



**Tom Berg**  
Senior Editor

*What's this foreign truck doing in the hands of an agency of one of these United States? Helping West Virginia's Department of Highways maintain roads and bridges, and plowing snow and spreading salt in the winter.*

And it's a mostly American truck, assembled in Williamstown, W.Va., from components mostly made in the USA – enough to meet Buy America requirements in state and municipal contracts, though some major items come from Japan.

This 2010-model 338 conventional-cab dump truck is one of 175 units Hino is building for the highway department. The dealer, Matheny Motor Truck Co. in Mineral Wells, won the contract with a bid that was \$3,000 per truck less than the nearest competitor, according to Mike Matheny, the dealership's owner. So far the customer is very pleased.

"That truck's built better than any truck in any factory I've ever seen," declared Bob Andrew, director of the Equipment Division for the state's Department of Transportation. He listed good outward visibility, the stout



**This compact but tough Hino 338 is one of 175 ordered by West Virginia's Highway Department. The 2010 model has old wing-like grille bars; new 2011s have blockier styling. Bug and stone shield is part of the customer's specifications. The Henderson body with corrosion-resistant stainless steel bed should last two lifetimes of hauling rock and spreading salt.**

cab, and the proven and reliable six-cylinder diesel as some of the truck's attributes. "That's why I think it's the best truck goin' right now."

Andrew's department tested out a single Hino truck last year. He and others liked what they saw, and feel good about ordering this home-built batch. The initial Hinos with pre-2010 diesels will be followed by another single unit to test the urea-injection system on its 2010-legal engine. Partly due to the new, costlier engine, a 2011-model truck lists at \$12,528 more than the one I drove, he said. So he figured he saved the state's taxpayers more than \$1.2 million by ordering those 175

PHOTOS: TOM BERG

# drive



## Hino 338 Dumper

trucks with the pre-10 engines.

Hino got its start in the U.S. in the early 1980s by importing low-cab-forward models that earned a reputation for reliability and long life. However, early cabs rusted in climates where salt was used on roads, so better steel was substituted. Most of those who owned those cabovers loved them, but sales always stayed low, because most North American truck buyers prefer conventionals.

Early this decade Hino switched to conventionals, assembled first in California and now in West Virginia, and sales climbed in response. In April, a Hino 268 was named Medium-Duty Truck of the Year in the American Truck Dealers' second annual judging, of which I was a part. That truck carried a reefer body. The one I drove for this test had a dump body.

**A sizable state order for work- and snow-plow trucks comes with a testimonial for build quality.**

### **The truck**

Bob Andrew first listed "good visibility for the driver" as a desirable feature, and that matched my first visual impression. The windshield is huge, and the hood slopes steeply downward so the driver can see everything up front. Door windows are big, so visibility to the sides is also good.

But that big one-piece windshield glass also made me think it might pick up stone fractures and be expensive

# test drive



**Interior is a pleasant but busy place, with radios on the dash and controls for the box, sander and plow taking space to the driver's right. Allison lever-type selector reads R-N-D-5-4-3-2-1, so driver can catch just the gear he needs during plowing and other work.**

to replace. In fact, in this truck there was a chip on the passenger side of the windshield. Andrew told me his fleet doesn't see a lot of windshield damage and that the chip I saw was the first he'd heard of with the young Hinos. But he had Dan Taylor, manager of the station to which our test truck is assigned, check a replacement windshield's cost. Taylor reported that new glass is priced at \$185.35 and a new rubber seal at \$87.30, plus a little labor to install them – all told, not a lot of money.

## Tough bodies

Like the trucks they're replacing, the Hino dumpers haul rock for road building and maintenance, like tarring and chipping of old asphalt, and are used for snow plowing and ice control in the winter. Those duties are reflected in their specs, which result in a compact but rugged package. Overall length is only 22.5 feet including the 10-foot-long Henderson dump body. The body is stainless steel so it can haul a good load of salt – 3 tons more than a V-bottom insert – without



**Straight-through (not bolted-on) frame rails extend 23 inches forward of the nose to accommodate the plow mount. Heavy steel plow adds to the weight on the front end, so the Meritor steer axle's capacity is 14,000 pounds.**

33,000 pounds, the truck's gross vehicle weight rating. The capacities of the Meritor axles were 14,000 pounds front and 23,000 pounds rear, enough for a 37,000-pound rating, but Andrews indicated he chose the axles more for durability than for carrying weight. The front, though, does get heavy when a wide steel plow is hung. A plow weighs as much as 2,400 pounds, though the latest ones are shorter and lighter, at 1,800 pounds.

corroding.

A body with a stainless steel bed costs somewhat more than one of mild steel, but it resists rust and doesn't have to be painted and repainted, noted Dave Biczek, president of Ace Truck Equipment in Zanesville, Ohio, which supplies the bodies for this contract. Andrew expects the body to last 10 years, then another 10 on a second new chassis. He said he's following the lead of the DOT in neighboring Ohio, which went the stainless route about a decade ago.

The Hino's hefty frame includes 23-inch straight-

through rail extensions ahead of the nose to support the Henderson plow mount. The plow itself was absent on this warm, breezy day, but a hanger jutted out several feet and I had to remember to stop short of vehicles ahead of me at traffic lights or I might've speared 'em in the rear.

The "33" in the 338's designation means

# test drive

The “8” in the designation refers to the 8-liter inline six-cylinder diesel, rated at 260 horsepower and 660 pounds-feet. JO8E-VB engines are made in Japan and shipped in containers to the Williamstown plant. This engine’s B50 life is 500,000 miles, meaning at least half of them should still be running without many repairs at half a million miles. Hino claims that this is longer than any other comparable engine from any competitor, and so is the recently announced basic engine warranty, five years and 250,000 miles.

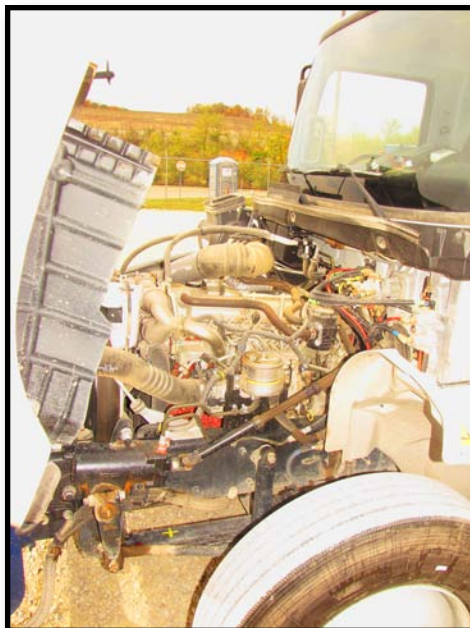
Fully trimmed cabs also come from Japan, though in the not-too-distant future they might be made in North America, executives said. Already sourced in the U.S. are most other components: the aforementioned axles, plus transmissions, springs, tanks, hangers and thousands of other items. Frame rails come from Hino’s parts plant in Arkansas. They arrive pre-punched and ready to take crossmembers, suspensions, tanks, powertrain mounts and everything else for each truck.

Andrew said he was impressed by the build quality in this plant, and he liked the lack of robots. Human beings use lift-assist equipment, power tools, computer tracking and skill to precisely assemble the trucks. Many workers were trained in state-funded classes; a handful of Japanese supervisors from the mother company ensure that things are put together correctly, but top managers are American. About 200 people are now employed on one shift with five nine-hour days. That will expand as sales climb.

## The drive

The engine in the test truck was a pre-2010 model with a diesel particulate filter but no exhaust aftertreatment. Hino’s EPA 2010 engines use selective catalytic reduction with urea injection, and these were going into the chassis on the line when I was there in mid October. The aftertreatment apparatus is housed in a compact cube under the cab’s floor on the right side. Pains were taken to keep the back-of-cab area clear for easy mounting of bodies.

The engine runs through a 3500-series Allison 6-



**JO8E-VB 8-liter diesel is gutsy at lower speeds but, with an Allison 6-speed and 6.14 rear-axle gearing, it runs out of revs and breath at about 65 mph. The engine’s warranted for five years or 250,000 miles – the longest in the business, Hino claims.**

mashed the footfeed, and I felt guilty doing that because this was about the top end of the tach’s green range.

The short 152-inch wheelbase was not much longer than many full-size pickup trucks, so the truck was pretty nimble. Turn-arounds were quick and easy, thanks partly to the outward visibility discussed earlier plus a good set of mirrors, and fairly fast power steering. The cab sat high – a function of the strong underpinning – which made me feel like a tugboat captain. I can imagine that this really is a good plow truck.

With windows up – easy, because they were powered – the interior was quiet, marred only by rattling of the added-on controls for the box, plow and sander, which you’d expect in a plow and work truck. The cab interior is tall and wide even if it and the nose are not especially handsome, but the chrome-plated grille with its wing-shaped bars brightened the truck’s nose.

The big, stylized “H” logo replaced the old winged shield a few years ago. The H might seem to mean only Hino, but someone told me it also represents a sun rising over water, as on Japan’s flag. To this they could add some stars and stripes, because these trucks have a lot of American in them, and they’re being embraced more and more by American truck users who appreciate quality. ■

speed automatic, which makes the truck easy to drive while cushioning the driveline. An Allison drives pretty much like the tranny in your car or pickup: Select D and go, or R if you want to go backwards. This selector lets the driver pick 1st through 5th and hold it to control speed during plowing and other steady speed work. The detents are close together, and I had to look at the selector to see what gear I was choosing. So I usually just left the tranny in D and let it decide when to change ratios, which was usually around 1,800 or 1,900 rpm.

This was not the quickest truck I’ve ever driven, but it was no slug, either. With nothing in the dump box, acceleration was fast enough to keep up with traffic in town, and it cruised nicely on nearby highways and out on I-77. The rear axle’s gearing is 6.14 to 1, and I found that 60 mph was about the best steady speed, with the engine spinning at 2,000 rpm. Another 300 revs got us to 65, but it wouldn’t stay there on uphill unless I