

Mazda BT-50 Ford Ranger Dressed to thrill

Words by Godfrey Castle. Photos by Mark Samuel.

The Mazda Drifter BT-50 and Ford Ranger are almost identical towcars. What may sway your decision of which one to buy will probably hinge on whether you're an extreme sports fundi or someone who's more family orientated.

Hedging your bets!

Make no mistake, these bakkies are solid workhorses and dressed to thrill. They're both now fitted with

bigger 3.0-litre turbo-diesel power plants which means they should rate well up there with the market leaders. But they do have an identity crisis, which really strikes home when you're given both models to test simultaneously.

Confucius says when you want more market share and you have only one vehicle, you give it a different badge!

I guess that's called hedging your bets – an ideal theory for when you don't know which vehicle is better!

No matter which bakkie you choose, underneath the mantle of

badging, radiator grills, different headlights, soft furnishings and chromed or painted rollbars, they're effectively the same vehicle. Both have simply been tailored to meet different tastes and, arguably, different lifestyles. The Mazda BT-50 version is aimed at the younger extreme sports market, hence its racier seat upholstery; the Ford version is a more family orientated bakkie, whose owner builds rugby fields for his unborn child (see Ford's TV ad if you don't know what I'm talking about).

So once you've run your race in



your new Mazda Drifter BT-50, won a life partner, swapped the mountain bike for a ride-on lawnmower and a caravan, maybe you'll settle on the new Ford Ranger!

Come a long way

Bakkies have come a long way since they were first introduced as hard-working farm or delivery vehicles. They've moved up the food chain, becoming a lot more expensive, and vacating their original market sector to cheap Chinese imports that can get scratched, dented, driven into the ground and thrown away with a "who-cares?" attitude because they're relatively cheap.

"they are comfortable and simplistic"

The face-lifted Mazda/Ford, apart from the obvious identity crisis, is a solid package that now also offers a 3.0-litre four cylinder diesel engine that develops 115 kW at 3 200 rpm and 380 N.m. at 1 800 rpm. Being a "big four" cylinder engine, we found that these vehicles were not as smooth or quiet as similar diesel engines that have more pistons, but the torque generated suits these vehicles for towing purposes.

The Mazda's GVM is 6 kg lighter than the Ford's, but its licence mass

is 2 kg more – this really boils down to semantics, as both vehicles have a maximum recommended towing weight of 1 800 kg (the petrol version is 1 600 kg). With this in mind we opted to test it with a Jurgens Exclusive once again. We thought that this combination of towcar and caravan would bear interesting results seeing that we'd recently partnered the Exclusive with the Hummer H3.

The drop on the towball with this big caravan was 35 mm. We found that the towball height of 560 mm was a bit too high for our liking and therefore suggest fitting an appropriate drop plate. But before you do this, a tip would be to load the heavier camping gear – maybe the caravan tent – into the rear of the vehicle, as it has a firm suspension and a load would provide both a softer ride and better towball ride height. But as we always say, rather a hard suspension than a soft one. The rear uses old fashioned, durable leaf springs, and the front is equipped with modern torsion bars. This set-up provides for a rigid vehicle – a combination of serious workhorse coupled with the niceties of pleasant family transport.

Good all round

Though nice to drive, having good all-round visibility, I did find it was easy to fluff the gear change



Towing performance
Mazda BT-50 (3.0L CRDi)
Ford Ranger (3.0L CRDi)
Jurgens Exclusive

Car specifications

Engine

Diesel 3-litre Common-rail

Tare weight

1 798 kg

Power I.S.O (kW/revs)

115 @ 3 200 rpm

Engine torque (N.m/revs)

380 N.m. @ 1 800 rpm

Caravan

License weight: 1 380 kg

Gross weight: 1 700kg

Acceleration

0-60 km/h 7.74 sec

0-80 km/h 13.75 sec

0-100 km/h 28.34 sec

Overtaking ability

60-80 km/h 6.4 sec

80-100 km/h 13.7 sec

Top towing speed

123 km/h

Braking

100 km/h – 0 km/h 3.34 sec

Hill climb 200 m height

1 min 44.13 sec over 2 km

Fuel consumption towing

Steady 100 km/h = 15.7 l/100 km

Towball height

Requires three hole drop plate to get to 560mm

Drop on towball with 80 kg

35 mm

Could use a drop plate to get to

460 mm

Price:

Mazda BT-50: R311 990

Ford Ranger: R315 900

The Ford has silver double roll-bars, compared to the Mazda's matt grey single roll-bar.





Spot the difference! On the left is the Mazda, on the right is the Ford.

on the manual 5-speed gearbox. This occurred most frequently when changing from second to third gear under quick gear changes. For some reason I always found the gate to third gear – or didn't find the gate, for that matter. Acceleration from zero to 100 km/h took 28.34 seconds with the big 1 700 kg Exclusive, and while towing up Ou Kaapse Weg we clocked 1 min 44 sec - not at all shabby, and in fact quicker than the bigger petrol engine Hummer H3!

I would rate this particular Mazda/Ford model as the finest of the range to date; both vehicles are comfortable and simplistic. The 3.0-litre diesel has been too long in coming, and yes, you have a choice in style. There are higher side walls on the loading bay - again so that your lawnmower

won't fall out that easily if you are driving a Ford, or the quad bike won't get damaged if you're driving the Mazda!

Personally, I suggest you forget what the marketing people are saying, take a look at both these vehicles and decide on which interior you like best. Expect to find an MP3/CD/radio sound system and an above-average interior finish with carefully thought out locations for instrumentation and other equipment, depending on which model you choose. They are also available in four-wheel-drive and different cab options. The 3.0-litre diesel models tested here are priced at R311 990 for the Mazda and R315 900 for the Ford. According to NAAMSA, which monitors new vehicle sales in South Africa, the Ford "Mazda" version outsells the Mazda "Mazda" version. Yes, we agree, Confucius says...

