MAHINDRA QUANTO — CLEVERLY EFFICIENT & COMPACT

The practicality of a seven-seater utility vehicle, the dimensions of a premium hatch and the driving manners of an SUV in one vehicle may sound far-fetched. Putting these doubts to rest is the all new compact SUV Quanto. Mahindra & Mahindra’s (M&M) Quanto earns the distinction of being the world’s first sub-four metre compact SUV. In addition, the vehicle brings forth technologies seen only on premium vehicles till now, reflecting the company’s quick technical progress. We tested the Quanto to get an insight into the how well M&M leveraged its existing technology and resources to come up with the Quanto.
INTRODUCTION

Based on the Xylo platform, Quanto retains a fair share of the vehicle properties in the form of design, mechanicals and underpinnings. While it may visually come across as a smaller version of Xylo, it’s much beyond that. The Quanto is M&M’s attempt to lure people away from premium hatches and entry-level sedans, while making them believe that they’re in an SUV.

In the Indian market, where recent trends suggest most people would want an SUV/UV over any other vehicle, a compact SUV makes great business sense. The sub-four metre size and a 1.5 l engine means consumers will need to pay only 12 % excise duty. Adding to that M&M’s years of experience in this domain gives potential consumers every reason to believe that this could be a game-changer. Whether the Quanto does so requires an insight into various aspects of the vehicle.

DESIGN

For a vehicle based on an existing platform, it’s quite natural to bear design similarities and same is the case with the Quanto. The vehicle looks almost like the pre-facelift Xylo right up to the B-piller. The front fascia is rather unexciting and very utilitarian and could definitely look better with lesser space between the grille and hood.

The side profile looks more acceptable and better integrated, providing the vehicle with a good stance. The high ground clearance significantly helps the Quanto project a SUV-like look. The rear has undergone a complete design change and is the best looking profile too. The high-mounted tail lamps have been neatly merged with the design and the spare wheel lends the rear with a dynamic stance. The primary reason for the spare wheel adding to the looks is the good looking wheel cover.

Overall, the Quanto comes across as a functional design, with a few good looking touches. However, the vehicle could’ve done better with a little difference to the front if it is to appeal to the young buyers, like the commercials suggest.

POWERTRAIN

Quanto’s strongpoint is the powertrain technologies it offers, which are mostly seen on vehicles a couple of segments above. The vehicle features a 1.5 l mCR100 three-cylinder engine with two-stage turbocharging, making it the first 1.5 l engine in the world to have two turbo units. The engine is a derivative of
M&M’s mHawk engine found in the Xylo and is paired with a start/stop system to enhance fuel-efficiency. Peak power is rated at 100 hp, while torque is 240 Nm between 1,600 and 2,800 rpm.

The three-cylinder layout has its benefits and drawbacks. The key advantage is the high power density at about 67 hp per litre leading to better efficiency. For a diesel UV, this figure is truly impressive. The other benefit is lower weight and fuel consumption. However, as expected the NVH levels from the three-cylinder engine were quite high. The moment one starts moving, the sound and vibration is prominent, especially in the first gear. Even while cruising at about 80 km/hr in fifth gear, the sound is a bit bothersome. Although the company claims to have used a hydra mount and tuning dampers to lower the NVH levels, the Quanto doesn’t score well in this area.

The highlight of the engine though, is the inclusion of two turbochargers, something usually seen on premium vehicles. Both turbo units are integrated in a single manifold with an ECU-controlled by-pass valve. While it’s interesting to see an Indian company develop such technologies, the way the turbo set-up has been established is even more interesting. Instead of going the widely adopted route of using the smaller turbo throughout and the larger unit for boosting power, M&M went the opposite way. During low-engine speeds, exhaust gases are passed through the larger turbo, also known as the high-pressure turbo. This unit is designed to reduce turbo lag and offer more torque at lower engine revolutions.

During high engine speeds, the ECU kicks in and changes the exhaust gas flow through the by-pass valve. These gases are now passed through the smaller or the low-pressure turbo, which has been designed to increase the power output. While driving, some of these effects are visible but some are hard to spot. Power comes through in a strong and linear manner but tapers off a tad too early at about 3,500 rpm. The in-gear acceleration though is appreciable and makes city-driving quite easy.

However, the twin-turbo set-up doesn’t remove the turbo lag completely. Until one reaches about 1,700 rpm, there is noticeable lag, which is accompanied by significant vibrations. Once post this rpm mark, the engine performs a lot better and offers decent levels of performance between second and fifth gear. During our test-cycle, we recorded a 0-100 km/hr run in 18.8 seconds using a handheld GPS device, while vehicle-indicated average fuel efficiency was 14.2 km/l.

The five-speed 5MT 320 transmission is the latest from the company and uses ball-bearings to lower power loss and enhance efficiency. The overall shifting experience leaves a fair amount of room for improvement. The shifting isn’t smooth and slotting gears needs applica-
tion of some force. The reverse gear particularly is hard to slot in and takes some time getting used to.

The overall performance of the powertrain is acceptable but could’ve been a lot better with some more refinement and better performance at the top end. The key positive for us is the development and introduction of technologies such as twin-turbocharging. This is the first time M&M has developed the technology and we expect it to get refined at a quick pace.

INTERIOR

The interior is quite expectedly similar to the Xylo and hence quite functional and spacious. The front seats offer good lateral support and overall comfort. Using the same wheelbase as Xylo allows the Quanto to offer good space all around. Leg room is good at the rear as well, and offers more comfort than some hatchbacks of the same price range. One strange design flaw we noticed was that of the front head rests. Surprisingly, they’re positioned at an angle matching the incline of the seat. This means that the head rests are almost unusable because using them would require one to raise his/her head to the angle of seeing the headliner.

The overall plastic quality isn’t appreciable and might not go very well with some potential consumers. However, what the Quanto loses in terms of feel and quality, it makes up for by offering good space and seven seats. Yes, seven seats on a sub-four metre vehicle! The third row consists of two opposing seats and surprisingly they’re quite usable for short trips. Although more suited to kids, adults can use the seat with average comfort for short in-city trips. The seating arrangement in our opinion will drive Quanto’s sales more than any other parameter. We expect it to be successful in Tier II cities and small towns, where large families are abundant. In such places the option of moving the entire family at the cost of a hatchback will quite definitely overshadow aspects such as refinement and styling.

DYNAMICS & RIDE

Positioned purely as a family-mover, one shouldn’t expect agility and sharp handling from the Quanto. It behaves well in a straight line and doesn’t dive much during braking. Through the corners and turns it stays well-composed at sane speeds although there is a fair amount of body-roll. From a people-mover perspective, the Quanto handles well and doesn’t leave much room for complains.

The ride quality is on the softer side and will be welcomed by people sitting in the middle-row. The vehicle rides well over broken surfaces and does insulate the bumps pretty well. What filters through though on every bump is a combination of squeaks and rattles, which wouldn’t be appreciated by many.

OUTLOOK

The Quanto, despite being based on the Xylo, is a huge technical leap for M&M and the supply base in India. From a segment perspective, the Quanto has no competition and is expected to add significantly to the numbers. Within three weeks of its launch, the Quanto already received more than 5,000 bookings, thereby testifying our belief.

The overall value for money quotient of the Quanto is high and will force many people in the hatchback segment to give it a look. The engineering effort definitely deserves an appreciation for thinking beyond the usual. The only area where the Quanto fails to deliver well is refinement and interior quality. With better NVH, improved plastics and a slightly better front, the Quanto can taste more success in the long-term, when competition catches up.

All said and done, M&M has once again led by example, like in the case of the XUV 500. Moreover, it’s an indication that the company is investing in the right technology in pursuit of its global ambitions. The Quanto is available in four variants and is priced between ₹5.82 lakh and ₹7.36 lakh, ex-showroom, Thane.

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