

# 4WD BUYERS GUIDE

## FORD RANGER

### LARGE UTES

**Newly released, jointly-developed Ford Ranger and Mazda BT-50 utes are set to tackle the traditional ute-market leaders in Australia: Toyota and Nissan.**



The outgoing Ford Ranger had part of the required package for market share improvement, boasting the most potent four-cylinder diesel engine in the ute class. However, it powered re-skinned bodywork that was tad on the small side and the chassis had a torsion-bar suspended front end that didn't really work in concert with an over-stiff set of rear leaves. It wasn't a bad package for a ute, but Ford knew that more would be required in the near future: more people space and cargo volume; more refinement, more performance and more presence.

As with the outgoing model the 2011 Ranger is based around three cab styles: Single, Double Cab and Super (with forward-opening rear doors and no obstructive B-pillar). The launch model is the Double Cab, to be followed by Super and Single Cabs.

All models are longer, wider and higher than before, with no carry-over components from the previous range. A new box-section ladder frame that's taller, wider and thicker than before mounts a double-wishbone, coil-sprung front end with rack and pinion steering.

An underslung rear axle design with bias-mounted shock absorbers continues, but with longer springs and stronger brackets and shackles. A brand new five-cylinder, turbo-intercooled diesel has been developed and six-speed manual and automatic transmissions are offered.



The 3.2-litre five-cylinder produces claimed maximum power of 147kW at 3000rpm, with peak torque of 470Nm in the 1750-2500rpm band. Claimed fuel consumption is 8.9L/100km.

A four-cylinder, 2.2-litre engine is available on the Single Cab manual transmission cab/chassis model.

Output is a claimed 110kW at 3700rpm, with peak torque of 375Nm at 1500-2500rpm.

More grunt, improved chassis dynamics and car-level electronic aids ensure that the new Ranger easily outperforms and out-handles its predecessor.

Standard kit includes ABS with disc/drum EBD brakes; traction control; dynamic stability control; emergency brake assist and hill start assist; shift-on-the-fly 4WD selection; dial-selectable low range gearing; hill descent control and a lockable rear differential. The dynamic stability control system incorporates roll stability control, trailer sway control and adapts to suit different payloads. Incidentally, drum rear brakes are retained because they provide a more powerful parking brake than the tiny drum-in-disc units fitted to 4WD wagons.

Three equipment levels are offered: **XL**, **XLT** and **Wildtrak**.

XL is far from being a 'poverty pack', with aircon; power windows and mirrors; remote central locking; Bluetooth; steering wheel cruise control and audio controls; trip computer; auto lights function; USB input; six speakers in all but Single Cabs and front and curtain airbags. Ford has received an NCAP rating of five stars for all variants.

XLTs score carpet; front fog lamps; dual-zone aircon; chromed side steps and rear step bumper; ambient temperature gauge; leather wrapped knob and steering wheel; locking rear diff; height and lumbar adjustable driver's seat and tubular sports bar with high-mount stop light.



The Wildtrak is a Double Cab Ute model with XLT features plus leather seat trim, sports bars; satnav; rain-sensing wipers and an auto-dimming rear view mirror.

The carry-over part-time 4WD system has an electronically controlled, two-speed transfer case. A new chassis provides the base for a longer, 3220-millimetre wheelbase and wider track of 1560mm. Measuring 1549mm long, 511mm high and with a maximum cargo width of 1560mm, the cargo box of the double cab is more than 100mm wider than the current model's. Width between the wheel arches is 1139mm on all ute models and there are 'mezzanine-floor' support pockets in the cargo box sides that allow plywood or plaster board to be laid in flat sheets on a false floor.

Up front, the suspension is a new coil-over-strut, double wishbone suspension and rack and pinion steering is fitted. The back end has traditional ute leaf springs.

The brake system includes Electronic Brakeforce Distribution and Emergency Brake Assist to provide maximum boost for the Anti-Lock Brake System (ABS). Flashing hazard lights automatically alert following vehicles when an ABS stop is triggered.

All 2011 Ranger models have larger, 302mm front disc rotors with twin-piston callipers. Rear axle brakes are old-fashioned, 295mm drums, but at least this design guarantees a reliable handbrake, rather than the dodgy parking brakes provided by the tiny drums fitted inside 4WD wagon rear disc rotors.

Ford's Electronic Stability Program (ESP) system that includes four-wheel traction control, yaw control and roll-over mitigation is standard. With Trailer Sway Mitigation the vehicle brakes are selectively applied to slow down and stabilise a ute/trailer combination.



We haven't spent a great deal of bush time in the new Ranger yet, but the suspension shows up as somewhat softer in action than Mazda's taut settings. We're anticipating a long-term test range in the near future.

Our brief run in Rangers was done in some Australian launch vehicles, which were 3.2-litre XLT Double Cabs fitted with manual and automatic transmissions

Getting comfortable wasn't a problem, thanks to the XLT's adjustable driver's seat and tilting steering wheel. However, some of the short-armed testers hankered for a telescopic column.

On bitumen and smooth gravel surfaces the Rangers rode and handled superbly, with noise levels that were almost car-like at cruising speeds. Only when the loud pedals were floored did engine noise intrude.

Rough surfaces stirred some leaf-spring reaction at the rear end, but the ride wasn't harsh and dynamic stability and traction control preserved direction. We checked out gentle and emergency stopping power and were impressed with the Ranger's pedal feel and stability under panic braking. The six-speed auto was slick, with a manual override function that was easy to operate, once we adjusted to a forward movement for downshifts, not the more commonly used backward flick.

A light clutch with a vague friction point caught out some of the testers, but we found the manual gearbox very easy to use. That said, we preferred the auto, both on and off road.

Steep, stony and dusty grades that were too steep to stand on proved to be no problem for the new Ranger that made a tidy job of conquering these quite demanding conditions. The 3.2-litre lugged happily down below 1000rpm, with no protest from engine or driveline.

The traction control system worked unobtrusively to control wheelspin and hill descent control was powerful, yet speed-variable by using the cruise control buttons.

The new Ford Ranger and its mechanically-similar Mazda BT-50 stable mate seem set for increased market share.

## Previous Models



Ford's Courier, jointly mechanically-developed with Mazda, was given a fresh face for 1999 that aligned its appearance with that of the company's US-built F-truck range. New wheel packages consisted of 16-inch on 4WD GL and 15-inch styled steel wheels with 235-section tyres on 4WD XL models.

Cabin space and appointments were improved on all models and a driver-side airbag option was introduced. The 2.5-litre Ford-Mazda intercooled turbo-diesel was then the most powerful diesel in a compact pickup, with 86kW at 3500rpm and 280Nm of torque at 2000rpm.

For 2003 the PG Courier received styling changes in the form of new grille, headlights, front bumper and front fenders. The top-of-the-range XLT models scored chrome on front and rear bumpers, door handles, tailgate handle and mirrors. A larger 265/70R15 tyre was standard on the 4WD XL and XLT vehicles.

Ford introduced a rear access system on the four-door Super Cab.

Other new additions include optional two-tone exterior, two new colours – Amber and Spruce Green – and new alloy wheels.

Inside, there were new fabrics, chrome door handles (XLT), an upgraded stereo system (with six-stack CD on XLT), engine immobiliser on crew cab turbo-diesel models and a keyless entry system.



Ride quality was supposedly improved with revisions to the suspension componentry, but our testing showed little change to the harsh ride. However, twin-piston ventilated discs on the 4x4 XLT did improve fade resistance.

A new Super Cab 4x4 XLT was added to the range.

Dual airbags and four-wheel ABS were optional on some 4x4 models.

Pricing ranged from \$28,890 for a 4WD Single Cab Chassis up to \$42,560 for a 4WD diesel Super Cab Pickup XLT.

In January 2005, Ford announced the Courier V6 option across Super Cab and Crew Cab body styles and in GL and XLT specification levels. The 4.0-litre SOHC V6 engine produced a class-leading 154kW of power at 5250rpm and 323Nm of torque at 3000rpm.

On automatic 4WD V6 models there was a 'Shift on the Fly' selector switch mounted on the centre console, which enabled actuation of the transfer case for shifting between 4x2 and 4x4 modes (2WD-4WD-4WD Low). The system worked in conjunction with an electronic remote front wheel hub lock.

Recommended retail pricing was \$43,190 for the top of the range automatic 4WD XLT Crew Cab.



In March 2007 Ford released the Ranger, with new bodywork and a new 3.0-litre, four-cylinder Duratorq diesel engine, with output of 115kW of power at 3200rpm and peak torque of 380Nm at 1800rpm. A variable geometry turbocharger reduced turbo lag and broadened the torque curve. The new powerplant was matched with a five-speed manual or an optional five-speed automatic transmission.

Ranger retained interior spaciousness and flexibility with a Single Cab, Crew Cab, Chassis Cab and the Super Cab, incorporating the innovative rear access system (RAS). Ford Ranger's more rigid chassis and tougher, more durable suspension may have improved strength and payload capacity, but ride quality continued to be a problem for the Ranger until the 2011 range was introduced.

Pricing varied from \$33,490 for a 4WD Single Cab Chassis XL up to \$45,990 for a 4WD Crew Cab Pick Up XLT. Automatic transmission was a \$2000 option.

The last upgrade of the first Ranger was in February 2009, with an exterior restyle that included a new \$48,990 Wildtrak model.



## Bush Modifications

The Ford Ranger and Mazda BT-50 are pretty right for bush tripping out of the box, but a snorkel and some bar work up front, with or without a winch and spotties – would be desirable. Ground clearance is quite good, but 50mm increase would be an advantage for those venturing into rocky terrain.

We're planning some long bush trips in these vehicles over the next few months, so we'll know more after that exercise.



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Brilliant!"**

