

Volvo vs Man

I am not an adventurous bloke. That's what everyone around me says of me. And when I think about it, I realise that may even be true to some extent. I haven't jumped off a cliff with just a stretchy bit of rope tied to my feet, neither have I conquered any mountains on foot. I am yet to embark on an impulsive month-long road trip, and I can't even think of travelling the world because I don't have a passport yet. But what I do have is a few out-of-the-ordinary dreams that qualify for my bucket list of adventures. And one of them is to drive a truck. A monster truck. So when an opportunity to drive India's most powerful 8x4 tipper comes along, I waste no time saying yes.

It is a gloomy October morning and my ride for the day is the Volvo FMX 440 8x4 tipper, literally standing tall at the truck maker's Hoskote plant premises in Bangalore. Launched in 2011, the FMX is the pride of Volvo's truck portfolio in India. And taking centre stage at its test track, it has a charisma all its own. Not only is the FMX the segment leader as far as power figures go, it

also leads the pack on value for money. So I'm really expecting this frontrunner stallion to give me a tough time on our first outing together.

Standing beside the beast, I am very excited and very anxious. Excited because this is a dream come true for me, to finally get behind the wheel of a Volvo truck. And anxious because I've never driven a truck before, so I know it can all go horribly wrong – for me and for everyone else present at the track today. Just then, Hari Babu, head of Volvo's internal competence development centre, comes up and gives me a crash course on everything I need to know to drive the FMX and live to talk about it.

Before we hit the track, I get a product briefing that includes tech specs, features and a warning that this thing is powered by a 12.8-litre, in-line six, turbo-charged, inter-cooled diesel motor that churns out a class-leading 435bhp and 2,200Nm of max pulling power. And that's a lot of power, I am told. All this is easy to digest, but what my tiny brain can't cope with is the gearbox. The FMX

BIG IS BEAUTIFUL

We decided to pit Man versus Truck, so Volvo sent in one of its prizefighting giants – and this is one humble pie we won't mind eating again



Cabin is at medium height. But it's still tall. Good thing I don't have vertigo, then



Words: Devesh Shobha Photography: Nitin Rose

Volvo vs Man



Live second axle helps turn this monster in tight spaces



At this point, I am already thinking of an immediate career shift



The left switch is for diff locks, right for engine braking

'I'M NOT EXAGGERATING — STEERING THIS MASSIVE VOLVO IS AS EASY AS STEERING MY DAD'S MARUTI'



SPECS

VOLVO FMX 440
8x4 TIPPER

ENGINE: 12.8-litre, in-line six, turbo-diesel
POWER: 435bhp, 2,200Nm
GEARBOX: 14-speed forward, 4 reverse
TURNING CIRCLE: 22,400mm (diameter)
TOTAL WEIGHT: 17,240kg
PRICE: ₹81.5 lakh (ex-showroom, Bangalore)
FUEL CAPACITY: 270 litres
MAX SPEED: 87kph

PROS: Looks awesome for a truck, driveability, cabin features, technology
CONS: No reverse camera

BOTTOMLINE: If you ever decide to change professions and become a trucker, this is the ride you want to go for.

8/10

440 comes with a 14-speed 'box and to use all those gears, there is just one gear lever complemented by two switches on it. I instantly know this is not going to be easy. More on that in a bit.

Fresh off the assembly line, this FMX 440 8x4 tipper looks as gorgeous as a mining truck is allowed to look. Volvo knows a thing or two about making good-looking trucks. Okay, you still can't take one to a social dinner outing, though. The FMX's all-grey cabin is also attractive and functional, for a truck in India. It's a well thought out layout and features adjustable seats and steering wheel, a huge dashboard, generous storage space all around and most importantly – it's chilled. Makes a truck interior so much more hospitable.

Once I comprehend what the various switches and knobs do, it's time to get the 17,240kg monster rolling. The 12.8-litre turbo diesel comes to life with an easy twist of the key in typical truck fashion. The engine is loud, things start to vibrate and I start to adjust the numerous external mirrors that will be my best friends on this drive.

The cabin is hard to fault ergonomically – I am astonished to find things precisely where they should be. I press the ultra-light clutch pedal, slot the 'box into first low, release the handbrake and get off the clutch. The revs build in a linear fashion and I have successfully got a Volvo truck rolling off the start line on my first attempt without stalling. That's an achievement in itself.

I am ecstatic, and surprised at how easy it is to drive this truck. By now, I'm grinning ear-to-ear. I engage second, then third. No stress at all. The throws are a bit harder, but I'm told that's because the 'box is brand new, and that it'll smoothen out with daily use. Since the tipper isn't loaded, we're carrying good speed and Hari eggs me on to shift into higher gears.

A few meters ahead, we approach a sharp turn and I'm advised to turn wide into the corner. By now, I've become overconfident, so I think I've turned wide enough, but I'm wrong. Luckily, the track has a margin for error and I continue unscathed. If Hari has been nervous at any time during the drive, he hasn't shown it – which has allowed me to concentrate on the job at hand.

By now, I've done loads of laps around the track and am clearly in my comfort zone. I find a relaxed seating position on my three-way adjustable driver's seat and despite things being on the stiffer side, the ride quality is impressive throughout. Sure, we aren't driving on city roads, but we can feel the independent cabin coil springs and shock absorbers working hard to filter out the bumps, along with the standard leaf springs on each axle.

There's a huge roundabout at the centre of the track, where I test the FMX's turning circle, the steering system and the grip from those chunky on-and-off-road tyres. Impressive on all three counts. I'm not exaggerating – steering this massive Volvo is as easy as steering my dad's Maruti, thanks to the dual power-assisted steering wheel.

Anyway, so we move next to a drill that needs the truck to be driven in a figure eight while carrying decent speed. I'm not sure I can do this without embarrassing myself, but the Volvo takes me by surprise again – it does tight turns without breaking a sweat. Also, I get my first taste of the dual-line air brake system on this Volvo, which feels reassuring.

After driving around for a while, I feel confident that I have just become a phenomenal full-time truck driver (they are paid really well). But just then, I'm told



the FMX comes loaded to the gills with all the latest technologies and driver aids to make life much easier on the move. Like the live second axle, for instance.

I don't realise this at first, but as I'm turning into a corner, the second axle also steers along with the front one, which is quite helpful in tight situations. There's also the option of engine braking at the click of a button, a gear ratio splitter for occasions when the truck is loaded to capacity, and diff locks (again, button-driven). These are just some of the features this tipper comes loaded with.

All in all, a day well spent. And it just shows how far the truck industry in India has evolved, with Volvo making a healthy contribution to the growth of the sector in India. I am convinced that without all the software and hardware assistance, my first taste of big-truck driving wouldn't have been anywhere as sweet as this. Of course, at ₹81.5 lakh (ex-showroom, Bangalore), this is an expensive buy. But we aren't really authorities on truck pricing. What we can judge is the fun factor, and on that count, this Volvo FMX 440 8x4 has impressed us no end. In the epic battle of Truck vs Man, Round One goes to Truck. **TG**



The beast was easily tamed, thanks to all the built-in software