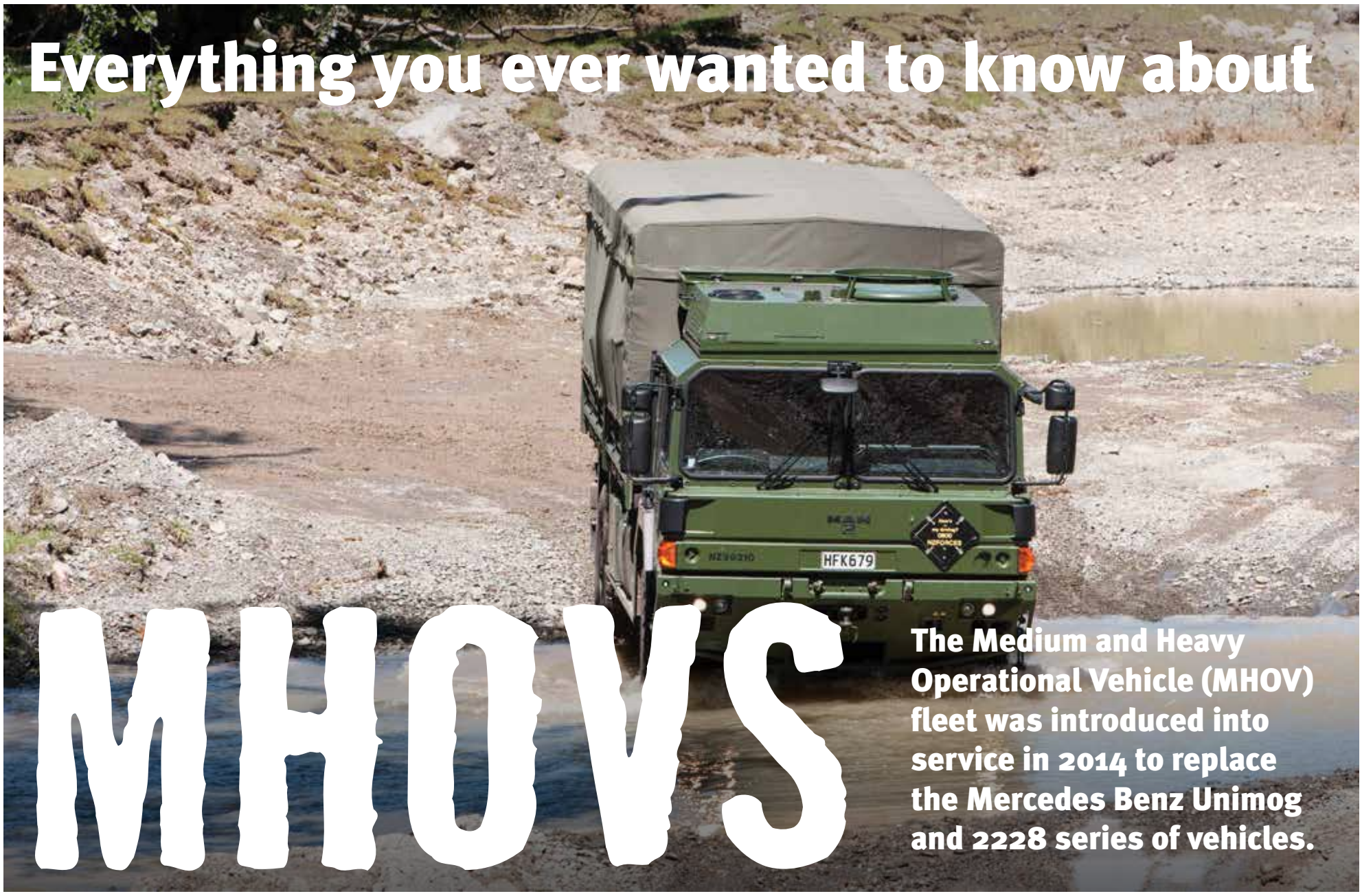
Everything you ever wanted to know about MHOVS



The Medium and Heavy Operational Vehicle (MHOV) fleet was introduced into service in 2014 to replace the Mercedes Benz Unimog and 2228 series of vehicles.

The intention was to provide a deployable mobile platform and prime mover capability for personnel, weapons systems, containers, equipment, fuel and cargo across a wide variety of tri-service users in diverse climatic and topographical conditions across a wide spectrum of armed conflict. The MHOV fleet will complement other in-service mobility capabilities in support of the motorised, light infantry and composite Task Group across the spectrum of conflict. Mobility capabilities are critical enablers for Task Groups to maintain freedom of action and manoeuvre; the MHOV fleet provides NZDF with a tactical capability across the battle space.

With the previous fleet of vehicles being in service for over 30 years the change to a more modern type of vehicle brings with it a need to understand how it can be utilised within our current procedures and if there is need to alter these to suit how the vehicle is required to be operated.

Now that the initial phase of introduction is complete and the vehicles are being used for their intended purpose within NZDF units some common concerns have been raised by those who haven't had the opportunity to regularly use the vehicles.

Frequently asked questions about the MHOV fleet

Is the weight of the new vehicles restricting their use compared to the old fleet?

The New Zealand Transport Authority has a set standard for vehicle dimensions and mass to ensure there is a reasonable balance between road safety, productivity and managing New Zealand's road infrastructure. The NZDF is not exempt from this legislation therefore we must ensure all vehicles we are operating comply. To put it in basic terms there is a weight limit a vehicle may operate at; if the weight of the vehicle once loaded exceeds this then we are required to gain an Over Weight Permit (OWP) before we can continue.

The Mercedes Benz fleet had a much lower tare and gross weight compare to the MHOV and therefore almost never required OWP. You could load a Unimog to its limits and still be within the NZTA regulations. The introduction of the significantly heavier MHOV family of vehicles has meant that once a vehicle is loaded (sometimes to only 50% of its load capacity) it will be classed as overweight under the rules of NZTA. It is true that with the old fleet we could usually load our vehicle up to the correct weight and then start our task; now the operator needs to be aware of not only the vehicle load capability but once loaded, if the vehicle exceeds the NZTA limits.

If that is the case the NZDF has a system for operators to easily obtain an OWP for their vehicles. This is managed by Mr Charles George, the Land Transport Compliance Manager based in Linton. He works on compliance issues across the board but more importantly OWP issues with MHOV and is able to obtain OWPs for all NZ state, regional, and provincial roading networks.

Can the MHOV fleet operate on most roads in New Zealand?

The main State Highways within New Zealand are generally open for use by the MHOV fleet but what we do need to be aware of is accessibility once we start using secondary roads. Where once we could drive our vehicles wherever we had access, with an OWP they will usually come with restrictions. This may be in the form of not being able to drive on certain roads or more commonly bridges that, due to their structure, cannot take the weight of a heavy vehicle without the risk of damage. To counter this planning needs to be done to ensure the correct route is chosen and possibly an alternate route identified if circumstances change.

Planning is needed to ensure we have the correct size of load on the vehicle; if the vehicle is over the NZTA limit an OWP is obtained and the correct route must be followed. The OWP once issued will state what restrictions are in place in the area that we will be operating and what precautions are to be taken. For the sake of extra time spent on preparation, which has increased compared to the old fleet, the benefit of extra load capacity can only be seen as an advantage. For example the Unimog had a load capacity of 4 tonnes whereas its direct replacement, the MAN HX 60, can carry a 6-tonne load.