

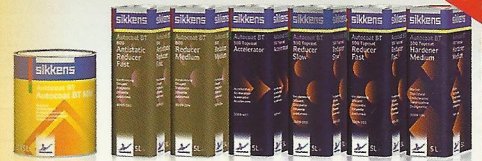
CV

COMMERCIAL VEHICLE

At the heart of the Indian truck & bus industry

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HIM targets SCV space

Story Kiran Bajad

The 69-year-old Hindustan Motors, better known as the maker of the iconic Ambassador car, is all set for a comeback. With two SCVs on the road and two more to join the fray, things could get interesting.



The Veer represents a rather curious attempt at creating the new out of the familiar.

In April this year, West Bengal-based Hindustan Motors launched Veer, a 0.8 tonne pick-up, built on the platform of one of the oldest-running Indian cars, the Ambassador. While the latter is best known for its application as taxis and government vehicles, the Veer will address the booming market for sub-tonne vehicles - albeit in the face of tough competition from the likes of the Tata Ace and the Mahindra Maxximo. While the prospects are good, what maybe the Veer's biggest challenge is the fact that it is based on a passenger vehicle platform, when compared to competing vehicles which have dedicated monocoque commercial vehicle platforms.

The Veer, priced at Rs 3.3 lakh ex-showroom Delhi is available in two models - Veer and Veer LX. While the Veer has a separate load tray, the Veer LX's load tray is seamlessly integrated with the front cabin. The vehicle is also available as a drive-away chassis (DAC) with front cabin. The Veer is powered by the same BS III-compliant 1.5 litre AVTEC (a fellow CK Birla group company) diesel engine that propels the Ambassador too. This vehicle can only run in tier II Cities and semi-urban areas until the end of this fiscal - the estimated time needed for the rollout of the BS IV compliant common rail version of this engine. 'We will be ready with a BSIV version of our 1.5 litre diesel engine by the end of this fiscal. This

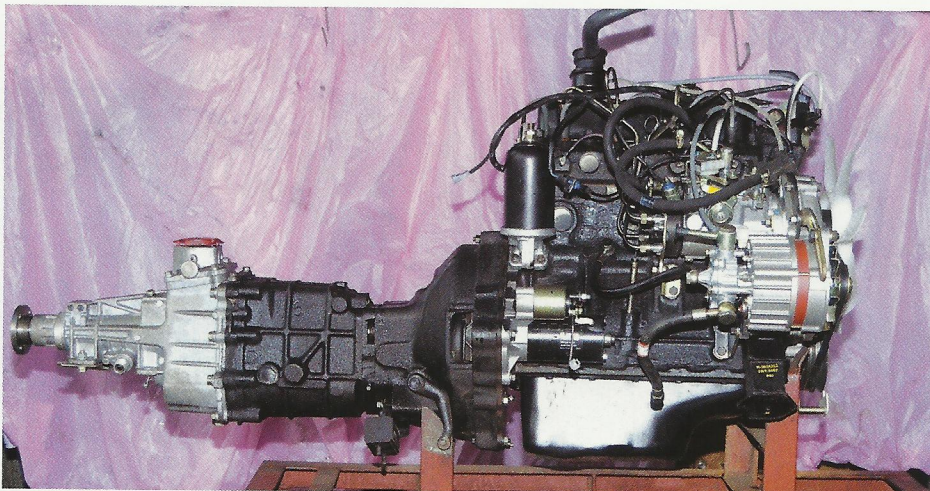
common rail engine shall have a fuel-efficiency of 18-20kmpl,' states Manoj Jha, MD, HM. The lack of a BSIV engine does not take away from the fact that this 800cc SCV has the best in class power to weight ratio. It compares favourably with the 16 hp and 25 hp for the Tata Ace and the Mahindra Maxximo respectively. But the corollary to this fact is that the Tata Ace and the Mahindra Maxximo are powered by much smaller engines - 700cc and 900cc respectively. Naturally, the penalty is fuel-efficiency. While, on an average, the Ace and Maxximo return figures of about 18 and 22 kmpl respectively, the



Manoj Jha, MD Hindustan Motors says that the BSIV version of the 1.5 litre engine shall be ready by March 2012.

Specifications **HM Veer**

ENGINE	
Type	1.5 ltr diesel
Displacement (CC)	1489
DIMENSIONS	
Overall Length (mm)	4280
Overall Width (mm)	1600
Overall height (mm)	1593
Wheelbase (mm)	2464
Ground Clearance (mm)	152 minimum
Kerb weight (kg)	1245
GVW (kg)	2045
Payload (kg)	800
Fuel tank capacity (L)	54
PERFORMANCE	
Max. Power (KW/rpm)	26.5/4000
Max Torque (Nm/rpm)	73/2250
TRANSMISSION	
Type	4 forward and I Reserve
CLUTCH	
Type	Dry Disc
ELECTRICAL	
Battery	12V 80 Ah 20 HR rate
SEATING	
Capacity	1+1/2+1
SUSPENSION	
Front suspension	Independent suspension with torsion bar springs and anti roll bar with hydraulic telescopic double acting shock absorber
Rear Suspension	Parabolic leaf springs with hydraulic telescopic double acting shock absorber & metallic bushes
STEERING	
Steering system	Rack & pinion
Power assist	Manual
Minimum turning radius (m)	5.4
BRAKES	
Front brake	Disc (Servo assisted)
Rear Brake	Drum with auto adjuster
TYRES & WHEELS	
Wheel rim type	Steel
Tyres	175 R 14C-PR (radial)



The 1.5 litre AVTEC diesel engine, puts out peak power of 35hp, enough for a decent power to weight ratio.

Veer can only notch up 14 kmpl. But, as of now, a BS IV compliant CNG version of the Veer is ready, pending only ARAI certification. The engine in question is the same 1.8 litre Isuzu that is at the heart of the Ambassador. It is unlikely that this engine will deliver fuel-efficiency significantly better than its smaller diesel counterpart.

So, undoubtedly, the Veer does have limitations. But, there are strengths too. The Ambassador has immense brand

recall and longevity. 'Recognition of the Ambassador brand is unmatched. The second fact which commercial vehicle users will appreciate is the car's longevity. Not very often do you find a car that lasts for 30 years. And for a car, that has lasted so long in the market, the availability of service and spares for any vehicle based on this platform is also not an issue at all,' states Jha. Also basically having a passenger car in the front will also offer much superior comfort vis-a-

vis other commercial vehicles. Nowhere is this clearer than in the three-seat bench provided in the front cabin. The Veer has leaf springs at the front and parabolic springs at the rear, further adding to the value proposition.

The clutches are of the dry disc type, while the brakes are of disc-drum combination, with power steering being optional. The tyres are 14-inch passenger car radials. These specifications are common across the diesel and CNG variants of the vehicle with a GVW of 2,045 kg. What is different is the marginal difference in payload and transmissions. While the diesel version has a kerb weight of 1,275 kg, that for the single cylinder CNG engine is 1,245 kg, leading to a payload difference of 30 kgs. In the same vein, the CNG variant has a 5-speed transmission, while the diesel has a 4-speed.

Thus far, the performance of the Veer has been mixed. 'Customers will always want a bigger load-carrying body and payload capability at as low a price as possible. But that said, they appreciate both the technological and practical



The Veer is available in two variants, with a separate as well as a tray integrated with the front cabin.



HM intends to introduce the passenger version of the Winner in less than six months.

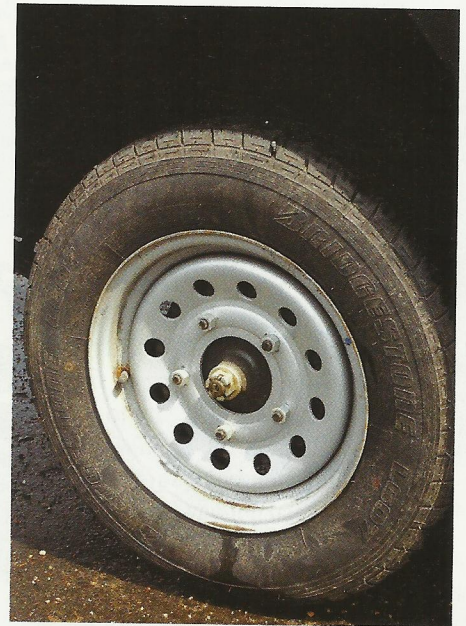
benefits afforded by the cargo-carrier,' states Jha.

WINNER'S TALE

The HM Winner, 'pilot launched' two years ago has also been making steady progress. Having undergone fine tuning the vehicle is ready to take on overloading (by reinforcing suspensions), the mini-truck is ready for a fresh stab at the market. HM is now focussing on increasing production capacity at 500 units, beginning with October. Right now, road shows across Bengal, Assam, Bihar, as well as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat and Maharashtra have been planned. Jha says, repeat orders from customers are an indication that the improvements in the Winner have been fruitful. Priced at slightly over Rs 4 lakh, the mini-truck is derived from Chinese company Shandong Shifeng's product. The cabin and certain chassis parts are sourced from China, while all the other major aggregates are sourced locally. The Winner is powered by the same 1.5 litre diesel and 1.8 litre petrol-CNG engines that are at the heart of the Veer. The other features/aggregates of the Winner are the same as those of the Veer. What are different are elements like payload and suspensions. While, the Winner XD Plus has a payload of 1,000 kg, the Winner 1.8 CNG has just 900 kg. Also, both front and rear suspensions are leaf springs unlike the leaf-parabolic

combination in the Veer. One other minor point of difference is that the CNG option of the Winner is also 4-speed unlike the 5-speed in the Veer.

HM intends to build on both these platforms. It plans a 7-9 seater passenger carrier on the Ambassador-Veer, on the lines of Tata Magic and the M&M Maxximo minivan. Another passenger carrier to be launched would be a minibus on the Winner platform. Both the passenger carriers are likely to be unveiled before the end of this calendar year. Beyond this, what is interesting is that the cargo carrier vehicle portfolio could itself be extended. 'AVTEC has a 2-litre



The Veer rides on 14-inch passenger car radials tyres.

diesel engine in its portfolio and both the Winner and the Veer have enough space in their engine compartment to take on a bigger engine. So, we cannot rule out the option of a 1.5 or 2-tonne payload vehicle in the future. However, the focus for HM at least for the next 12-18 months is to consolidate on the current crop of products,' states Jha.

PREPARING WELL

Most believe that part of the success of the Ambassador was due to the fully-integrated and time-tested plant at Uttarpara which still produces a large number of aggregates in-house. The plant,




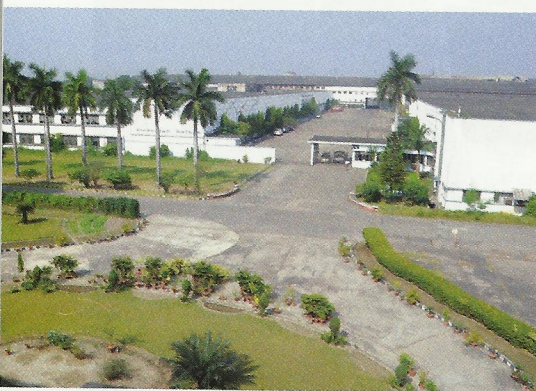
The Winner's cabin is imported from Chinese company, Shandong Shifeng.



Manoj Jha inspects the Veer and the Winner, during a roadshow in South India.

home to the Ambassador since 1948, will continue to make the Veer, while newer generation vehicles based on the Winner platform, shall be put together at the Pithampur plant. As of now, between the two plants, HM can comfortably reach a capacity of 2,000-2,500 units per month. 'With LCV segment outgrowing the rest of the CV industry, we see potential volumes of 500-1,000 units per month each for the Veer and the Winner. Therefore, we are investing in three areas, mainly on engine upgradation, manufacturing and equipment for the new products as well as capacity enhancement and troubleshooting capacity bottlenecks,' says Jha. Talking about expansion plans, HM plans to take the Veer, pan-India by March on the strength of its 100-strong dealerships.

With four products on their table, by the end of this fiscal, HM's dealerships are likely to be a busy place. But, these will still be very early days as the seven-decade old company steps into newer frontiers to take on strong competition in a much more demanding market. 



The Uttarpura plant came up as far back as 1948.

Specifications **HM Winner 1.8 CNG**

ENGINE	
Type	O.H.C CNG
Bore x Stroke,mm	84.0 x 82.0
No. Of Cylinders	4
Displacement	1817 cc
Max. Engine Output, KW@RPM	Gasoline Mode: 40.9 KW@ 4000 RPM CNG Mode: 36.6 KW @ 4000 RPM
Max. Torque. Nm @RPM	Gasoline Mode: 111.2 Nm @3000 rpm CNG Mode : 102.9 Nm@2400 RPM
STEERING	
Type & Brief Description	RCB
Steering Wheel Diameter,mm	430 mm
CHASSIS FRAME	
Type	Ladder Type
Long Member Size	Rectangular box
SUSPENSIONS	
Front	Solid axle beam with leaf spring & shock absorber
Rear	Leaf Spring
BRAKE	
Type	Hydraulic Dual circuit with TMC, vertical split & Vacuum assisted. Acting on all four wheels
Front	Disc
Rear	DRUM
TYRE	
Type	175/80 R14LT
FUEL TANK	
Capacity	54 ltr
DIMENSIONS (IN LENGTH IN MM)	
Wheelbase	2240
Overall Width	1600
Overall Length	4380
Overall height	2000
Front Track	1360
Rear Track	1340
Cargo Box Dimensions	2610 (L) X 1600 (W) X 350 (H)
WEIGHT (IN KG)	
Maximum GVW	2350
Kerb Weight	1450
SEATING	
Capacity	1 Driver + 1 Passenger
GEAR BOX	
Model	ROD SHIFT
No of Gears	4 forward one reverse.
Clutch	Dry DISC