

SCOPO...

PURPOSE, ITALIAN STYLE

BY JOE SAGE

The delivery van is a ubiquitous beast that sells in huge numbers. Generations of Econoline and Savana vans live in near-invisibility and near-anonymity. A few years ago, Ford shook up the scene with its Transit Connect, a small, affordable, fuel-efficient van conceived to connect, in Europe and the rest of the world, with its larger Transit van—which is soon to arrive here, too. Then Nissan joined the fray with their larger NV2500/3500 vans in the US, now being joined by the smaller NV200. There was some irony in this, as Ford—known for its big trucks—brought us their small van first, while Nissan—known for its small trucks—brought us their big van first.

Enter Chrysler Group LLC, with its large Fiat ownership share, now shaking up the market with a new Ram ProMaster lineup of vans. The series includes a variety of sizes and capabilities, all built off the same core—Fiat’s Ducato lineup. These are Europe’s number one seller, at over 4.5 million

units in over 30 years of service (with two million on the road today), but reskinned with a Ram face and manufactured within NAFTA, in Mexico.

ProMaster has the capacity to take on the larger vans, with Euro-maneuverability and fuel economy like the smaller ones. It claims best-in-class step-in height, headroom and flat width between wheel wells (thanks to its front-drive layout). Near-vertical sidewalls combine with both rear and side doors to accommodate a standard forklift palette load—a key part of our test drive in the working suburbs of Southern California.

Ram ProMaster vans are highly customizable to various commercial customers’ needs. They have been built with realities of the daily grind in mind, with headlights up and back, to avoid damage, and a three-piece front bumper, to save on repairs.

The seating position is not quite conventional, nor unconventional—just a little different. The high roof adds just 93 pounds. It handles and corners as well as the low roof model. It just looks tall—and loads tall. Models in the 2500 and 3500 range are all high roof; the 1500 is available with low roof, and its low roof version is available with the shortest wheelbase of the lineup. Expect an even smaller ProMaster City van within a year. ■

PROMASTER BASICS

ENGINES:

- 3.0-liter I-4 EcoDiesel with best-in-class fuel economy, high torque, long service intervals (174 hp / 295 lb-ft torque)
- 3.6-liter Pentastar V6 (280 hp / 260 lb-ft)

TRANSMISSIONS:

- 62TE automatic, enhanced specific to Ram ProMaster drivetrain characteristics.
- Optional diesel: M40 automated manual, new to North America.

FUEL ECONOMY RATINGS.....not yet released

MAXIMUM TOWING5100 lb

TURNING CIRCLE36.3 ft, 40.7 ft, 46.8 ft

ASSEMBLY PLANTSaltillo, Mexico

BODIES/WHEELBASES: 1500, 2500 and 3500; cargo van, chassis cab and chassis cab cut-away; 1500 has 118" or 136" WB; others have 136" or 159" WB; 1500 offers low roof; LWB on 3500 cargo van or chassis cab available with extended body; LWB on 3500 chassis cab available with extended frame.

BEST-IN-CLASS: Fuel economy; cargo capacity; payload; total cost of ownership; turning radius; interior ceiling height; step-in height.

DURABILITY: 16.2 million customer-equivalent test miles, with shocks "built for Detroit."

STARTING PRICE\$28,630

