

Isuzu Ute aims high

Isuzu Ute reveals its 'committed goal' to match HiLux sales Down Under

By JAMES STANFORD

ISUZU Ute Australia (IUA) has revealed a bold long-term goal to match Toyota's HiLux sales in Australia.

The company, which began selling its D-Max one-tonne ute – a mechanical twin to the Holden Colorado (nee Rodeo) – in Australia 12 months ago, competes head-to-head with Toyota for market leadership in Thailand and believes the same can happen here ... in time.

IUA is owned by the finance arm of Mitsubishi Corporation and has a close relationship with Isuzu Motors. Both believe the D-Max ute can match Toyota's HiLux in Australia, according to IUA managing director Hitoshi Kono.

"That is our committed goal," he said. "Our bosses were personally involved (in Thailand) so they know that that kind of situation never happens overnight."

IUA has sold 2434 D-Max units in its first year, which the company says was close to its original target and a good achievement given the impact of the global financial crisis that broke around the same time the model was introduced.

The company is aiming to push past the 3000-mark this year, and has announced a sales target of 5000 vehicles next year.



D-Max

The monthly average since start-up has been 202 vehicles, although sales picked up after the first few months and September stood at 339.

This means IUA has a long way to go to match the all-conquering HiLux, which has averaged 2932 monthly sales so far this year.

While it will not mention any such goal, IUA is also likely to be aiming to overtake the sales of the Colorado, which hails from the same plant in Thailand. So far this year, Colorado sales are averaging 1197 a month.

Mr Kono said there was no pressure to catch up to Toyota in a hurry. "Recently the top executive from Mitsubishi Corporation visited us and the message was, 'Think about the long-term,'" he said. "He told us not to just try to do something to show off the result at the cost of long-term benefit."

"Of course, for the benefit of our dealers and ourselves, we need to promote a certain number, but more importantly we need to make the customer happy."

Mr Kono was not involved with the

Thailand operation but has studied it and believes a solid dealer network, reliability and a fuel economy advantage are behind the vehicle's strength in that market.

"The dealer network is rock-solid," he said. "We start from 50 years ago and deal with the grandchildren of the dealer. We maintain a very small dealer network, so each dealer is making a very good profit, so everyone has a great appetite to make a reinvestment for the future."

"The product durability is so good. For the Thai people it is like buying a house."

IUA started with 38 Australian dealers in October 2008 and has since grown to 62. Seven satellite outlets, with both sales and/or service operations, have been appointed in small locations.

IUA is aiming to have 70 dealers and 20 satellite outlets in operation in 2010, and by 2012 it wants 80 dealers and 30 satellite outlets.

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