



The stylish Daimler-Benz L2000 was introduced in 1931.
(Courtesy Daimler AG, Mercedes-Benz Classic Archive)

5000kg gross vehicle weight. There was even a choice of twin-cylinder engines, ranging from four to ten horsepower.

Whilst Daimler's truck competed head-on with the steam powered lorries of the day in England, Daimler found it difficult to sell his motorised trucks in Germany. So he focussed his initial sales efforts in Britain. In 1899 Daimler put the engine at the front of the vehicle for the first time – instead of being underslung – quite a revolution for the age.

Sadly, Gottlieb Daimler never lived to see his fledgling company grow and prosper, as he died early in 1900 and his friend of many years, Wilhelm Maybach, took over the

company. However, just seven years later, Maybach left the company, having established it as the leading European truck builder.

Both Gottlieb Daimler and Karl Benz were tough competitors in the car business and, whilst Daimler produced his first truck, Benz worked on what he called 'delivery vehicles' – the precursors of today's vans. Curiously, in 1923, three years before the two businesses merged, both firms developed, quite independently of each other, their first diesel-engined trucks, thereby initiating a revolution in truck propulsion.

The history of trucks bearing the Mercedes star has also been, from an

Installation of the first Daimler-Benz diesel engine was in this K3 5-tonner.
(Courtesy Daimler AG, Mercedes-Benz Classic Archive)



This double-trailer outfit operated in Namibia. (Courtesy Lex Meeder)

of the V8 engine. The eight-cylinder was given a longer stroke and a displacement of 14.6 litres. A derated base version developed 250hp; the naturally-aspirated version 280hp; the turbocharged version 330hp and a powerpack with turbocharger and intercooler cranked out an impressive 375hp. So, for the first time, Mercedes had a single diesel – with unchanged displacement – covering a power output band with a 50 per cent rise from the smallest to the most powerful version.

“The old 320hp V10 had relatively low torque compared with Cummins and Rolls-Royce Eagle diesels available in the UK at that time,” continues Colin Burton.

“So, when Daimler-Benz launched the V8 280hp powered 1628, it was advertised with the slogan ‘More torque – Less Revs.’ In addition, Daimler-Benz in the UK spent much time and effort getting axle ratios right for specific UK customer requirements. In many cases, differentials were changed at the pre-delivery stage. However, as UK market share increased, so it proved easier to get more influence over design and specifications coming from the factory.”

Alongside the boost in power, engineers also focussed their attentions on fuel economy, against the background of the Middle East oil crisis. One solution was the availability of a 16-speed transmission,



An unusual 8x4 rigid and three-axle drawbar trailer, spotted in New Zealand. (Courtesy Trevor Jones)



The off-road capability of the mighty Zetros 6x6 makes it the ideal vehicle for fire-fighting and emergency duties in areas that wouldn't be accessible to normal highway emergency vehicles.
(Courtesy Mercedes-Benz media library)

Going global

In the 21st century, Daimler has become the most dominant, innovative and far-reaching truck maker in the world. Unlike many other firms in the automotive sector, which have attempted to grow market share by acquisition, only to morph acquired brands and products into the parent company, Daimler has taken a much more flexible approach, achieving this goal by undertaking a number of clever strategic moves.

In fact, this flexibility has resulted in all manner of strategic alliances and partnerships, including straightforward acquisitions, and even the setting up of brand-new entities.

However, all have had one common thread: to help expand Daimler's customer base and ultimately increase market share.

Alliances and partnerships

Some of the most straightforward ventures have been alliances and partnerships with other truck builders. There have been a number of such relationships, and while some were little more than acting as a supplier of components, and some have long been dissolved, many are still active today.



As the world's largest truck manufacturer, Daimler AG builds a wide range of trucks for every conceivable market. (Courtesy Mercedes-Benz media library)

Terberg, Holland

A major construction boom in Holland in the 1960s, including major land reclamation projects, saw the need for a large number tipper trucks. Terberg was one of the many Dutch companies that started by reconditioning war surplus, US Army 6x6 REO and GMC trucks, and repowering them with modern diesels and new cabs.

Terberg built its first trucks in 1966 and sourced engines from Mercedes. After initially fitting a locally-sourced coachbuilt cab, it switched to using the steel Mercedes-Benz SF 1200 cab. Eventually, Terberg grew to the size where it had to register as a truck builder in its own right and, so, chose to standardise on Volvo components.



Dutch specialist truck builder Terberg initially used Mercedes-Benz cabs and engines, before switching to Volvo components. (Courtesy Lex Meeder)

FAP, Serbia

Fabrika Automobila Priboj (FAP) is a Serbian manufacturer of trucks and buses. Founded in 1953, the company enjoyed a long-standing relationship with Daimler-Benz, which provided engines and licences for many of the FAP-produced trucks.

Daimler-Benz granted FAP a new licence in 1975, which was extended to heavier trucks in 1978, being renewed again in 1986. FAP is still building trucks using the old, rugged NG cab.

Serbian-based FAP is still building a 21st century truck, based on the old Mercedes-Benz NG cab originally launched in 1973. (Courtesy Juraj Hlavac)



DICV also assembles complete knock-down kits of the massive Actros 4841 8x4 tipper. (Courtesy BharatBenz)

network or set up its own operation, Mercedes-Benz trucks were initially sold in India via an arrangement with Indian vehicle producer Tata.

The trucks sold well, quickly creating a reputation for reliability and longevity, both of which are crucial in the harsh conditions in which many Indian trucks operate. However, the market was slow to adapt to modern technology, and Tata continued to produce older Mercedes models, and even some Hanomag-based models, long after production had ceased elsewhere in the world.

For decades, just two Indian manufacturers built trucks locally – Ashok Leyland and Tata. Tata, at one stage, accounted for some 75 per cent of all trucks built in India. However, these were mostly light and middleweight vehicles.

By 2002, Daimler was at a crossroads in terms of further developing the Indian truck market, as it was becoming more and more frustrated with Tata's old school approach. So, in the end, each company decided to go its own way in developing future truck sales, and with Daimler electing to manufacture its own trucks alongside those built by Tata, the partnership was inevitably going to cease. In 2010, Daimler sold its 5 per cent stake in Tata and created Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV) – a 100 per cent subsidiary of Daimler AG – and began construction of a brand-new truck assembly plant in Chennai.

The company wanted to create a truck designed exclusively for the Indian subcontinent, so a new brand company was created – BharatBenz ('Bharat' being the word for land). The first new truck – a BharatBenz 2523 C construction truck with a gross weight of 25 tonnes and a power output of 230hp – rolled off the production line in June 2012.

The company's philosophy is to build trucks that are simpler than the high-performance trucks that ply European roads, but still well above the standards previously common

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