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BEST OF 2012

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MITSUBISHI PAJERO SPORT | RENAULT DUSTER

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AUDI Q3 | BMW 3 SERIES
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BEST OF 2012

There have been an unprecedented number of launches since the Auto Expo in January this year, but what we have here are some of the best of the year. No model refreshes, no facelifts, and no badge engineered variants were allowed to make the cut. These are all new models – six of the very best from 2012.

words: Ishan Raghava // photography: Kapil Vashist



RETURN OF THE SAMURAI



Mitsubishi has struggled off late, but the launch of the Pajero Sport has changed its fortunes. Here's why.

To be absolutely honest, the past few years haven't been the best for Mitsubishi in India – and that reflects in the dwindling sales of its cars. Customers today are flooded with choices. And in the mix Mitsubishi sedans, which had an early lead in the country, have fallen out of favour. Despite all of this, though, the Mitsubishi brand still enjoys massive loyalty in the country, especially when it comes to SUVs – and this is evident in the way customers waited eagerly for the launch of the Pajero Sport in India.

While the older Pajero has soldiered on with various cosmetic facelifts, it proved to be no match for the Toyota Fortuner, which has been a runaway success. A new product was deeply needed for Mitsubishi to mount an effective challenge, and the Pajero Sport has fulfilled that role brilliantly.

Sticking to the old-school, body-on-frame architecture, the Pajero Sport offers a rugged mix of on and off-road ability with the capacity to carry up to 7 passengers. Fitted with a 2.5 liter diesel engine with a variable geometry turbo, it has a power output of 176bhp and 400Nm of torque – all of which is amply on display when driving this beast of an SUV around. Though it suffers from a bit of turbo lag in the lower rev range, once on song the Pajero has a simply astounding midrange that offers very quick in-gear acceleration – and this is

especially useful when overtaking on the highway. The gearshift too engages with a positive action, but does need a bit of effort to operate. But what impresses more is the steering. In today's world of electronic power steering systems that are devoid of feel, the Pajero Sport offers detailed feel about exactly what the front wheels are doing. While the steering is a little too slow in its gearing for my liking, the analogue feel it offers makes it a lot of fun to operate. When you drive this car, you can truly feel Mitsubishi's rally and Dakar winning roots shine through.

The even more outstanding feature, though, has to be the ride-and-handling setup of the Pajero, which is exemplary in its class. It offers a wonderful balance of comfort and usability, and it doesn't have that annoying side-to-side rocking motion characteristic of large SUV's when traversing rough terrain. On highways, the Pajero is wonderfully stable, and retains the ability to munch miles for hours on end without any discomfort to its passengers – no matter how awful the road conditions get.

Combined with the selectable four-wheel drive mechanism – which even offers a locked center differential in both 4-High and 4-Low – the Pajero is a truly all conquering beast. In fact, in one of our off-road tests, a Thar got well and truly stuck in some slush. But pulling it out with the Pajero Sport was a breeze – even I was surprised at how easily the Pajero



AN EVEN MORE OUTSTANDING FEATURE, THOUGH, HAS TO BE THE RIDE-AND-HANDLING SETUP OF THE PAJERO, WHICH IS EXEMPLARY IN ITS CLASS

was able to drag the Thar out without any issues whatsoever. In fact, it never even felt as if we were towing another vehicle, such is the torque and off-road ability of the Pajero Sport.

So, the Pajero Sport comes as a breath of fresh air for Mitsubishi and its fans in India – bringing with it a very capable and desirable product that is once again drawing customers back to the showroom.

