

4WD BUYERS GUIDE

MITSUBISHI PAJERO THREE-DOOR SMALL WAGONS



Mitsubishi's re-introduced three-door wagon lasted only four years, from 2007 until 2011. The current-shape three-door was available overseas from the introduction of the NM monocoque-body-chassis model in 2000, but wasn't brought here until the 2006 NS re-skinned model.

At the new three-door's 2006 introduction we reckoned it was a gamble that wouldn't pay off, because the Australian market had moved away from big three-doors. Because the 2006 upgrade was a re-skin the Pajero's specifications were largely unchanged, but bigger brakes across the NS range dictated 17-inch wheels (18s on the top-spec') and the already well-kitted Pajero traction system was expanded by the availability of a \$1000-option rear-axle diff lock.

The new acronym was MATT (Mitsubishi All Terrain Technology), embracing ABS and EBD, engine-braking assistance, stability control, traction control and hill-hold assistance. Traction control and stability control were cancelled when the diff lock was engaged.

The proved, selectable-full-time 4WD system was retained, but the shift action was improved. The 2006 3.8-litre V6 engine retained single overhead camshaft design, but with variable valve timing.

The 2006 diesel engine was a common-rail version of the 3.2-litre that was first seen in Australia in the ML Triton when it was launched in July this year. This DOHC 16-valve intercooled turbo diesel engine was Euro IV emission compliant and produced 125kW of power at 3800 rpm, with peak torque of 358Nm at 2000 rpm.

The three-door was available with either 'R' or 'X' equipment levels.

To an R-list that included roof rails, automatic air conditioning, six-stack CD player, compass, altimeter, immobiliser and alarm, remote locking, power windows and mirrors, cruise control, fog lamps, steering wheel audio controls, leather wheel, handbrake and gear lever trim, the X-level added heated front seats, an eight-way adjustable, powered driver's seat, leather seat coverings, aluminium sports pedals, chromed grille, high-intensity-discharge headlights, colour-keyed handles and mirrors with turn indicator lights, auto-dim heated mirrors, curtain airbags, reverse parking sensors and a cargo blind.



A \$2000 electronic tilt/slide power sunroof option was available on R and X, and a hands-free mobile phone system with Bluetooth was a dealer fitted accessory.

Both engines could be mated to either a five-speed fully synchronised manual transmission, or Mitsubishi's five-speed INVECS II 'Smart Logic' automatic transmission with sports mode.

The three-door variants got 290mm ventilated discs with two-pot callipers at the front and 305mm ventilated disc brakes with one-pot callipers at the rear.

Trailer towing capacity was 2500kg, with a maximum ball weight of 250kg and the need for weight distribution bars for ball loads above 135kg.

Pricing for the Pajero three-doors started at \$40,990 for a petrol manual and peaked at \$49,990 for a diesel auto X version.

Mitsubishi's industry-leading, five-year/130,000km and 10yr /160,000km drive-train warranty, with five-year roadside assistance, applied to the new three-doors.

The last upgrade for the three-doors was part of the 2009 model year NT Pajero revamp that included an engine upgrade, cabin and exterior refinements, and revised specifications.

The 4M41 common-rail DI-D new engine upped output to 147kW of power at 3800 rpm, with 441Nm of torque at 2000 rpm – an 18 per cent improvement over the former model. At the same time, claimed superior fuel economy of up to 13 percent over the previous model.

A new five-speed automatic transmission with sports mode, lock-up and intelligent shift control was the only transmission, coupled to either engine.

The RX scored side and curtain airbags as standard, as well as new side steps, front mud guards and body coloured trim, and new cloth seat trim.

The X model received new equipment including rain-sensing wipers and dusk-sensing headlamps, a standard rear diff lock on diesel variants and an electric slide and tilt sunroof.

On and Off Road

The 2009 Pajero's poise on gravel roads was class-leading and when provoked out of shape it was pulled smoothly into line by the stability control system. The three-door is more nimble than the five-door and is eminently 'chuckable' with complete safety. However, the 18-inch, 265/60 rubber produced a harsher ride than the old 16-inchers used to.



Switches and controls were judged excellent and the Super Select 4WD driveline lever worked slickly, without baulking or crunching.

Pajero interiors have always been very driver-friendly, but we wondered why the company has adopted a dark instrument binnacle in the NS model. With sunnies on your face and the headlights on for safety – thus dimming the dash lights - it's very difficult to see the speedo and tacho readings. It wasn't broke before, so why 'fix' it?

As a long-distance machine the Pajero proved excellent and it also had a second-row seat that could accommodate two adults for long periods in comfort

The Pajero's independent suspension limited wheel travel, but that didn't stop the X-rated three-door. What the suspension travel couldn't achieve with tyre contact the Pajero's off-road traction system managed, by limiting wheelspin whenever a wheel came off the deck – which was often. The Pajero would have been stranded without its traction control, but that's what it's there for.

Fuel economy from petrol V6s is usually ordinary and the Mitsubishi Pajero was no different, averaging 14-15L/100km. The diesel was better, at around 10.5-12L/100km.

Previous Models

In 1987, the popular box-shaped ND Pajero scored larger front seats, an automatic transmission option and a slightly larger, 2.5-litre turbo-diesel engine. For 1988, the NE model came with the Aussie-built 2.6-litre petrol donk from the Magna sedan.

Model year 1989 NF and 1990 NG Pajeros saw the last revamp of the box-body vehicle, before a slightly more rounded body shape was introduced in 1991. The model range was topped by an EXE luxury version.



The Pajero NH was launched in April 1991 with new bodywork sitting on top of largely the same chassis and engines that the box-shaped NG model used. Also retained was independent front suspension by wishbones and torsion bars.



The 1991 NH lineup started at GL level with drum rear brakes and leaf-spring suspension. Engine choices were a carburettored 4G54 2.6-litre petrol engine or a 4D56 2.5-litre turbo diesel, with a five-speed manual transmission and part-time 4WD, using manual free-wheeling front hubs and steel split-rim wheels.

The GL's performance was no improvement over its predecessor.

GLS models were available with petrol or diesel power and sported fat, cast aluminium wheels and integrated door trims, bumpers and wheel arch flares.

The next model designation - NJ - came in November 1993, with the introduction of a new 2.8-litre diesel engine across the range. The new 4M40 diesel was naturally aspirated in the GL models, for outputs of 71kW at 4000rpm and 198Nm at 2000rpm and turbo-intercooled in the GLS models for outputs of 92kW at 4000rpm and 292Nm at 2000rpm.

Other mechanical changes were revised manual and automatic transmissions, plus improved ground clearance and roll stability at the front end.

The next Pajero upgrade came in September 1995, when the 3.5-litre engine was made standard in the GLS models and optional in the GLX. Apart from minor trim changes, the bodywork remained the same until the three-door was discontinued at the NM model release in early 2000.

Bush Modifications

A shortie has an advantage over a four-door wagon at the end of any camper or caravan towing stint, being able to tackle very difficult terrain when uncoupled.

Most of the usual mods for a five-door Pajero can be adapted to the three-door. A 50mm suspension lift can turn it into a real bush weapon.

Forget a dual battery system, because there's no usable space under the bonnet, but it's easy enough to strap power packs behind the folded seats.





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