

Honda's definition of MUV Makes Alan Greig

See Big Red

By Alan Greig



Little did I know as I headed out to Port Waikato for the launch of Honda's new "Big Red" MUV, I was entering "Honda Territory".

Now firstly, you're probably wondering what the heck an MUV is, and secondly, you're trying to work out how you missed seeing the signpost indicating the turn-off to Honda Territory.

Well, the first one's easy.

An MUV is a Multi-purpose Utility Vehicle, a TLA (three letter acronym) which encompasses all sorts of things from grounds care vehicles to six- or eight-wheel-drive all terrain vehicles.

Now, at this point you're thinking "we already have a TLA for those types of vehicles - ATV".

Well, kinda. While the term ATV may have initially been used to describe all the many and varied types of All Terrain Vehicles, these days ATV usually refers to what would more commonly be called a quad bike.

Many manufacturers shy away from calling their products quad bikes as this term seems to connote "toy" rather than "serious tool of the trade".

The term MUV identifies the vehicle as having two side by side seats and is "driven" rather than "ridden".

Even so, there are MUV's designed for all sorts of applications from maintaining golf courses to tackling near impossible terrain.

So where does Honda's "Big Red" fit into all this?

Quite simply, it has far more grip than a glorified golf cart, but it stops short of being a swamp-busting amphibian.

Pretty much anyone who needs to access remote corners of a farm or other large tract of land and have the ability to carry a passenger and an amount of gear, will find the Big Red near on unbeatable.

Whoa! Hold on there a minute, soldier - that's a big call! You mean to tell me this thing's better than my 4x4 flat-deck ute for getting around the farm?

Yup. And I'll tell you why in a mo. First, let me answer question two.

"Honda Territory" is a name that was dreamed up for an ad

campaign by Honda's advertising boffins in Canada.

Turns out Honda's ATV's and MUV's were then - and are still - the number-one selling range of farm (ranch) oriented vehicles. Apparently, we borrowed the nickname and it stuck.

Anyway, back to business.

Why should I buy an MUV, and more particularly a Big Red, when I already have a ute? Simple.

Me and a bunch of journo's who know a thing or two about mud, put a gaggle of these things through their paces and were mightily impressed.

Yes, we did manage to get a couple of them stuck, but only after repeatedly driving up the same slippery bank so many times, the surface turned to mush. Even then, it was only a case of reversing down and getting a bit more run-up.

Due to their clever design, the Big Red's are very, very stable on all angles from steep up-hills and down-hills to sidelings you wouldn't normally think about traversing in the trusty ute.

All components - including the engine and transmission - are mounted as low as possible, creating a very low centre of gravity.

Add to this a wide track and long wheelbase, and you start to see where the aforementioned stability comes from.

Positioning the wheels at the very outermost points of the vehicle means approach and departure angles are amazing. You could just about drive a Big Red up the side of the barn if you wanted to.

The power is provided by a 675cc liquid cooled single cylinder, EFI four-stroke engine, mated to a three-stage automatic transmission.

While the driver doesn't have the option of choosing their own gear (you basically get the choice of forwards, neutral or reverse), you can select from a number of transfer case positions.

With options for 2wd, 4wd (rear diff lock) and 4wd (front and rear diff lock), there is an option for any terrain from mild to tough.

Even in 2wd, I was surprised how far this thing could go. Mounting the drivetrain longitudinally means fewer components



are required to get the power to the front and rear wheels, meaning less weight to move around.

Braking is via discs all round, and the on-board computer controls the transmission to provide engine braking.

Meanwhile, the double wishbone suspension is making sure the tyres stay in contact with the ground.

Interestingly, Honda's engineers opted for short travel suspension with sway bars to maximise stability as opposed to the long travel suspension normally associated with the more sports oriented MUV's.

Now, if you are dubious about this setup (like I was), being from the "Long-shocks and Soft-springs School of Off-Road Suspension Design", I can assure you it works fabulously and gives you the utmost confidence to take this thing over some pretty gnarly terrain.

From a convenience standpoint, you get a decent size tray, which is completely flat and big enough to put a 1200mm pallet into.

The tray is strong yet light, and tips via a hydraulic actuator. Tie down rings are mounted in each corner. There is also a waterproof 12v socket, and an in-cab glove box for storing small items.

The cab is relatively roomy, and features a number of safety items such as the four-pillar roll cage, side body netting, plastic half doors and three-point ELR (Emergency Locking Retractor) seatbelts.

Opting for the BigER Red, means you get a few extra goodies like a towbar, LCD instrument panel, polycarbonate windscreen, fabric roof cover and rear mesh load screen.

So it sounds like there are lots of good features on a Big Red, but surely my 4wd ute - or my ATV - can do all that stuff?

Well, yes to an extent; but don't forget, your ute is a high centre-of-gravity road vehicle that can be used on the farm, and an ATV only has a small load carrying capacity, unless you like the idea of manoeuvring a trailer around on slippery slopes. Conversely, Big Red is a farm vehicle which, when required, can also be used on the road (for short distances).

It is far more stable on the soft stuff than any ATV or road-going 4wd vehicle, due to the wide footprint and low centre of gravity.

The reality with any piece of machinery is if you try and make it suit lots of applications, you inherently build in compromises.

Only when you engineer a product specifically for one purpose, and one purpose only, does it truly excel at what it was designed to do.

Now, I've done a lot of off-roading in recent years, and I must admit I had some doubts about this little machine. But I'm pleased to report Big Red far exceeded my expectations, inspiring confidence and getting the job done with ease.

I even had a lot of fun! Try one for yourself, you'll see. Prices start at \$27995 + GST.

