

## NEWS - NISSAN PATROL First Drive

**The new generation Patrol was previewed at the 2010 Australian International Motor Show in late October and we've had a brief on and off road drive of the Show vehicle.**



Structurally, the 2012 Patrol bodywork sits on a completely new ladder-frame chassis that is said to have twice the lateral rigidity of the previous model; not that that would be an unreasonable target! Australia may have been the central focus of the original Patrol's development in the early 1960s, but that sure ain't the case today. The first seventh-generation Patrols are all left hand drive and their principal market is the oil-rich Middle East. Even the prototype testing was centred on the playground of cashed-up sheiks, with a lesser amount of testing in Australia.

The specification also says 'Middle East', with the only engine offered being a petrol V8. The all-new VK56VD 5.6-litre V8 engine with VVEL (variable valve event and lift) and direct petrol injection generates 298kW and 560Nm of torque.

Thankfully, a 140-litre fuel tank is standard.

Nissan Australia boss, Dan Thompson told OTA that "there are a number of possible diesel engine options" for the 2012 Patrol. One possibility must be the new V9X three-litre V6 diesel that powers top-shelf Pathfinders and Navaras. It's down on the petrol V8's power, but matches its torque.



The Sydney Motor Show display 2012 Patrol was more of a Range Rover Vogue and Lexus LX570 competitor than an alternative to GXL LandCruiser 200 Series or Land Rover Discovery 4.

The Show vehicle boasted all-independent suspension, hydraulic body motion control (HBMC), for sway control and stability off- and on-road, and a new seven-speed automatic transmission with manual shift mode. It also had hill start assist and hill descent control.



Other technologies included lane departure warning and prevention, intelligent cruise control, distance control assist, forward collision warning system, vehicle dynamic control, traction control, helical brake limited slip differential, a mechanical differential lock, tyre pressure monitoring system and intelligent brake assist.

Inside, the preview model had leather upholstery and trim, polished aluminium and wood-grain panelling.

There were also six airbags, front seat belt pretensioners with load limiters and active head restraints.

The multi-screen, multi-functional individual DVD entertainment system boasted three displays, a dashboard screen and two rear-facing TVs that connected to various sources of music, video and entertainment, such as a DVD, iPod and game player. There were also a Hard Drive based Navigation (HDD) System and a 9.3GB 'Music Box'.

Fit and finish on the 2012 Patrol were exemplary and quite capable of comparison with the interior quality of its established rivals. However, all this kit won't come cheaply, which is why there will most likely be lower-specification models and the existing generation GU series Nissan Patrol will continue for the immediate future.



The lower-specification 2012 Patrol will retain all-independent suspension, but most likely with coil springs and conventional dampers, rather than the hydraulically cross-linked HBMC struts. This model would almost certainly have to be diesel powered to attract buyers in the bush-travel and towing segments of the large 4WD wagon market.

## On and Off Road

The top-shelf 2012 Patrol was a refined performer in all the different terrain conditions at the Mt Cotton (Brisbane) proving ground. On-bitumen it handled predictably through high-speed corners and showed a handy turn of speed along the straights.

Overtaking slower traffic won't be a problem for 2012 Patrol drivers.

Off-road the big machine idled over rocky trails in high and low range, with the terrain program switching controlling mode changes.

However, it needed to be stopped for the high-low switch over – unlike current Land Rover and Range Rover models - and the combination dial and button arrangement isn't as intuitive as the Land Rover terrain-mode dial.

In on and off road conditions the HBMC system worked very well, maintain a flat stance through the on-road twisties and helping keep the wheels on the deck in severe off-road suspension travel situations.

Obvious downsides were the sheer size of the beast and its weight: it had to be teased through narrow track sections that the GU Patrol handled easily. Ground clearance wasn't a problem on this test track, but a conventionally-sprung version, without HBMC's ability to optimise suspension travel, may have some issues. After-market spring makers will no doubt step into the breach, with 50mm-lift suspension kits.

## The Future of the Venerable GU



Nissan Australia intends to keep the existing Patrol selling alongside the new model well past 2012. The GU is a stalwart, but has an Achilles Heel in the form of the aged ZD30, three-litre diesel that needs to rev too much and drink too much to deliver too little.

Nissan wouldn't be drawn on the possibility of the V6 diesel slotting into the Patrol's big engine bay, but OTA's assessment is that all its competitors will have V6 diesel power by 2012 and the asthmatic Nissan four will lag well behind.