

# ROUND 'EM UP

**I**f you're pulling a big load, then, down the centuries, a few more horses have always made a big difference. Yet even the most experienced caravan enthusiasts and other towers may well raise their eyebrows at the subject of this Tunit conversion test. What we're talking of here is a relatively modest two tonne 3litre turbo-diesel pick-up from the Isuzu stable comfortably towing trailer loads of up to four tonnes and more!

Illegal, surely, and unsafe as well? Not with The Fifth Wheel Engineering Company's special HGV-style attachment that's installed in the back of the pick up, along with HGV-style air brakes powered by a compressor cunningly hidden in the spacious double cab. It allows the modest Isuzu Rodeo to legally, and safely, tow heavy caravan-style touring units, exhibition trailers, and trailers with anything from horses to mini-diggers aboard, up to way beyond the gross weights of any conventional trailer with normal towing attachments and overrun braking. The Denbighshire makers of the Fifth Wheel attachment, and a wide range of impressive bespoke designs of trailer units (ask them, and they'll design one) have focussed on a small number of matched towing machines, and the double-cab Isuzu Rodeo is a favourite of theirs. That's mainly on account of a particularly useful first gear that's significantly lower than that of rivals, thus helping low-speed manoeuvrability and to get such big loads rolling more easily. But on-road performance is obviously an issue with such big towed loads and Fifth Wheel Company Director Mervyn Parry-Jones came to Tunit in search of some extra grunt that would help keep up better with the general traffic flow, and also give some useful extra punch when the Rodeo was running solo.

## HEART OF THE MATTER

The standard Isuzu engine in The Rodeo is a somewhat dated but honest motor that's not exactly high-tech – unlike the common-rail unit fitted to the renowned Trooper – and it's specified at a modest 131bhp at 3,800rpm, with 206 lb ft of torque from 1,600-2400rpm. This broad band of torque is just the ticket for flexibility and pulling big loads, even though its vital statistics sound more in line with those of one of today's 2litre common rail engines. But the Tunit boys boast the expertise to coax some



The Isuzu Rodeo Pick-Up: After a few engine tweaks and an air brake conversion, it'll safely pullover four tonnes.

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usefully more realistic figures from this low-revving lump, and there's no reason to think otherwise after sampling many of their wide range of passenger car diesel conversions. So we went up to Tunit HQ to see if they could 'deliver the goods' in this somewhat specialised and torque hungry context. On the rolling road dynamometer, in standard tune, (with a newish, and tight, engine) power and torque clocked at 123bhp and 207 lb ft – and looked likely to fall well in line with the paper figures after a few more miles of loosening up. Attachment of the Tunit VP magic box and connection of its harness (horses again!) into the engine's ECU circuit is a relatively simple task, and we were soon in a position to see what unrealised potential the 3litre engine had up its sleeve. Like all Tunit conversions there's wide potential for adjustability (in most cases by the owner) to suit individual engines and requirements, and it took a few runs and adjustments to optimise the settings. During this process tailpipe emissions are also always carefully monitored – in this case being even more relevant, as no owner would want

to get the black looks, or even the ticket, that can be thrown at a towing machine that's holding up the traffic and belching noxious black smoke on account of over-fuelling!

## AFTER SURGERY

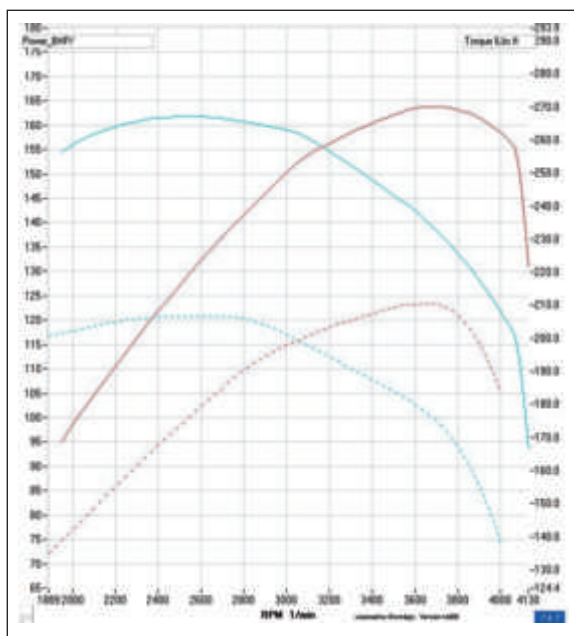
The crucial figures appeared on the dynamometer's VDU screen, and smiles appeared all round, as they declared 164bhp and 267 lb ft of torque, at around 3,700 and 2,500rpm respectively. In fact the torque was over 25 per cent up on the previous maximum all the way from 2,100 to 3,000rpm – enough to sharpen up the Rodeo's act without any doubt, although of course the real judgement would be down to how things actually felt out on the road! We weren't inclined to take the wheel of the Rodeo with a heavy trailer latched on for a run. We felt that only an experienced trailer driver should take the wheel of such a combination, even if Mervyn says that it's all pretty easy to handle with the added security of the fifth wheel system. But Mervyn's later-related impressions and experiences speak for themselves. He says that

# RODEO!



The dated, yet solid Isuzu engine had much more untapped power for us to try to harness.

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From 207 lb ft to 267 lb ft – giving up to a30% increase in hill speed.

there's more meaningful pick up at all speeds, making towing a wholly more comfortable and relaxed business; but his test run on a long uphill haul on the A55 dual carriageway into North Wales tells the story better than anything. In standard tune, with a two tonnes plus caravan-style residential trailer unit latched on, The Rodeo used to struggle up to 38mph flat out – a speed that might embarrass even the thickest-skinned (with apologies all round!) caravan enthusiast. But, after the Tunit conversion, the same combination was storming up the same long hill well over 30 per cent quicker at 51mph! That's a stunning improvement, and fitting testament to the difference made by the Tunit electronic wizardry.

#### BETTER ECONOMY

Mervyn also thinks that the Isuzu's economy is a touch better – even though he's averaging far better speeds – and that's a beneficial feature that's common to most Tunit conversions, according to owners. In fact Tunit conversions are now making waves in HGV circles, where fleet owners are boosting truck performance and yet saving as much as ten per cent on fuel costs – meaning tens of thousands of pounds every year!

Readers interested in the towing and



Air brakes are a must for 4-tonne plus!

trailer side of this particular feature can find The Fifth Wheel Company Ltd. on [www.fifthwheelco.co.uk](http://www.fifthwheelco.co.uk) – they are a young British family business that's growing fast by offering innovative solutions in the world of trailer transport by way of their fifth wheel conversions. There are, of course, a number of other similar pickups and utility vehicles that would benefit similarly from the Tunit treatment, which in most cases comes at a cost of £400 + VAT, and there's a wide range of conversions for every make of car, and many trucks. You can find details of all these at [www.tunit.co.uk](http://www.tunit.co.uk) or speak to a member of their technical sales team on 01257 274100.

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