

# NEW AND USED VEHICLE REVIEWS

These brief assessments of each make and model 4x4 are to be used as guides only; particularly when evaluating used vehicles. The models covered are true off roaders, with low-range gearing and high ground clearance.

We've also included modifications you'll need to make if you intend to do much off-roading. Not included in these sections are bars, bush tyres, deep-cycle backup battery power, fridges, racks and winches, which are covered in the vehicle modifications section.

## MEDIUM UTES



### Ford Ranger/Mazda BT-50

Ford owns a controlling share in Mazda, so these two utes are virtually identical, other than for minor panel and trim differences. The mechanicals are the same.

Like most utes they have a part-time 4x4 system, which restricts 4x4 operation to low-grip surfaces.

The diesels are the pick for bush work and are the best performers in the medium ute class. Ride quality when lightly loaded is harsh.

### Previous Models

The Courier/BT models were relatively low-powered, but tough and reliable.



### Bush Modifications

Like all part-time 4x4 utes the Ford/Mazda ute can do with a self-locking rear diff to control wheel spin when in two wheel drive, ideally matched by a driver controlled front locking diff. Also needed is a suspension height increase of around 50mm at the back and a torsion bar 'tweak' up front for a lift of around 30mm. Longer shock absorbers are needed to match the suspension height change. A bash plate is needed to protect the low-slung intercooler.

## GWM

Great Wall Motors is, obviously, a Chinese ute maker. The first example to be sold in Australia is a 100kW/200Nm, petrol-powered crew-cab that's down in performance terms, but low-priced at 27 grand, driveaway.

### Previous Models

Old GWMs were probably rickshaws, but the Chinese are learning vehicle-making fast.

### Bush Modifications

It's early days for the GWMs, but a softened rear suspension is obviously needed. We'll know more about this make in coming months.



## Holden Colorado/Isuzu D-Max

Like the Ford/Mazda pair the Colorado/D-Max twins are virtually identical utes, sharing common mechanicals.



They differ from all other medium-sized utes in having rear axles that bolt over, rather than under, the rear leaf springs. This arrangement reduces belly clearance.

Performance from the petrol and diesel engines is good and ride is acceptable.

### Previous Models

The Rodeo has a good reputation and there are plenty of used ones available.

### Bush Modifications

Like all part-time 4x4 utes the Colorado/D-Max ute can do with a self-locking rear diff to control wheel spin when in two wheel drive, ideally matched by a driver controlled front locking diff. Also needed is a suspension height increase of around 50mm at the back and a torsion bar 'tweak' up front for a lift of around 30mm. Longer shock absorbers are needed to match the suspension height change. A bash plate is needed under the front suspension and to protect the under-frame fuel filter.



## Land Rover Defender 110

An ancient body sits on top of the most sophisticated chassis, suspension and mechanicals in the ute market. The new engine is a modified Ford Transit light truck diesel and the standard box is a Ford six-speed.

Primary safety is top-shelf – all-coil handling and optional traction control – but secondary safety – cab design is 1950s.

The Defender 110 comes into its own when the bitumen ends.



### Previous Models

Old Defenders don't die easily, but the four and five-cylinder diesels were leisurely performers.

### Bush Modifications

The latest Defender wagon has traction control, but some utes and all older models have open front and rear differentials. A pair of Maxi-Drive diff locks is the traction solution.

## Mahindra Pik Up

A single or crew-cab diesel with only 79kW/247Nm means the Pik Up is no rocket and 'tinny' bodywork sits on a solidly built chassis with over-strength rear springs.

Head room in the back of the four-door is superb.

Euro-diesel heritage means it's frugal and pricing is well under 30 grand.



### Previous Models

There aren't many in the market, yet.

### Bush Modifications

It's early days for the Mahindra, but a softened rear suspension is obviously needed. The chassis is fitted with captive nuts for a bash plate, so it's easy to make one to fit.

## Mitsubishi Triton



The latest top-shelf Tritons come with wagon-like features: full-time 4x4, traction control, stability control and optional rear diff locks, so they've left the medium-ute competition well behind. The 2010 model has increased crew-cab tray dimensions and more diesel grunt. Best medium ute by far.

### Previous Models

The Triton has a good reputation in the used market.

### Bush Modifications

A 2009/2010 Triton that comes ex-factory with selectable part-time, full-time 4x4, traction control and a rear axle diff lock is well set up out of the box. However, a suspension lift is called for. Older models with part-time 4x4 can benefit from a self-locking rear diff, ideally matched by a driver controlled front locking diff.



## Nissan Navara D22

Nissan took an each-way bet when it introduced the D40 Navara, retaining the previous model as a tough, entry-level ute, just in case the Euro-built D40 didn't hack it.

Originally fitted with the Patrol's three-litre diesel the D22 has been repowered with a detuned version of the D40's 2.5-litre donk. Tough and honest, the D22 is showing its age.



### Bush Modifications

Like all part-time 4x4 utes the D22 Navara can do with a self-locking rear diff to control wheel spin when in two wheel drive, ideally matched by a driver controlled front locking diff.

Also needed is a suspension height increase of around 50mm at the back and a torsion bar 'tweak' up front for a lift of around 30mm. Longer shock absorbers are needed to match the suspension height change.

## Nissan Navara D40

The European-built Navara was the best 4x4 medium sized ute until Mitsubishi did a massive upgrade to the Triton. The Navara performs well and has a choice of five-speed auto or six-speed manual, behind grunty petrol or diesel engines.

Nissan designed the Navara with a great deal of commonality with the Pathfinder wagon and now needs to bleed some Pathie features, such as full-time 4x4, traction control and stability control into the Navara very quickly.

### Previous Models

See Navara D22.

### Bush Modifications

Like all part-time 4x4 utes the D40 Navara can do with a self-locking rear diff to control wheel spin when in two wheel drive, ideally matched by a driver controlled front locking diff. Also needed is a suspension height increase of around 50mm front and rear. Longer shock absorbers are needed to match the suspension height change.



## Toyota Hilux

The HiLux is the biggest selling 4x4 in the market, despite being the highest-priced ute and way underdone in comparison with the new Triton's specifications. Ride quality is good, but ground clearance is worse than previous HiLuxes. Resales are excellent.

### Previous Models

Older HiLuxes make better bush beasts than the current one, with its Prado-like front end and poor approach angle.



### Bush Modifications

Like all part-time 4x4 utes the HiLux can do with a self-locking rear diff to control wheel spin when in two wheel drive, ideally matched by a driver controlled front locking diff.

Also needed is a suspension height increase of around 50mm front and rear. Longer shock absorbers are needed to match the suspension height change. The weak front bash plate needs to be replaced by a sturdier one.