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India

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SUPER SUV...
AND OTHER
MAHINDRA BRUTES



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MITSUBISHI
PAJERO SPORT
NEW SUV, SAME GENE POOL.
THANK GOD

RENAULT
DUSTER
HOW TO MAKE
A CLEAN SWEEP

GOING OFF-ROAD



NO ROAD? NO PROBLEM

ALSO FEATURING:
PULSAR 200 NS, DUCATI MULTISTRADA



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VOLUME 7 ISSUE 11

MERC GETS BUSY | CLS SHOOTING BRAKE + NEW A-CLASS + B-CLASS



It's raining again. At least, in some parts of India. And it's raining SUVs too. The next few months are going to see some serious action here. It all started with the Audi Q3 two months ago and is going to end this year with the Ford Eco Sport. Most manufacturers, after toying long and hard with soft-roaders, have finally got the hang of it, toeing the fine line where it remains an SUV and not fall into the rubbish trap of a sedan on stilts.

You must have heard this a million times about India being a diverse culture. Equally diverse is the economic strata. Thankfully, along with the traditional expensive SUVs, we are now seeing a lot of affordable ones. If you've been tracking us on topgear.com, we had a go at the Renault Duster just after we closed the last issue. I happened to mention it to Renault India boss Marc Nassif how pricing wasn't his company's forte and he insisted that with the Duster, there was no option but to get it right. And they have. For the price, you get a seriously usable and effective SUV. After years of monopoly, M&M and Tata finally have some serious rivalry in their comfort zone. Just how big a rival? Typically, we head for the hills to get some answers.

In more traditional space, we also have the new Pajero Sport. HM was nice enough to hand it to us on its home turf where we took the car to what would have been familiar territory for all of its predecessors and current stablemates. But no Indian off-road special would be complete without the raw display of Mahindra muscle. And we have not one, but three of them including an exclusive and first drive ever by anyone outside Team Mahindra of the Super XUV, the amazing motorsport monster that's devouring rivals. This one is rally ace Gaurav Gill's machine. We don't think he knows we drove his baby, which explains how he was still nice to us when we interviewed him for 'The Driving Test' (See pg50) and check out Indian motorsport poster boy's life in cars.

In all the mayhem, we also bring to you all the new cars you would be driving soon. New Elantra and Merc A-Class to name a few. Also, TopGear poster is back. Waiting for applause...

GIRISH KARKERA, EDITOR
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"AFTER TOYING LONG WITH SOFT-ROADERS, MOST HAVE FINALLY GOT THE HANG OF TOEING THE FINE LINE WHERE IT REMAINS AN SUV AND NOT ANOTHER SEDAN ON STILTS"

THE PRODIGY RETURNS

Mitsubishi Pajero Sport

Has the new Pajero lost
the charm that made the
brand iconic? It took a
jungle to find out >>>

WORDS: MANISH SARSER PHOTOGRAPHY: NITIN ROSE



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or years, the Pajero has been the weapon of choice for the explorer clubs.

You've seen them climbing mountains and serving UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. So the first thing that comes to your mind on seeing a Pajero is its reliability and the ability to take whatever you throw at it.

You see, we at *TG* are completely in love with the Pajero SFX, the second-generation model that first appeared in 1997. Despite its wheezy but ultra-reliable 2.8-litre 108bhp oil burner, the Pajero didn't wet itself at the thought of going off tarmac. The kind of engineering that has gone into the Pajero thanks to the famous Dakar rallies clearly shows.

The SFX is a legend but quite long in the tooth now. Which brings us to the Pajero Sport. It's been a long time coming, and it's finally here. Can it match the off-road prowess of its iconic predecessor and more importantly, should the Toyota Fortuner be afraid? We decided to raid the hills around Yercaud, Tamil Nadu, to find out.

Walk up to the Sport and you'll love its presence. It stands tall and looks quite purposeful with those massive wheel arches. Okay, so the

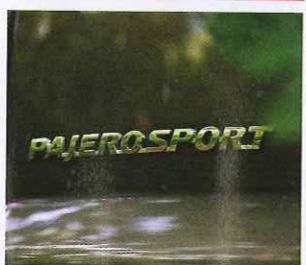
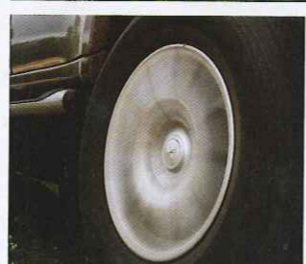
front grille isn't to everyone's tastes but it looks good in certain colours, especially in white. In profile, the Sport looks as if it's standing on its toes thanks to the massive gaps between the wheels and the body.

The Pajero Sport is based on the Mitsubishi Triton pickup, which means the underpinnings are as rugged as they come. Power comes from a variable geometry turbocharger-equipped 2.5-litre four-pot oil burner that puts out 177bhp and 400Nm of torque. Along with this, you get a five-speed manual gearbox and the superbly capable 'Super Select' 4WD system. More on that later.

Start up the motor, and you can tell refinement isn't its strong point. It's quite smooth, but noise levels are higher than what you expect. It's got the signature Pajero noise and even in this day of quiet diesels, we're inclined to say we almost love that clatter.

Out on the road, the Pajero has a strong mid-range. Below 2000rpm, the engine isn't as responsive, but it picks up the pace as you pile on the revs. Power tapers off by 4000rpm. As long as you keep it in the mid-range, there's plenty of shove and overtaking can actually be fun.

The short gearing does put a spring in its step. But at expressway speeds, the noise at high rpm makes it sound as if it's straining. The ▶



Old-school dials give way to modern Montero-like display

Mitsubishi Pajero Sport

"THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO YOUR MIND ON SEEING A PAJERO IS ITS RELIABILITY AND THE ABILITY TO TAKE WHATEVER YOU THROW AT IT"



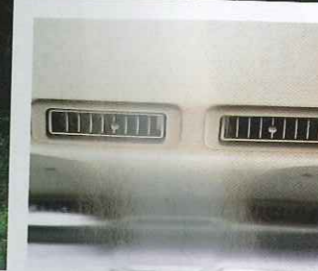
“OFF-ROAD, THE PAJERO SPORT LIVES UP TO ITS ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER IMAGE, AND THE ADDED POWER GIVES IT FAR MORE ACCESS TO REMOTE PLACES”



There's a whiff of a Montero in here... we're not complaining



Legendary Super Select gives low range with centre diff-lock. Now where's the mud?



five-speed gearbox is light and easy to use, but vibrations do filter in. Zero to 100kph is dispatched in 13.3 seconds, which isn't bad. Numbers aside, you'll love riding that 400Nm torque wave.

Climbing up the hills from sea-level Chennai gave the engine and the gearbox a good workout. But thanks to the turbo-lag, you do need to work that gearbox to keep the Sport on the boil. On the highway, once it's built up speed, it can cruise without trouble all day. An automatic option is hinted at for next year and that'll really help the Pajero Sport get more customers.

And now the Pajero's party piece – the Super Select. It's this system that has given the Pajero cult status around the world. You've got four modes to choose from – 2H, 4H, 4HLc and 4LLc. Now most off-roaders cannot be used in 4WD on dry tarmac. But with the Pajero, you can use 4H on paved surfaces thanks to the centre differential, which can also be locked.

On the rain-soaked climb up to Yercaud, the 4H mode came in pretty handy. With the front wheels also pulling, there's a marked difference in the way the Pajero takes corners. It feels far more confident and allows you to carry much more speed around bends. The 4HLc will lock the centre diff and give both axles equal amounts of torque.

The ABS is fully active even with the locked differential, which is another one of the Super Select's selling points. And when you're really in a soup, the 4LLc comes to the rescue. With the low range, you get so much torque that you could probably tow a small jetliner if you

had the ballast. But the limiting factors are the tyres, so upgrade if you plan to do some serious mud-plugging. We thought the Pajero would have to work hard driving through a forest, but it was like using C4 explosive to open a can of Coke. Maybe the Himalayas would've proved a meatier challenge.

Off-road, the Pajero Sport lives up to its Arnold Schwarzenegger image, and the added power gives it far more access to remote places. And it impresses on the blacktop as well. Ride quality is quite good and it just smothers potholes at speed. You just don't need to slow down. The tyres do a great job of cushioning you from bad roads, though.

For something this tall, the Sport goes around corners relatively well too. The steering may feel heavy but at speed, it works very well and provides good feedback. It has body roll, but it never threatens to topple over. Straight-line stability is fantastic even through patchy roads. Sure, it isn't a BMW, but you get a dynamically sorted SUV that won't cringe at the first sign of dirt. Try doing that with the BeeEm.

The only big complaint we had with the old Pajero were the 1980s interiors. But step into the Sport and you'll be pleasantly surprised. The dashboard is thoroughly modern. Plastic quality is good and the equipment list is long. But the music system stands out like a sore thumb in an otherwise well-finished cabin.

Even though you've got everything you'd ever need, you can't help but notice the Pajero Sport has been toned down. Gone is the massive 92-litre fuel tank, replaced >

Mitsubishi Pajero Sport

MITSUBISHI PAJERO SPORT

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Price: ₹24.43 lakh
(ex-showroom, Mumbai)
Engine: 2477cc in-line 4-cyl turbo-diesel
Power: 177bhp
Torque: 400Nm
Transmission: 5M
0-100: 13.3*secs
Top speed: 190kph (est)
Kerb weight: 2065kg
Fuel efficiency: 9.7kpl

PROS

Tough as nails, off-road ability, engine

CONS

Fuel efficiency can be better, needs an automatic option

VERDICT

This is for those forever looking for shortcuts through the bushes. Fantastic off-road, adequate on it. Built for a certain kind of person.

*Not under standard test conditions

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MITSUBISHI PAJERO SFX



The Pajero SFX was first shown to the world in 1997. It may be extinct worldwide, but it continued to sell in India beside the present-generation Pajero as the Montero. But despite its vintage, the SFX is a superbly capable machine.

The 2.8-litre oil burner that came in the Indian model did not set any roads on fire, but it was torquey and ultra-reliable. Its mountain goat nature and ability to take punishment were things its owners loved.

Even now, the Pajero commands a lot of respect, and if it were up to us, we'd keep this one going for a few more years - with better interiors, of course! We're sad to see it go, as are its legion of die-hard fans across the country.

by a 70-odd litre unit. Fuel efficiency is marginally better at 8.5kpl and 10.8kpl for city and highway respectively. But it still can't match the range of the old Pajero. Very useful if you're touring Ladakh, where finding a fuel station is like finding an honest politician. But it is more spacious than the SFX and you do get seven seats.

And being based on a truck chassis means the floor is high, which robs passengers of under-thigh support, especially in the second and third rows. All rows get dedicated vents for air-conditioning, but we would've liked some more space, especially in the last row.

It's established then the Pajero Sport is quite capable. In fact, if you're the explorer, you'll do well with the Sport. Its ability to take punishment is amazing and when you're driving up the Himalayas,

that's what really matters. The Fortuner is capable as well, but when it comes to off-road dexterity, the Mitsubishi has a definite edge.

Priced at ₹24.43 lakh (ex-showroom, Mumbai), you're not paying too much over the old SFX, making the Pajero Sport much better value for money. But the old SFX was hardly value for money.

Currently, the Sport comes as a CBU, but once CKD production starts, expect the Sport to match the Fortuner, and that's when it'll become really interesting.

So were we impressed? In a word, yes. It's fantastic off-road, looks good and drives well enough. Now all Mitsubishi needs to do is to build up a good dealer network and service this beast properly. Get rid of that '80s stereo and bring in that automatic option real quick and you're good to go. **TG**

"WE THOUGHT THE PAJERO WOULD HAVE TO WORK HARD DRIVING THROUGH A FOREST, BUT IT WAS LIKE USING C4 EXPLOSIVE TO OPEN A CAN OF COKE"

