

FEATURE

to go on a road-trip every time you get in with its built-in compass and altimeter. The four-wheel drive gear lever also seems to call out to you to engage the differential lock or slot it in low range.

What surprised me most, however, about the latest Pajero was just how refined the diesel engine has become – in its Euro IV guise it's incredibly smooth and tractable on-road. But, as ever, it's when you go off the beaten path that it's in its element. The articulation of the suspension and the ease with which it dismisses serious obstacles is quite extraordinary. Even deep water crossings, with five aboard in the vehicle, are no trouble at all. Let's just say that it simply gives you the confidence to push on without apprehension no matter what you're facing – steep hills, gorges, rocks, or water crossings. The only obstacle that gave us trouble was a steep ramp leading to a plateau about the length of the

car – with an even steeper drop off at the other end.

On our first attempt, we had up to six people in the car, and were never going to make it up the steep hill with those many occupants. So, on the next attempt, we shed most occupants and tried again – but to no avail. We had Four Low engaged so couldn't carry enough speed up the ramp. So, shifting the lever of the transfer case to Four High with the differential lock on, we tried once more. This time we managed to carry more than enough speed, but I took my foot off the accelerator pedal once the front wheels made their way over the edge of the crest at the top of the hill – one of the marshals was waiving us in and it would have been unseemly to run him over in the process. In doing so, however, the Pajero bogged down into the soft mud and refused to go any further, no matter how much we coaxed. Eventually, we had no choice but to accept defeat and

