THE LAUNCH of the new U-Truck platform, in the making for 3 years, ushers in a whole new way of building trucks at Ashok Leyland. It marks a turning point in what this Company has been doing very well for nearly six decades. It cues a radical organisational transformation in terms of products, processes, attitudes and customer engagement.

The ‘U’ in the U-Truck stands for the customer focus that has become a mission at Ashok Leyland. R Seshasayee, Managing Director, says “The U-Truck is a sublimation of our in-depth understanding of the customer, his requirements, his pain points and converting our insight into a product platform best-suited for him. It is an innovative, future-ready platform that will set a new benchmark in terms of a holistically superior trucking experience for all.”

In terms of design, the effort has been to application-optimize the U-Truck products so that operating costs of customers are brought down which in turn improves their business viability. “Each and every aggregate and component has been engineered and validated to meet certain pre-set performance requirements,” says R R G Menon, ED-Product Development. Starting with the joggled or cranked frames with deeper sections that can house larger, more powerful engines and are optimised to reduce weight so that the customer can carry more load. “Simply put, the U-Truck offers the customer a huge menu from which he can pick the engine, gear box, axle and suspensions of his choice” Menon added.

The future-readiness of the U-Truck is reflected in its sweeping electronic architecture that uses multiplexing to drastically reduce the number of harnesses and wiring. The instrument cluster will feature a bi-lingual LCD screen with a simple trip computer to advice the driver about fuel consumption and road speed patterns while the Gear Shift Advisory System will help optimize both speed and fuel efficiency. An OBU (On Board Unit) – ALERT – will open a two-
Leyland Direct is the one window for all consumers to contact Ashok Leyland directly. It offers services like handling sales queries, parts queries, service queries, providing technical support, booking servicing, giving candid feedback amongst others. This service is first of its kind, offered in vernacular languages and with a strong service network ensuring assured and efficient solutions to every consumer.

Amongst the bevy of services offered under Leyland Direct, is a unique service - Tatkaal - which takes consumer engagement to a new level in the Indian consumer vehicles market. All it takes is a call and be sure that a response team reaches a stranded customer within four hours anywhere on the Golden Quadrilateral and restores the vehicle back on road within 48 hours, with a committed compensation for any delay.

Thanks to the modularity of the platform, the Company is endowed with the agility to respond quicker to specific customer demands than ever before. “The modularity gives us speed,” says Vinod Dasari, Chief Operating Officer, “it helps us to control our inventories and we can help our vendor partners to plan their inventories better. On the manufacturing front, it will cue our transition from stock-and-sell to make-to-order system.”

“Tatkaal assurance of a response team reaching a customer in 4 hours anywhere on the Golden Quadrilateral and restoring the vehicle back on to the road within 48 hours, with a committed compensation for any delay.

“Thanks to the modularity of the platform, the Company is endowed with the agility to respond quicker to specific customer demands than ever before. “The modularity gives us speed,” says Vinod Dasari, Chief Operating Officer, “it helps us to control our inventories and we can help our vendor partners to plan their inventories better. On the manufacturing front, it will cue our transition from stock-and-sell to make-to-order system.”

“The U-Truck is a win-win proposition for both the customer and our channel partners” said Rajive Saharia, ED-Marketing. “For the customer, the attributes of quicker speeds, more trips, improved fuel efficiency, greater comfort and safety and more choices of fully-built options translate into higher revenue, lower operating costs and hence better profitability. Reliable aggregates and interfaces with proper matching of consumables ensure long and synchronized service intervals. This, along with our bouquet of service offerings, will help our channel partners to service our customers a whole lot better” he added.

Straddling the entire range of tractors, tippers and haulage trucks in the 16 – 49 tonne segment, the U-Truck will transform the Company’s trucks over a 3-year horizon - the first phase of which will see the roll out of 25 models and a host of variants in 18 months starting April 2010.

The trucking world is changing and changing fast. It is a whole new order that is emerging and the U-Truck will be the vehicle to drive Ashok Leyland into the future.

The U-Truck is designed for high uptime and profitability. Vitaly supplementing the product in this objective are a bouquet of service products covering the entire product life cycle.

– Rajive Saharia, Executive Director – Marketing

U-Truck is truly inspired by the customer and shaped by his needs. It offers a holistically superior customer experience. It will transform Indian trucking.

– R Seshasayee, Managing Director.

The modularity of this innovative platform will slash time-to-market and enable us to quickly respond to customer’s unique needs.

– Vinod K Dasari, Wholetime Director.

The proud team behind the making of the ‘U-Truck platform, at the launch.
Neptune Engine: Many ‘NEW’s

The U-truck will feature a completely electronically governed engine range.

The all-new Neptune 6-cylinder and 4-cylinder engine range (160-380 hp) are entirely CRS electronic. The low friction, high torque NEPTUNE engines have been globally benchmarked for lower operating costs, lower maintenance, longer life, higher vehicle availability, better comfort and to achieve world class performance.

The contemporary Neptune engines have been designed and developed entirely by Ashok Leyland engineers from a clean sheet with technical assistance from AVL – an Austrian powertrain and combustion expert design house. A case of Indian frugality and ingenuity meeting European technology and discipline.

The fully loaded 8-litre, 6-cylinder and de-contented 5.3 litre, 4-cylinder engines are modular with high degree of component commonality. While the bore and stroke are 112 mm and 135mm respectively, among other features, Neptune features four-valve single overhead camshaft, unique top down cooling, wet liner with top end cooling and a noise optimised design. The unique trussed block allows peak firing pressures of 220 bar. The Neptune engine range uses latest third generation Bosch common rail fuel injection system which operates at 1800 bar pressure, and also sports advance features like cruise control and on-board diagnostic capability. The ECU controlled ALEBS (Ashok Leyland Engine Brake System) in the high power 6-cylinder range enhances the safety of the engine apart from improving the brake and fuel efficiency.

The Neptune base architecture is with cooled Exhaust Gas Re-circulation (EGR) meeting BSIV emission standards with an option to either upgrade to BS V or re-engineer to BS III with minimal changes.

Also, interestingly on account of their high power density, the 160 to 230 HP Neptune 4-cylinder engines can easily substitute the 6-cylinder H-series engine in that range.

The project was executed on the ‘integrated platform’ concept with time-bound implementation, demanding high commitment by a dedicated lean team.

The programme was implemented through partnerships with suppliers right from the concept design stage, and not to mention early involvement by the various extended functions within the organisation through continuous interactions.

“The contemporary Neptune engines have been designed and developed entirely by Ashok Leyland engineers from a clean sheet with technical assistance from AVL”.

– Murali Saketharaman, SD-Neptune Program