



# Upgrade packs some punch

Nissan's trusty Pathfinder has been repowered so it can continue to be competitive as an SUV with one aim in mind - grunt. **Rob Maetzig** drives the new model.



## NISSAN PATHFINDER

**POWER PLANT:** 2.5 litre in-line four cylinder turbocharged diesel engine, 140 kW at 4000 rpm, 450 Nm at 2000 rpm.

**RUNNING GEAR:** All-Mode selectable all-wheel drive with low ratio. Five-speed automatic transmission with manual override. Double wishbone front suspension, independent multi-link setup at the rear.

**HOW BIG:** Length 4813mm, width 1848mm, height 1781mm, wheelbase 2853mm.

**HOW MUCH:** \$76,800.

**WHAT'S GOOD:** Excellent low-down grunt. Nice ride. Solid off-road capability.

**WHAT'S NOT:** A little noisy when that turbo-diesel is under acceleration load. But, then again, 2.5 litres of cubic capacity is being required to haul more than two tonnes.

**OUR VERDICT:** Performance has gone from modest to powerful. That alone helps keep Pathfinder a desirable medium-sized SUV.



**More civilised:** Better finish and materials improve an already well-designed cabin.

**New look:** The facelift has also seen the Pathfinder get a new "softer" nose.



**Roomy:** Trunk capacity is more spacious than ever



I've always had a soft spot for the Nissan Pathfinder. Originally developed straight off the ladder chassis of a ute – to the extent it could have been said to be a ute with a cabin stuck out the back, it was designed to compete against the likes of the Jeep Cherokee, Ford Explorer, and Toyota 4Runner models.

It did all right too, which explains why there have only been three generations of the SUV since that first model arrived on the scene 24 years ago.

It's easy to understand why there has been such longevity. It's because the Pathfinder has traditionally offered an unadorned look that has been able to remain timeless.

The first-generation model looks good even now – and it has offered an honest level of performance.

Not that the performance has been bare-bones, mind you. Nissan has traditionally specced-up the Pathfinder so it could be a more luxurious alternative to any four-door version of the Navara ute that it has been based on.

So in that regard, it has traditionally been a reasonably expensive vehicle.

But in recent years, if there has been one criticism of the Pathfinder, it has been that while performance might have been honest, it hasn't been particularly grunty.

Granted, it has traditionally offered very good offroading ability via its All-Mode 4WD system with selectable Low ratio, and its chassis has been tough enough to allow the vehicle to tow weights of up to three tonnes. But, when compared with some of the opposition vehicles, it was starting to lose out in the grunt stakes – to the extent its performance needed to be described as leisurely rather than powerful.

But now the Pathfinder has been facelifted, and the performance is much improved.

The SUV's 2.5-litre diesel engine, which previously developed 128 kilowatts of power and 403 Newton metres of torque, has been repowered so it now offers 140 kW and an enormous 450 Nm.

That makes the new Pathfinder a very solid performer, as a recent week behind the wheel of one quickly proved.

Actually there's now only one Pathfinder to be driven.

Whereas prior to the facelift, the model was available with a choice of 4.0-litre petrol and 2.5-litre turbodiesel power, and with a choice of ST and Ti levels of specification, Nissan New Zealand has now pared that down to a single diesel model with the high Ti spec.

The reason behind this decision was a lack of consumer demand for both petrol power and the lower specification.

At the media launch of the Pathfinder earlier this year, the company said they found that when people were going to spend more than \$60,000 on an SUV, they pretty well wanted everything.

With this new \$76,800 model, they certainly get that.

The Pathfinder's cabin boasts leather seat upholstery, and electric front seats that automatically slide back when you turn the ignition off so it's easier to get in and out. Those seats are heated, too.

There's also keyless entry, dual-zone climate-control air conditioning, a six-CD in-dash audio system, sun roof with blind, and a one-touch flip operation of the second row of seats so easy access can be gained to the third row.

Outside the vehicle, there are 17-inch alloys, puddle lamps which are great to use when getting out of the SUV in the wet at night, side steps, and front fog lamps.

The facelift has also seen the Pathfinder get a new "softer" nose via a new bumper, grille and bonnet design that has added about 80mm to vehicle length. There are no changes to interior dimensions, but that's okay because there's a heap of room in there.

With all seven seats in use, there's 245 litres of space. That is quite cramped, but with both rear rows of seats folded down – and they both fold down flat – this increases to 1130 litres.

So it's a well specified SUV.

And it's now a lot more powerful too, thanks to refettling of the

diesel engine that has included installation of a new direct-injection system that operates at an amazing 2000 bar – that's 29,000 psi. That pressure means the fuel spray entering the bore is atomised to an even finer degree for more complete combustion.

There's also a new cylinder head with parallel ports to increase the efficiency of the combustion process, while a new electrically-controlled variable nozzle turbocharger replaces the previous vacuum system. It all means that not only do power and torque rise by 11 per cent, but fuel consumption and emissions have also been reduced.

I found this to be sufficient to offer spirited performance around town and nicely lazy operation out on the open road where the engine will turn over at less than 2000 rpm at 100kmh, but provide good oomph when required.

Pathfinder has a passenger-oriented independent rear suspension rather than the leaf-spring setup that is aboard the Navara ute, so the ride is fine. Handling is assisted by such electronic aids as stability control.

Off the road, the Pathfinder is very good. It's All-Mode electronic 4WD system allows the driver to select everything from 2WD when nothing other than good fuel consumption is needed, to Auto which automatically flicks from 2WD to 4WD as circumstances require, to 4WD High and on to 4WD Low.

Down there, the Pathfinder seems capable of taking on just about anything – and a ground clearance of 228mm helps.

The SUV also boasts hill descent control and hill start assist, which I've always found really helpful in offroad conditions.

So overall, I've found the new Nissan Pathfinder to simply continue with the honesty that has always appealed to me with this model. Its Navara underpinnings mean it really can perform off the road, but its different rear suspension means it provides a comfortable ride for all aboard.

And the repowering of that 2.5-litre turbodiesel engine is the proverbial icing on the cake.