

# 4WD BUYERS GUIDE

## NISSAN PATROL

### LARGE WAGONS

**The ruggedly-built Patrol is well past its use-by date, but still attracts buyers who want no-nonsense bush-capability. The three-litre diesel has had a chequered past and is a high-revving beast.**

Nissan is gambling that Patrol upgrades will continue to keep customers happy, but it's highly likely that if Nissan had been better managed in the 1980s and 1990s – as Toyota was – we'd already have a new generation Patrol.

There's a new Patrol coming in 2012, but it's petrol-only at this stage and is going to be very expensive; probably in the Lexus LX570 league. Just as Nissan has done with the D22/D40 Navara ute lineup the company plans to market the new expensive Patrol alongside the current model, hopefully, with some upgrades for 2012.



When the current GU model was launched in late 1997 it was the best the cash-strapped company could do. The new bodywork was a re-skin, mounted on substantially the same chassis and running gear as the GQ's.

When you consider that the 1988 GQ was itself a 1980 MQ with a coil-spring chassis and flared mudguards – even the windscreens were interchangeable – it's obvious that the Patrol's development has been severely undernourished over the past 30 years.

Another cost-conscious example was the introduction of a five-speed 'tiptronic' style auto with the 4.8-litre engine in 2001 – the box came from the company's Z-cars and meant that the petrol Patrol lost its advantageous transmission-mounted handbrake.

The Patrol was upgraded in 2005 to its present appearance with exterior panel and trim changes, fatter rubber and a restyled interior. The only significant mechanical change was a slight increase in power for the ZD30 three-litre diesel and a torque boost for the same engine when coupled to a manual transmission.

Nissan Australia's market research indicated that Patrol buyers wanted the vehicle's traditional ruggedness preserved, but would be happy to see improved comfort and a better quality interior layout. Hence the 2005 upgrade.

The styling changes aped the LandCruiser's flared wheel arch shapes and adoption of the chromed '4WD family' grille made the Patrol resemble a Navara front-on. The interior scored the greatest change, with an entirely new dashboard and instrument cluster. The seats were repadded and there was a new range of upholstery.

The Patrol isn't exactly the 4WD market's leading light in terms of primary or secondary safety. For a start it's a part-time-4WD machine, which means that it's rear-wheel-drive only in most on-road conditions. Some experienced 4WD operators know how to operate the part-time-4WD system on slippery roads without risking mechanical damage, but most drivers don't.

ABS braking, surely the greatest primary safety feature in a heavy towing vehicle, isn't available on the DX base model. However, Nissan has raised the secondary safety bar a tad with a standard driver's side and passenger airbags.

The only mechanical upgrade for 2005 was a 3kW lift in power for the ZD30 three-litre, turbo-intercooled diesel. ZD30 engines bolted to five-speed mechanical transmissions had maximum torque of 380 Nm - a lift over the previous 354 Nm peak – but those engines with auto boxes were limited to the previous peak.

The fender flares housed fatter 275/65R17s on all STs and above.

For 2007, the revised Patrol wagon line-up included the five-seat DX and seven-seat ST, ST-L and Ti turbo diesel variants and, in petrol form, seven-seat ST, ST-L and Ti models. ABS anti-lock braking was standard on all but the base DX turbo diesel model.

The ST was previously only available with turbo-diesel power, but was included in the 4.8-litre petrol-engine line-up after a rationalisation that saw discontinuation of the ST-S version previously offered in both diesel and petrol ranges.

The ZD30 3.0-litre turbo diesel gained a common-rail fuel injection system, but without much-needed improvements in output and torque. This engine has had many in-service problems, from fuel pumps to turbo failures and we'd like to see some reassuring facts from Nissan's engineering team about reliability concerns.

This three-litre needs to rev to achieve performance and is better in front of an auto than a manual box, because low-speed torque is poor when compared with other turbo-diesels.

In 2012, the Patrol is well past its use-by date. The basic ergonomics of its old body shell can't compete with competitor designs, or even with its own Pathfinder, and the longer Nissan allows the Patrol to lag behind its competitors the more difficult it will be to catch up.

Our Patrol testing shows that the dynamics of the post-2007 Patrol are little changed from previous GUs. In fact the fatter rubber, if anything, makes it more skittish on gravel 'marbles'. We can't say we noticed any great improvement from the seating updates and the previous ergonomics haven't changed. The Patrol scored its five-speed automatic box from Nissan's luxury car lineup some years back and while it was state-of-the-art then that's no longer the case. Our test vehicle suffered from an average two-second delay when the driver called for 'kickdown' and the shifts were jerky.

On lumpy bitumen the 2007 Patrol bump steered at both ends, as it's always done, but was predictable. Ride quality is still firm and handling is flat at normal 4WD driving speeds. Try upping the velocity around tight corners and the big Patrol understeers in protest. That's not what it's meant to do. Where the Patrol shines is on long hauls and when the bitumen ends.

Potholed dirt roads don't faze the Patrol, which soaks up big holes and ruts in grand style. It's the same story in true off-road situations where the combination of good ground clearance, excellent wheel travel and a powerful limited-slip rear differential work optimally to keep the Patrol moving in situations where only the rugged make progress.

Economy from the Patrol's old engine lineup isn't good. The diesel won't give better than around 13-15L/100km in mixed city and highway driving and the petrol is worse still, with typical consumption around 18-20L/100km.

All this could change if Nissan slots the Renault three-litre V6 diesel from the Pathfinder/Navara models into the Patrol's ample engine bay - 550Nm is just what the aged Patrol needs to get it back into the pack.

### Previous Models

If you can find a late-model, factory turbo-intercooled 4.2-litre Patrol. Patrol it's a better bush vehicle than a new three-litre.

### Bush Modifications

Patrol coils sag easily, so a taller, stronger set is required, along with matching shock absorbers. Being a part-time 4WD wagon the Patrol can benefit from a rear-axle self-locker, ideally matched by a driver controlled front locking diff.



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