

## Big Chev blazes in at Dubai show

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It's big, it's brash and it's built on a rugged truck chassis – Chevrolet's new TrailBlazer was launched today at the Dubai international auto show and will reach South Africa sometime early in 2012 to challenge Toyota's market-dominating Fortuner.

Perhaps even the Jeep Cherokee.

Certainly it is no Sandton kerb-dimber: this is a serious SUV, to be built in south-east Asia in either two or all-wheel drive (the latter with a low-range option) to carry seven adults pretty much anywhere while towing - as Matt Noone, director of design for GM do Brasil announced at a pre-launch dinner - "just about anything".

### LADDER CHASSIS, LARGE LOADS

Dubai, of course, is the king of dune-driving countries so it was apt for this SUV to be launched there; almost every other vehicle on its road is an SUV. Chev calls the TrailBlazer "our toughest, most refined, mid-size sport utility vehicle" and you can bet it has the pedigree to back up that claim.

The car was designed and developed (in Sao Paulo, Brazil, by Noone and a team of 230 people) in parallel with the new Colorado truck that was also launched at the Dubai show, its rugged ladder chassis designed to handle way more than its official load capacity. South Africa's rugged off-road conditions shouldn't, then, worry the new TrailBlazer.

As Chev emphasised at the launch: "The new-generation TrailBlazer combines the hauling and towing capability of a body-on-frame SUV with the ride comfort and efficiency of a crossover.



**CHEV'S OFF-ROAD CHALLENGERS:** Dubai, king of the off-roading world, played host at its international auto show to the launch of the Chev Trailblazer.

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"It shares the chassis architecture of the Colorado though tuned to combine heavy-duty off-road capability with refined city driving."

Regard it as the Chev Captiva's bigger brother: where the Captiva is an SUV for modest rough-stuff and gravel back roads, the TrailBlazer is the relative who stops for nothing.

The unit on show in Dubai was a full-on 4x4 fitted with GM's new four-cylinder, 2.8-litre Duramax diesel engine whose variable-geometry turbocharger, GM says, aims for "an optimal combination of

**YOU'LL SEE IT IN THE TRAFFIC:** The new Chev TrailBlazer is a full-sized SUV - no messing about with names here. Just point it and go.

performance and fuel economy". And, as Brad Merkel, GM's global vehicle line executive for mid-size pick-ups and utilities told me on the show's sidelines, the TrailBlazer will also be available (depending on market) with a 2.5

Duramax diesel or either of two petrol engines – a 3.6-litre V6 or a four-cylinder 2.4.

GM South Africa is still mulling over the choice of vehicles.

However, shades of Isuzu – a long-time associate of GM in South Africa – are still to be found in the breeding of the TrailBlazer, inasmuch as the ladder chassis is concerned. If you thought the KB bakkies were tough, then that DNA has been passed on to the TrailBlazer.

Noone said: "This SUV is completely new, from the chassis to the sheet metal. It's a vehicle to bash about in with its chassis supported by a five-link rear suspension. The body is sculpted, not boxy – very much a total package."

It has aluminium detailing and the new Chevrolet "face" and bonnet shape in common with all other modern Chev products from the baby Spark upwards.

"The cabin is premium and excellently packaged," Noone added. "There are three full rows of seats and we've paid a lot of attention to detail. Arrival and departure angles for off-roading are steep and the TrailBlazer has a high ride-height."

The launch vehicle also featured two iPads suspended from the roof and outlined with blue lighting; whether that feature will make production remains to be seen but what is certain is that the two rear rows of seats will fold absolutely flat and be able to take a lot of punishment with tough-looking backs to handle heavy loads.



**FRONT-ROW COMFORT:** There are three rows of seats in the TrailBlazer but comfort up front will be exceptional.

"It is a reflection of the importance of the Middle East market for General Motors that a vehicle as important as the TrailBlazer is making its global debut at this show," said GM Middle East operations president and MD John Stadwick.

"Without question, the new TrailBlazer will be one of the biggest and toughest members of the Chevrolet family – the perfect vehicle to take on the Middle East's competitive midsize SUV segment.

"Although this is a show vehicle, the overall design is faithful to the production version that will arrive in Chevrolet showrooms in 2012. The TrailBlazer will be the ideal fit not only for every place around the world where it will be sold."



**SEVEN MINUS FIVE = A HUGE LOAD BAY:** The second and third rows of seats in the TrailBlazer fold with gravity - no wrestling with releases and springs.

Merkel again: "The growing markets of the world want flexibility. That means power and capability combined with comfort and efficiency. The TrailBlazer does it all. You can tow anything, go anywhere, comfortably seat seven and do so with the fuel efficiency associated with a smaller, less capable, vehicle. It's the complete package."

A power dome in the bonnet, GM says, gives the SUV a purposeful appearance in

support of the high dual-projector headlights. Other distinctive styling details include:

- Highly detailed sheet metal in the bonnet, door panels and rear quarters.
- Front and rear LED Chevrolet signature lighting in the sculpted aluminum decorative bezels;
- Custom dual-finish 20" aluminum rims fitted with Cooper Zeon LTZ tyres.

- Exterior mirror-mounted diode indicators.

Noone enlarged further: "The TrailBlazer delivers a great combination of capabilities, from negotiating trails to city driving and we wanted to convey that visually. There's an obvious sense of muscle in the design,

"From every angle the TrailBlazer looks agile and athletic."

The Trailblazer combines car-like characteristics with the boldness expected of an SUV. The seven-seat cabin has two right-at-the-back seats but, Noone said, "they weren't an afterthought – people can sit there comfortably for long trips"

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