

## Nissan Pathfinder has rugged elegance

One of the worst rides I ever had was in a stiffly sprung 4X4 sport truck trying to get down a highway in the winter to the hospital.

My wife and I both shudder when we think of that drive. The pitching and crashing of the vehicle, thanks to a suspension with no give, was almost too much to endure.

To this day, my wife says, "I

hope it doesn't ride like that Brand X we had" every time I bring home a four-wheel drive sport utility truck.

In truth, they are all getting better as computer-designed suspensions are tailored to a market segment which wants a tolerably smooth ride with the ability to slog it out through water-choked gullies in Four Low. Even Brand X has made its

truck a gentler runner since that first encounter.

Many consider the Nissan Pathfinder one of the best thought-out, best assembled four-door sport trucks on the market today. Instead of a warmed-over body on a pickup chassis, Pathfinder's body is purpose-built and placed on a 104.3-inch wheelbase. Nissan does not use leaf springs preferring coils and a five-link suspension package at the rear. And it does make a difference.

Nissan says it has the most generous interior dimensions of any vehicle in its class. The width between the seats is generous. You don't sit rubbing shoulders as you do in most imported sport trucks. I can say the Pathfinder does not have a high step-up to the cab followed by seats which feel they are set on the floor. This, with a low cab roof, can lead to a very cramped feeling found several other competitors.

The car as tested was an SE four-door model with all the options and then some. The SE comes equipped with special mag wheels, three-speed wipers with delay, cruise, power mirrors, windows and door locks, an exterior rear tire carrier, limited-slip differential, discs all around, power sunroof and bronze-tinted windows, and, in the toy department, electronically-controlled shock absorbers. The truck has a base price of \$26,190. The optional four-speed auto is \$1,280, air is \$1,180 plus \$100 air tax and the special wheel and tire package is \$1,500. Add in bits and pieces like \$105 for floor mats and it came to approximately \$29,150 as tested.

The two rear doors are nicely flared into the overall body design with the handles up on



The 1981 Nissan Pathfinder adds a four door model to its purpose-built body lines and the power of the engine from the 300ZX sportscar.

the pillar just at shoulder height for easy opening. The rear seat accommodates three people and it splits for extra cargo stowage. I appreciated the four hooks on the rear floor for attaching the baby seat tether.

hp which, with the use of the five-speed manual trans or the electronically-controlled four-speed auto, lets you merge and pass without adding grey hairs. That's also enough to let you tow 3,500 pounds with ease.

For some reason this is one sport truck which doesn't look all propped up on top of a set of Big Foot-like tires. Shifting from 2WD to Four High is just a pull back of the transfer case lever. Getting to Four Low is also a cinch. Remember getting out of the truck to lock the front hubs? We've come a long way for sure.

What I noticed most was the responsiveness of the steering. Even though it gave lots of road feel, the power rack lets you crank into a turn without it becoming hard to move the wheel. In fact, you can feather your way through almost any curve the on-ramps can throw at you. Of course that's as long as you remember this is a truck and the centre of gravity is up around the transfer case.

The back deck is a two-way design, the deck folding down and the glass going up. Room is sufficient for a wheelchair to be transported fully open.

In its press material, Nissan says the four-door Pathfinder has "rugged elegance" and you'll not find me quibbling.

Combine that with just about the finest V6 in the segment and a purpose-built body, and you have a sport truck which is one of the leaders in the class.

### Health department keeps abreast of the times

Halton Region's health department was the first in the province to initiate a breastfeeding support service back in 1985, and committee members learned that the program is still going strong.

Last year, 320 Halton residents participated, an increase of 35 per cent over the previous year.

In addition, public health nurses provide workshops and seminars for health care professionals.

One of the reasons Halton began the program was a national study indicating that although 78 per cent of women initiated breastfeeding following birth, only 42 per cent were still breastfeeding at three months.

Dr. Pollett pointed out that the Canadian Pediatric Society, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, Ontario Ministry of Health and Halton Region health department all "support breast milk as the optimal source of nutrition for infants up to six months."

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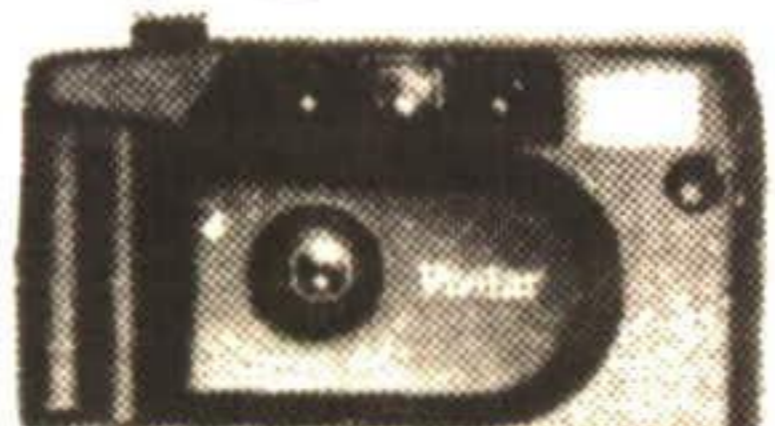
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