



FIRST DRIVE

IVECO: S-WAY NP 4X2

Iveco is of the opinion that its stylish new S-WAY and its Cursor 13 gas engine offer a winning combination. We took one out for a day to see if it lives up to expectations

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Commercial Motor It's widely accepted that in the coming years the road transport industry will rely on a variety of different fuels as it embarks on its journey towards net zero. While Iveco believes that electrification and hydrogen will both ultimately prevail (and indeed is investing heavily in both power sources via its partnership with Nikola), it also thinks gas, in particular biomethane, will have a massive role to play.

Jorge Asensio Lopez, medium & heavy country product manager & alternative propulsions lead at Iveco in the UK, is of the assumption that demand for gas-powered trucks will steadily ramp-up, reaching a peak between 2030 and 2035. He cites numerous reasons for its growing popularity, the key one being sustainability. From a well-to-wheel perspective, he says biomethane produces 95% less CO₂, 85% less NO_x and 90% fewer particulates than an equivalent diesel truck. He also points out that gas trucks have a lower total cost of ownership than diesel, to the tune of between 10% and 40% depending on gas prices.

"So if you're looking to decarbonise, it's the only cost-effective solution available now," he says.

Iveco is no newcomer to this sector, having launched its first gas-powered vehicle in 1994. Since then it has sold 35,000 CNG- and LNG-powered trucks and buses. Its latest offering is the S-WAY NP 4x2. Although it's available in the UK in both LNG and CNG guises, it's the latter that's proving the more popular. And that's the truck we choose to spend a day behind the wheel of.

MEET THE TRUCK

Not only is the S-WAY undoubtedly the best looking Iveco ever built, but it's arguably one of the most attractive trucks on the market. This demo vehicle, with its Active Space cab, looked particularly resplendent in Metallic Boreale Blue.

It should come as no surprise to learn that the S-WAY is winning the truck maker new customers. We have spoken to Iveco sales people who, having spent much of their working lives knocking on closed customers' doors, are getting people pounding on their doors instead.



LIKES AND DISLIKES

- ✓ Stylish exterior and vastly improved interior
- ✓ Cost-effective decarbonising
- ✓ Quieter than a diesel truck
- ✗ The 325-mile range won't suit all applications
- ✗ Gas engines aren't as torquey as diesel
- ✗ Gas filling network is still very patchy

LIKES AND DISLIKES

Truck makers are a sensitive bunch! In the same way that proud parents won't hear a bad thing said about their kids, they don't like it when we criticise their vehicles. Over the years we have probably upset Iveco a few times with our write-ups. While we always wax lyrical about its drivelines, we aren't quite as enthusiastic about its interiors. We've lost count of the times we've mentioned cheap plastics, squeaks and rattles when reviewing the Stralis and the EuroTech/EuroStar before it! However, as we climb into the S-WAY's cab, we're immediately reminded that things have moved on considerably. Finally Iveco has a cab interior that lives up to quality of the rest of this truck.

Everything feels well screwed together, and the abundance of soft-touch dark plastics are to be applauded. It's a far cry from the Stralis it replaced, and is on a par with some of the best of the competition.

FILL HER UP

The S-WAY NP CNG 4x2 tractor has a range of about 325 miles, so inevitably our day of driving would entail refuelling. Although still patchy, the UK CNG filling station network is expanding all the time, and we chose to fill up at CNG Fuel's new Avonmouth station. With 14 pumps, it's the largest public access biomethane filling station in the UK.

Having experienced filling a truck with LNG, we were anticipating a similar set-up, and were half expecting to be kitted out in full protective clothing. But this couldn't be further from the truth. It's simply a case of attaching the filling nozzle to the tank, pressing start, and waiting for a few minutes. It's not only vastly easier and safer than LNG, but it's every bit as quick as filling a diesel tank, and far cleaner too.

While an S-WAY NP does command a higher price than a diesel-powered equivalent, for the past five years gas prices have on average been between 30% and 40% less than diesel. What's more, the government has said the current fuel duty differential between gas and diesel will remain in place until 2032. So, with this in mind, operators should be able to recoup their extra spend relatively quickly. In fact, according to CNG Fuels CEO Philip Fjeld, a typical payback period is between 18 months to two years.

Since its launch we have been fans of the S-WAY, and in this guise, it not only looks great, but ticks both the sustainability and TCO boxes too. We reckon Iveco is onto a winner.



CNG FUELS

CNG Fuels is Europe's largest supplier of 100% renewable biomethane to the transport industry, and according to CEO Philip Fjeld, it's expanding fast. It already owns and operates 10 public access sites across the UK, and from Q4 2022 will be opening one per month. Ultimately, he says, it will have a network of 100 filling stations. The sites, which are open 24/7, 365 days of the year, are monitored remotely. Because they are unmanned, they lack retail or toilet facilities.

The biomethane CNG Fuels produces is a bi-product from the decomposition of food and animal waste, and according to Fjeld produces between 91-92% less greenhouse gases (GHG) than diesel when burned. However, within the next 18 months it will switch to producing biomethane from manure, which will move this figure to 100%, and will ultimately be GHG negative.

When CNG Fuels produces its biomethane, it is injected straight into the grid. A precise record is kept of how much it supplies, and it can then dispense that amount to its customers from its grid-connected sites. So, although it produces 100% biomethane, the actual gas that enters your truck is exactly the same stuff that flows into your domestic cooker – which is roughly 3% biomethane. Doing it like this prevents CNG Fuels from having to deliver biomethane to its sites by road.

The curved dashboard is smart and modern, and incorporates a multimedia screen that controls the audio, phone and sat nav.

Like the rest of the controls, it's incredibly simple and intuitive to use. Unlike some competitors' trucks, you don't need to read the handbook (or be aged under 25) to decipher how everything works.

There is a slightly raised engine hump, but it's only 95mm, and certainly doesn't impede cross-cab access. □

VEHICLE SPECIFICATION

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Make and model | Iveco S-WAY AS440S46T/FP CNG 4x2 |
| Engine | Cursor 13, 6-cylinder |
| Maximum power | 460hp @ 1,600rpm to 1,900rpm |
| Torque | 2,000Nm @ 1,100rpm to 1,600rpm |
| Gearbox | ZF TraXon 12-speed |



ON THE ROAD

Having inserted the key we press the start button, and the Cursor 13 engine springs into life. Gas trucks are supposed to be significantly quieter than diesel ones, but at tickover we can't tell a difference. Then it's just a case of selecting 'D' on the dash-mounted transmission control, and off we go.

Being a petrol engine, the 460hp Cursor 13 doesn't have the same torque levels as its diesel equivalent. And a lack of low-down grunt is immediately noticeable when we pull away. It's not underpowered, far from it, it just has a slightly more lethargic response to a heavy right foot.

On the motorway it behaves impeccably, and it's here that we notice how much quieter it is than diesel. On a couple of steep hills on the M4 the 36-tonne outfit drops about 10kph. It doesn't lug like a diesel engine, the 12-speed TraXon transmission choosing to drop down to 11th earlier than we would have expected. But it turns out to be the correct choice, and we are wise not to interfere with the manual override.

We're not big fans of the speedometer, which isn't particularly easy to read, especially when wearing sun glasses. However we soon find a button on the dashboard which, when pressed, illuminates a large and easy-to-read digital speed display instead.

Rumour has it that within the next year the S-WAY will get an interior refresh. Presumably this will mean the analogue dashboard will be replaced by a digital version, as seems to be the fashion these days. We wouldn't be surprised if an electronic handbrake and optional digital mirrors are on the cards too.

Perhaps this truck's strongest point is its ride and handling, both of which are flawless. This example was riding on air all-round, and proved to be totally unflustered on some particularly rough road surfaces.

We were impressed with all-round visibility too. And even though the rear-view mirrors are huge, they don't cause much of a blindspot on the approach to roundabouts and junctions.

