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Motoring

By: Dave Moore

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Nissan trucks talk the torque

The number 450 displayed on some of the latest Nissan trucks denotes not engine size or horsepower, but good old-fashioned grunt, writes **Dave Moore**.

IF YOU have a degree of dirt to cover in your everyday driving, you'll know that while outright horsepower is all very well, often the ability to get where you're going with least effort from yourself or the vehicle you're driving is dictated by torque, and how it's delivered.

This sheer twisting power, preferably at low to middle revolutions, and best produced by diesel rather than petrol engines is what can make the difference between an ordinary off-roader and a genuinely useful one. Quite apart from a vehicle's usefulness in the dirt – trickling along, for instance, barely above idle in low range on steep, loosely packed screes without breaking traction – good, predictable torque delivery has its advantages on the beaten track as well.

If a vehicle is geared sensibly, that torque can mean that cruising up hill and down dale at 100kmh produces amazing fuel economy figures, because at just below 2000rpm, you're right in the thick part of the engine's grunt production.

And that's even if the vehicle in question weighs more than two tonnes, like the Nissan Pathfinder SUV and its working-class ute sibling, the Navara.

Thanks to some refettling of the

model's standard 2.5-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel engine, Nissan has managed to extract a lusty 450Nm, up from 403, with the unit managing such a figure at 2000rpm, so theoretically you're never in a situation where you're short of urge, especially with the popular 5-speed automatic helping out as well. The Pathfinder's power output benefits too, being raised from 128kW to 140kW, a gain of 11 per cent.

The gain in urge for the Navara and Pathfinder have been brought about by changes to the cylinder head, turbocharger operation and increased fuel injection pressure. As I suspected, with the cars' relaxed and long-legged gait fuel economy has been lowered to 9.0 L/100km with corresponding emissions benefits.

The entry-point Navara diesel 2WD has also some power and torque gains, if not as dramatic as the 4WD and Pathfinder models. Its power is up to 120kW from the previous model's 106kW and torque is increased from 356Nm to 403Nm.

Only the Navara diesel gets a manual option now; the mechanically unchanged V6 petrol models continue in 2WD and 4WD forms and like the 4WD diesel versions have automatic transmission only. The six-speed manual gearbox has advantages in terms of ultimate ac-

celeration times, and has a precise and fool-proof shift and clutch action, but I'd personally stick with the automatic.

As far as being square-rigged is concerned, the Navara and Pathfinder are a little less so with the advent of this latest, mid-life going-over. The familiar chisel-shaped corporate grimace is a little softer, the chrome grille's diagonal bars slightly closer-set and as a result the vehicles are about 80mm longer.

They weigh about the same as before. Both the SUV and the ute enjoy more cosy, car-like cabins, with cloth replacing hard plastic in some places, and more gentle contours used where that plastic remains.

At the top of the lineup is the Pathfinder, in which you can have any trim you like, as long as it's leather. Nissan New Zealand found that in the Pathfinder's \$76,800 pricing area, customers expect leather rather than velour for the wearing surfaces and looking back at the three rows of seats that form the seven-up accommodation, you get the impression that a fair-sized herd gave of its best to provide it.

The Pathfinder is now a single specification model, known as the 450T and it is pretty loaded with safety kit as standard, with an electronic stability programme, hill de-



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scent control, hill start assist and six air bags, and all seven seats have three point belts with pretensioners. The ABS brakes also have brake assist and electronic brakeforce distribution. The new single-spec model adds Xenon headlights with washers, intelligent key operation, plus an auxiliary input for iPod operation and a Bluetooth hands-free phone system with the main controls on the steering wheel.

In the cabin there are also steering wheel controls for the cruise control which now includes a licence-saving speed limiter, the sound system and drive computer. The Pathfinder's dual zone climate control air conditioning now has rear outlets, while the front seats have power operation, with the driver's seat including height and lumbar adjustment and a memory function which includes the rear view mirrors. Night-hunters will appreciate the two-way power sunroof with shade, as will less intrepid buyers who use the Nissan for people-moving rather than animal-chasing.

For ultimate seven-occupant use, the Pathfinder's second row seats can be flipped with one touch, to allow quick access. While the sixth and seventh seats aren't as substantial as the first five chairs, they're a far-cry from the mere padded laptop-like units I've found in the back of some seven-seater layouts. When not in use, the third row folds to the rear floor and provides extra load space.

If there's a criticism of the Pathfinder, it's that with just a single specification level, you either have to come up with 76 grand or you can't have one. I'd like to see an additional model without the sunroof, just five seats, air conditioning instead of climate control and perhaps cloth trim to replace the leather, for say a mid-\$60,000 outlay. Though I'd keep the new 450Nm engine thanks.

I'd also like body-colour instead of chrome for the rather brash Pathfinder's grille, which could be said for the Navara, too. Like the Pathfinder, the Navara has just a single trim level, known as the ST-X,

the six available models being petrol V6 2WD and 4WD automatics, and diesel 4WD and 2WD with manual or automatic options. The lineup starts at \$48,600 and tops out at \$59,990.

ALL NAVARAS now get dual zone climate control, a drive computer, ABS, side and curtain air bags. There's also a 6CD stereo with auxiliary input and Bluetooth, with steering wheel controls for the lot. Four wheel drive diesel Navaras also have Electronic Stability Program (ESP) now fitted as standard along with Active Brake Limited Slip (ABLS) which works in conjunction with the ESP and ABS.

But like the Pathfinder, the big Navara story is 450Nm of torque. The difference it makes to the day-to-day drive is not just manifested in the form of performance. The engine sounds different, it doesn't rattle as much and even has something of an induction sound, though throttled back to less than 2000rpm, the most pleasing item is the slow fuel gauge.

The rear cabin of the Navara is massive, with few of the compromises you find in far less capable trucks like the Holden Crewman for instance. There's room for three big, broad adults, and headspace for them to wear hard-hats if necessary — those of you with knowledge of occupational health and safety issues will know what a bugbear that can be. I think Nissan has the Navara range priced and stepped just about right. There's little if anything that offers as much space and refinement as this model, while the new 450Nm power unit is without peer. The Pathfinder 450T has rather stuck its nose up now, with a pretty big outlay required. The single model is so well-equipped it's probably worth the price, but with other brands offering a selection either side of the \$60,000 mark, it begs some questions.

Suffice, to say, I, like many, would probably opt for the Pathfinder on sheer talent, space and ease of driving, but only if I could really afford it.

AT A GLANCE

PATHFINDER AND NAVARA

Drivetrains (as tested): All 4WD, five-speed automatic or six-speed manual (Navara only). Four-cylinder 2.5L turbodiesel.

Pathfinder 450T – 140kW at 4000rpm, 450Nm at 2000rpm. **Navara ST-X** – 120 or 140kW at 4000rpm, 403 or 450Nm at 2000rpm.

Dimensions: L 5296mm, W 1848mm, H 1795mm, W/base 3200mm, F/track 1570mm, R/track 1570mm.

Pricing:

Pathfinder 450T \$76,800

Navara ST-X Petrol V6 4WD; Auto \$59,950; **ST-X V6 2WD Auto** \$49,850;

Diesel 4WD Manual

\$59,450; **Auto** \$61,450;

Diesel 2WD Manual

\$48,600; **Auto** \$50,600.

Hot: Pathfinder's equipment, grunt, styling and refinement. Navara adds good pricing and almost as much kit.

Not: Single spec for Pathfinder narrows market.

Verdict: Both ute and SUV are top grade, with the Pathfinder being perhaps a more aspirational product than before.



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Nissan Pathfinder:
With all that torque it can walk the walk

Navara ute:
450Nm gives Nissan's favourite pick-up more pick-up.

