official Australian Design Rule (ADR) figures, Triton sips 1.4-litres/100 km less. However, on test the reverse was the case, with BT-50 averaging 9.2 to Triton’s 10.5. Both vehicles benefit from a buyer-friendly warranty; Mazda offering 3 year/unlimited km and Mitsubishi 5 year/130,000 km deals.

Our pair comes well equipped with standard features: halogen lights, leather steering wheel cover, airconditioning, tilt (but not reach) steering, power mirrors and windows, auxiliary power outlets, ‘lights on’ audible warning, lockable glove box, passenger assist grips and centre console with storage.

Both also boast front door pockets, in-dash six-stack CD player with MP3 compatibility (BT-50 has six speakers, GL-R four) and auxiliary input, double wall tray, rear and side steps, tie-down hooks, under body protection and 16-inch alloy wheels, along with a full-size steel spare.
Bang for buck, it’s a close run thing.

**DESIGN & FUNCTION**

In keeping with the utilitarian function of this type of vehicle, comfort is more a case of adapting to what there is. There’s no cushion tilt or lumbar adjustment to the driver’s seat let alone passenger’s, but the Triton driver gets seat height adjustment. Both vehicles have a driver’s footrest, remote locking and immobiliser.

The rear bench seat is typical of dual cabs – fairly basic – with a lap belt only and no headrest for the centre passenger. The Mazda can claim a slightly more comfy interior, but the Mitsubishi provides better rear door access and handbrake set-up than the antiquated ‘umbrella handle’ example fitted under the BT-50’s dash, which is awkward to get at and operate.

Space wise, the Mazda boasts slightly more front and rear head room, front leg room and a wider rear seat, but Triton has the better rear leg room and longer seat cushions. Overall, the Mitsubishi is taller and longer, with nothing between the two in width. The BT-50 holds a slight edge in ute tray size, being 25 mm longer and slightly higher, although the Triton is 14 mm wider.

The pair is pretty well on a par for practicality and build and finish quality.

**ON THE ROAD**

On paper, the Triton – with 131 kW of power and 400 Nm of torque – has more grunt than the BT-50 (115 kW and 380 Nm). However, some of this advantage is nullified by the latter being lighter (1867 kg pays 1928 kg). In real terms, the Mazda can carry a payload of 1172 kg compared with 972 kg, but towing is a match at 3000 kg braked (provided the Triton is fitted with genuine accessory tray and ‘3-tonne’ towbar).

The Mazda has a sweet gearshift and happily holds a higher gear around town. Triton, by comparison, suffers a little turbo lag. It goes strongly when on boost, but doesn’t feel as eager. The Mazda won the performance arm wrestle in four of our six acceleration tests, with the Mitsubishi prevailing over 100 m and from 60-100 km/h.

By commercial vehicle standards, both vehicles offer an acceptable standard of ride. BT-50 feels firmer, and demonstrates less body roll. Triton’s rear end has more of a tendency to skip around over low traction surfaces when unladen, but its standard electronic stability control (something missing on the Mazda) provides reassurance.

Both run the segment standard front disc/rear drum brakes, though Triton felt it had a more progressive pedal, pulling up from 80 km/h in 27.8 metres to BT-50’s 29.1. The Mitsubishi proved quieter at idle and at a steady 80 km/h, with the Mazda less noisy under acceleration.

There is little between the pair in approach/departure/ramp over/clearance angles and off-road both are competent. Their on-demand four-wheel-drive systems are simple to operate and grip and drive levels are good.

**CONCLUSION**

While BT-50 wins narrowly, we’d recommend that you also test drive a Triton.

**MAZDA BT-50 BOSS SDX 4X4 CREW CAB**

**PRICE:** $43,555

**SAFETY:** Dual front airbags, side airbags, anti-lock brakes, electronic brake distribution, two child restraint anchor points (none fitted).

**KEY FEATURES:** Front fog lights, limited slip differential, Boss Pack (alloy tray, ladder rack, tool box, water tank and bull bar).

**ENGINE:** 3.0-litre, 4-cyl. turbo-diesel.

**FUEL (ADR figure):** 9.5 litres/100 km

**CRASH RATING:** ★★★

**EMISSIONS RATING:** ★★★

**FOR:** On-road ability, standard features.

**AGAINST:** Stability control not standard, no rear centre lap/sash belt.

**STAR RATING (OUT OF 5):** ★★★★★

**MITSUBISHI TRITON GL-R 4X4 CREW CAB**

**PRICE:** $44,990

**SAFETY:** Dual front airbags, side airbags, anti-lock brakes, electronic brake distribution, two child restraint anchor points (none fitted), electronic stability and traction controls.

**KEY FEATURES:** Sports suspension, nudge bar, front recovery point, cruise control, bluetooth.

**ENGINE:** 2.5-litre, 4-cyl. turbo-diesel.

**FUEL (ADR figure):** 8.1 litres/100 km

**CRASH RATING:** ★★★★★

**EMISSIONS RATING:** ★★★☆

**FOR:** Standard features, safety edge.

**AGAINST:** No rear centre lap/sash belt, pricing not as keen.

**STAR RATING (OUT OF 5):** ★★★☆☆