

SCANIA HITS THE SWEDE SPOT

Ed Higginson finds that a big strong Swede has a lot to offer

Scania's New Truck Generation (NTG) has received awards all around the world since its launch in late 2016. As you come to experience the product range you'll find it provides choice from an impressive number of variants to ensure operators can find the right truck for their specific business.

Starting with the low height P-Cab with the 7-litre engine at 220 hp and 1000 Nm of torque, all the way through to the luxury Highline S-Cab with the amazing 730 hp V8 producing 3500 Nm, Scania can tailor a truck offering customers the most efficient, reliable and cost-effective solution possible.

Over the past 16 months, I've trialed Scania's R620 V8 and G500 in Euro5 form along the Hume Highway between Melbourne and Sydney. Following this experience was a run across the Nullarbor, covering 1800 km in two days with the same R620 V8 and a new Euro6 G500.

For both runs the G500 was loaded to a GVM of 56 tonnes, whilst the R620 worked at 66 tonnes. Both were ideally suited to their respective trailers and covered the trips in similar times, however, the 13-litre at 500 hp won on fuel economy whilst the R-cab won on driver comfort.

A common debate amongst truck owners, fleet managers, drivers and accountants, is whether you should buy the smaller and therefore cheaper truck to simply get the job done or pay a little extra for more horsepower and increased cab space.

This is where Scania's new R500 fits in nicely. After being offered one for the day coupled to a B-double and told we were welcome to take it wherever we liked, I only had one request, which was to have it fully loaded.

The Scania people were more than happy to assist, so I caught up with Simon Parker, the company's Regional Manager for Victoria & Tasmania to pick up the keys to a new R500 with the standard-height sleeper cab. It was also coupled to a new set of Freightliner B-double Tautliner trailers fitted with the latest EBS and fully loaded with concrete blocks to a GVM of 60.7 tonnes.

Heading out of the Scania's dealership in Laverton, I decided to take it on a common route I used to run with a local refrigerated trucking company that serviced Victoria running a mix of Volvo FH540s and FM500s, often running B-double trailers at a variety of weights.

The operation in mind is a good example of where Scania's R500 fits perfectly. With customers changing plans daily, the higher horsepower trucks could end up with the lighter loads whilst the smaller trucks would be forced to run at max weights.

Fitted with Scania's latest six-cylinder 13-litre Euro6 engine at 500 hp, it produces 2550 Nm of torque between 1000-1300 rpm. In comparison, the R500's key competitors, Volvo's FH540 and the Mercedes 2653 both produce 2600 Nm of torque so maybe its time we focus on torque rather than horses.

After working through the morning rush-hour traffic, we joined the Western Freeway and headed towards Adelaide to exit at Bacchus Marsh, before heading east into country Victoria.

Over the initial 50 km we hit some decent climbs and I quickly became concerned as the speed dropped well below what I'd have expected. However, after pulling over for a few pics in the only sunshine we'd see that day, I realised the truck was in Economy mode which lets the revs drop to as low as 950 rpm for maximum efficiency.

Thankfully, it was easy to flick the computer over to Standard mode so the truck came to life, letting you kick-down the accelerator to drop a gear as the truck dug into the hills, easily making a 20 percent improvement in speed over the steeper climbs and making the drive much more enjoyable.

The route through Gisborne, Heathcote to Rushworth for a stop at the bakery, then back through Murchison and along the Hume Highway to Laverton saw us cover over 400 km and gave us a great test in various conditions.

In terms of handling, the R500 is suburb. The Scania is fitted with steel parabolic-leaf springs under the front and two-spring airbags for the rear, with load transfer over a 3150 mm wheelbase. Our route had lots of twists and turns, rolling hills and plenty of potholes to unsettle the combination, but it always felt stable and smooth.

Combined with the excellent cab suspension and comfortable seating it provided a very smooth ride. The driving position is also lower than with some of the other flat-floor cabovers on the market, so it doesn't suffer from the same cab roll issues.

After the early morning photos, we soon hit rain that would follow us for the rest of the day. However, fitted with disc brakes and running Bridgestone tread all-round, the combination was always surefooted.

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The truck also had Scania's impressive R3500 retarder as well as an engine exhaust brake. With a simple toggle of the cruise control buttons on the steering wheel and downhill control set just 3 km higher, the speed was easy to control both up and down hills.

Scania has done an excellent job in working out the best cab layout, which is why it's one of my favourites with everything at your fingertips. It's also moved the light controls onto the door along with the mirror adjustments (all six are electronic), window and the central locking buttons which makes a lot more sense.

The steering wheel has the cruise control, downhill-speed control, adaptive cruise, radio with digital DAB, phone, horn, and truck information-system control buttons, plus a voice recognition option. This just leaves the indicators/wipers and retarder/Opticruise controls on the steering column stalks.

There is also an impressive Scania Infotainment system with a five-inch or seven-inch LCD screen including satellite-navigation as an option. The new truck gets plenty of charger points with USB, AUX, two 12-volt sockets, a 24-volt socket and a USB on the rear wall, so you can enjoy watching your iPad in bed.

As the R-series is seen as the premium highway spec, it also gets many more extras over the G. The spec' includes two tall fridges that can be set at different temps and its own inbuilt cab cooler that works off the truck's aircon with the engine switched off, plus an extendable lower bed for a full width, 1000 mm mattress. One of my few complaints is that with a window at one end of the sleeper and shelving at the other, you can't sit up comfortably in bed read or watch tv.

In terms of performance, when running at 60 tonnes across country Victoria the R500 never felt underpowered in Standard mode. In fact, with the help of Scania's Active Predictive topographical cruise it now sees what the road is about to do so knows when to hold gear, change down or drop into Eco-roll to keep momentum going whilst improving fuel economy.

If you plan to run over 65 tonnes or in steep terrain, you may want to pay the extra to jump into the V8 range. But for standard B-double work the R500 is the perfect balance between performance, fuel economy, comfort and price.

On the trip from Melbourne to Sydney last year, the G500 achieved a 2.11 km/litre figure running at 56 tonnes, then 1.86 km/litre across the Nullarbor. Across country Victoria running at 60.7 tonnes the figure was slightly lower at 1.71 km/litre, which is still good in comparison with other trucks I've used on this route.

Some may be put off thinking it's just a 500 hp engine, but the new Euro6 blocks are a lot more advanced and consequently they produce a lot more torque at lower revs than Euro5 trucks. They are proving to be reliable too, so Scania now offers a three year / 800,000 km driveline warranty plus a five-year free servicing package.

As Simon explains, "The 500 has been a standout engine in the range taking a bigger slice than we expected. It's such a gutsy engine and in the right application it has been exceptional on fuel, drivability and reliability."

Every operation is different so the only way to know how the R500 would compare in your operation is to put it to the test, but if your driver didn't know it was rated at 500 hp they probably wouldn't guess it. 

