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TOYOTA FORTUNER

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 O SO, YOU HAVE A RANGE OF CHOICES — TWO-WHEEL DRIVE COMPACT
TH GO-ANYWHERE BRUTE FORCE. WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

ONE'S AN EMOTIONAL CHOICE, THE OTHER, A LOGICAL ONE. ONE'S A PHENOMENAL PRODUCT, AND THE OTHER A PHENOMENAL MARKET SUCCESS. BOTH ARE SHEER BRUTES!

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There's something ridiculously charming about off-roading. I mean, just imagine – you're stuck in the middle of the wilderness, in really greasy muck, tyres spinning wildly, and little hope of making it out without help, and yet you could conceivably get an advertising contract from Colgate for grinning so wide that your teeth are visible from a mile away! It's just stupid, but also greatly satisfying. At this point, I'm remembering the fun that Dhruv and I had at the launch event of Polaris. We were just so engrossed in having fun and throwing mud all over the place that we didn't realize we made for quite a spectacle for the crowd and the photographers on hand. Everyone thought we were mad. We lost all our senses, in favour of pure fun and sheer shots of adrenaline!

And with this feature – it was something similar. The Pajero Sport and the Fortuner both are the most rugged here – and, quite obviously, the most severe treatment

MITSUBISHI PAJERO SPORT

ENGINE: 2,477CC / 4 CYLINDER / 16 VALVES / DOHC / COMMON RAIL DIRECT INJECTION / TURBOCHARGED
FUEL: DIESEL
TRANSMISSION: 5-SPEED MANUAL / FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE
POWER: 175BHP @ 4000RPM
TORQUE: 400NM @ 2000-2500RPM
PRICE: ₹24.4 LAKHS (EX-SHOWROOM, DELHI)

was reserved for these two. Jared flaunts the handling and overall zest of the Duster and the Yeti, while Ishan chirps about the quality and classy cabins, not to mention the brand novelty, of the X1 and Q3. I, on the other hand, have a 200,000 year-old body-on-ladder construction and proper off-road armour to make mince meat of these 'boys.'

Back in 2008, I got a bright and shiny Pajero SFX, and when time came for it to go back, it was brown – but it had a sense of pride about it. And this only showed the massive talent that was beneath that brutally handsome shape. The Pajero Sport has lost that masculine squarish shape of the SFX, and it even looks a bit hopeless from the rear. But under that rather uninspiring shape, there's a proper hardcore, misbehaved swine of a mechanical wonder hiding.

The Pajero debuted at the Paris Dakar Rally in 1983, and on only its third outing, it won what's celebrated as the toughest rally in the world. The Pajero, to date, is the most successful vehicle to race in the Paris Dakar Rally – and if that's not a testament to its off-road ability and undying spirit, I don't know what is!

The Toyota Fortuner doesn't have

any such trophies adorning the wall of its living room, but let's not forget that it comes from the same guys who do the enormously capable Land Cruiser – the by-word for dune-bashing in the Gulf or outback-crossing Down Under.

On a different note, the rains have quite a sparkling effect on kids – they play, get wet, and roll around in small ponds of water. Something similar happened to us. It had rained the previous day, and the ground water level had risen – making some ditches and ponds respectably deep in some places. The smile on our faces was endless. One look at each other, and we knew instantly that we had a full-on lawless time ahead of us! So, with the other cars looking shamefacedly, the Pajero led the way and the Fortuner, *reluctantly*, followed slowly behind.

The sales reps at Toyota are massively smart, I must admit. We'd been sent the 2WD automatic variant from the local dealer because the 4WD car from their media fleet wasn't available. We knew that the 2WD auto was coming, but the '4x4' sticker on the rear door had us whipping out our smart phones to check if there was
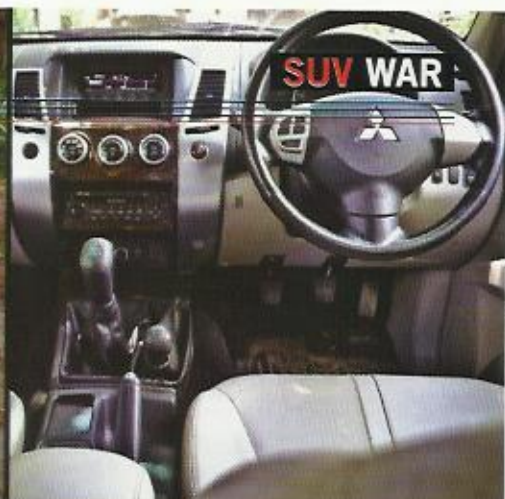
I'M NOT GOING TO GO ON ABOUT THINGS LIKE THE INTERIOR, SHIFT QUALITY, OR COSMETIC DETAILS – THAT'S NOT BEFITTING TALK FOR SUV'S OF SUCH MUSCLE AND BRUTE
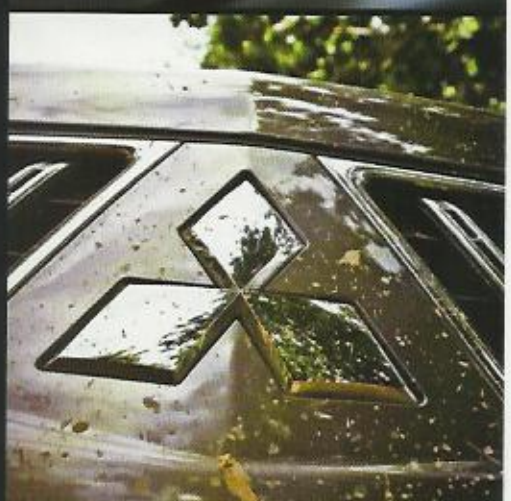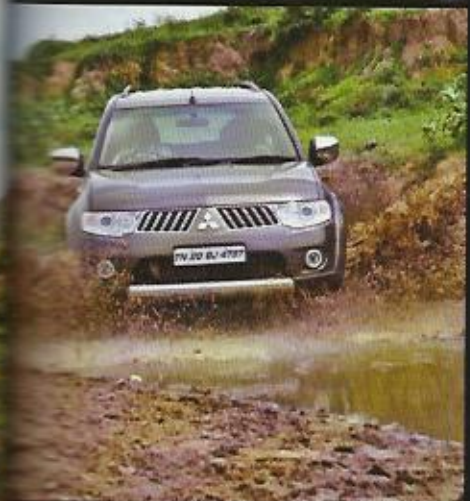
a new variant on sale recently! There wasn't. So, when the Pajero was going down a steep incline, we were literally mumbling prayers for the Fortuner. In its 4x2 config, it's basically reduced to a rear-wheel driven motorized elephant! But it came through, and then it was time for some good old fashioned mud plugging, water splashing fun!

The Pajero went in the shallow part of the pond first – to ensure that it was manageable. It came out without even a whisper of effort, so we decided to toughen things up a bit. For this, 4-high was needed, and we waded through the water again. Easy! This time, I was clearly a bit nervous – Kapil wanted some more dramatic wading. What that translates into is – "come on you pussies, do some daredevil stuff!" Aye, Mr. Lenseye.

We decided to leave the Pajero in 4-high and put its nose in. Stuck! Now, 4-low was engaged, and the Pajero started moving gently – but barely a few meters in, and it started spinning its wheels helplessly. This had now become really serious – the water was at the wheel-arch level, and we had no knowledge of how slippery the bottom was. It was time for maximum attack. The differential lock was engaged, and we reversed a bit, stopped, and gave it the beans in first gear. The Pajero came dancing out of the muck with a sinister smile on its face – as if it was toying around with us into working harder to have fun.

Excited by the Pajero, we brought in the Fortuner. With an automatic 'box that provides drive to only two wheels – it was a recipe for disaster. And that's exactly what happened! We got stuck, properly, and help was probably an hour away. So, a rope was brought out, and with three-and-a-half man-power, the Fortuner was freed from its misery. So,

at doing the jungle dance, a 4x4 is a necessary evil – stick to it.

The Pajero, with its four-wheel drive, as well as approach (36-degree) and departure (25-degree) angles, climbed up the steepest crests that we could subject it to. The Fortuner wasn't quite as eager – but then we understood its limitations. A 4x4 would have put things in perspective, but why do I have the suspicion that the Pajero would still come out trumps? Unlike the boys doing the other cars, I'm not going to go on about pussycat things like the interior, shift quality, or their cosmetic details – that's not befitting talk for SUV's of such muscle and brute. I'll just enjoy this sense of superiority that I have, which is reflected by the broad smile on my face. **aX**

TOYOTA FORTUNER

ENGINE: 2,982CC / 4 CYLINDER / 16 VALVE / DOHC / COMMON RAIL DIRECT INJECTION / TURBOCHARGED
FUEL: DIESEL
TRANSMISSION: 4-SPEED AUTOMATIC / REAR-WHEEL DRIVE
POWER: 168BHP @ 3600RPM
TORQUE: 343NM @ 1400-3400RPM
PRICE: ₹21.7 LAKHS (EX-SHOWROOM, DELHI)