

2001 Pathfinder has many standard features

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SE Pathfinders with automatic and the LE benefit from Nissan's computer-regulated All-Mode Four-Wheel-Drive. It senses road conditions and automatically adjusts from two- to four-wheel traction.

Fuel consumption ratings show the five-speed getting 14.7L/100 km (19.2 mpg) city, 11.8L/100 km (23.9 mpg) highway. The automatic returns 15.6L/100 km (18.1 mpg) city, 11.9L/100 km (23.8 mpg) highway.

All Pathfinders have power assisted brakes with ABS and the discs are vented at the front. All Pathfinders also have 16-inch wheels and tires and the wheels have different designs for each model.

Styling is enhanced, but it stays true to the overall lines that have kept Pathfinder in the top import SUV slot. Besides model-specific grille designs and body-color bumpers, there has been a freshening of the nose and tailgate areas as well as the fitting of the latest multi-parabola headlight systems.

Standard features are many including power windows, heated mirrors, clock, remote keyless entry and vehicle security system, rear cargo area cover, leather-wrapped steering wheel and rear convenience net.

Goodies as options include the Bose audio system with in-dash six-speaker stereo while the LE driver's seat has position memory. Between the seats is a new, dual-level centre console with armrest and built-in 12-volt power point.

A lot of detail work has gone into the Pathfinder to make it

feel like it belongs in the premium SUV segment. These include steering-wheel mounted audio controls, separate clock and "one touch" up/down front windows. The XE and LE get white face gauges with black numbers, the SE has a special titanium face.

Pathfinder was one of the first SUVs in my experience to not drive like a pickup truck hidden under a four-door body stuffed with leather and wood trim. Attractively priced, and wonderfully strong if you stick to the maintenance schedule, the honesty of the Pathfinder is what keeps it selling so well.

During a drive over some interesting terrain that combined highway with desert off-track, the Nissan was flawless.

The relatively high seating does not cause outward vision problems, it enhances visibility. Close inspection of the doors revealed a first-rate paint job, as one would expect at this end of the SUV stick.

Underway, and especially at highway speeds, the difference between the 3.5-litre and last year's 3.3-litre was night and day. Nissan brought a 2000 model along for comparison and it was quickly nicknamed "the penalty box" by another journalist on the test run.

Riding part of the way with Nissan Canada marketing director Ian Forsyth, he took a lot of time to talk about the efforts Nissan had taken to quiet down the Pathfinder. He said more than 100 improvements had been made for 2001 in the noise, vibration and harshness area including front liquid-filled and rear double-cushioned engine mounts. That's just about when I realized we had been talking at normal levels in the SE model at about 110 kmh where we would have been shouting in the old 3.3.

Another point of interest was the deflation of a rear tire. It's not often road testers get to use the jack, but this was one time when having a full spare (tucked underneath) was reassuring. With 250 km still to go, one of those little hard rubber donuts would not have been welcome.

The route I took, in fact, was very enjoyable, the Nissan purring instead of churning along and the banter back and forth entertaining and one always gets a lot of insight into the state of the Canadian market when listening to Forsyth.

Prices start at \$34,700 for the XE and \$38,200 for the SE with five-speed manual. Add the automatic and the SE is listed at \$40,200 while the LE has a list price of \$44,300.

With CD, sunroof, and go anywhere All-Mode 4WD, the Pathfinder is a very civil place to be and that's regardless of the season or the conditions outside.

And that's why, really, more and more people are getting converted to SUVs. And based on my test drive impression, and the ability of the Pathfinder, it's why Nissan continues to be the leader of the import sport trucks.

(NISSAN PATHFINDER 2001 AT A GLANCE)

BODY STYLE: Four-door SUV; front engine / four-wheel-drive

ENGINE: 3.3-litre DOHC V6 (manual transmission 250 hp, 240 lb/ft, automatic transmission, 240 hp, 265 lb/ft)

FUEL ECONOMY: Five-speed manual, 14.7L/100 km (19.2 mpg) city, 11.8L/100 km (23.9 mpg) highway; four-speed automatic, 15.6L/100 km (18.1 mpg) city, 11.9L/100 km (23.8 mpg) highway.

PRICE: XE, \$34,900; SE manual \$38,200; SE automatic \$40,200; LE, \$44,300.

AJAC Car of the Year Winners

TORONTO (Ontario) December 7, 1999 -- Eleven 2000 Car of the Year Award category winners were announced today by the Automobile Journalists Association of Canada (AJAC) at an awards ceremony held at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre in downtown Toronto.

AJAC's Gerry Malloy, president of the Canadian Car of the Year Awards, explained that, "the winners represent the best among an excellent group of new cars and trucks for 2000, as selected by a sophisticated voting process based on back-to-back, real-world testing."

The winners are:

Best New Economy Car: Winner: Ford Focus LX

Best New Family Car: Winner: Ford Focus ZTS (under \$25,000)

Best New Family Car: Winner: Nissan Maxima GXE (over \$25,000)

Best New Luxury Car: Winner: Infiniti I30

Best New Prestige Car: Winner: Audi A6 4.2

Best New Sports Car: Winner: Audi TT Quattro Coupe

Best New Sports Coupe: Tie Win: Honda Civic

SIR and Ford Focus ZX3

Best New Luxury Coupe: Winner: BMW 328 Ci

Best New Sports Sedan: Winner: Nissan Maxima SE

Best New Station Wagon: Winner: Saturn LW2

Best New Sport Utility: Winner: Nissan Xterra

The 2000 Canadian Truck of the Year Winner is the Nissan Xterra. The overall 2000 Canadian

Car of the Year winner, as well as the winners of the Best New Design Award and the Best New

Technology Award will be announced on press day of the Canadian International Auto Show,

in Toronto on Thursday, February 17, 2000.

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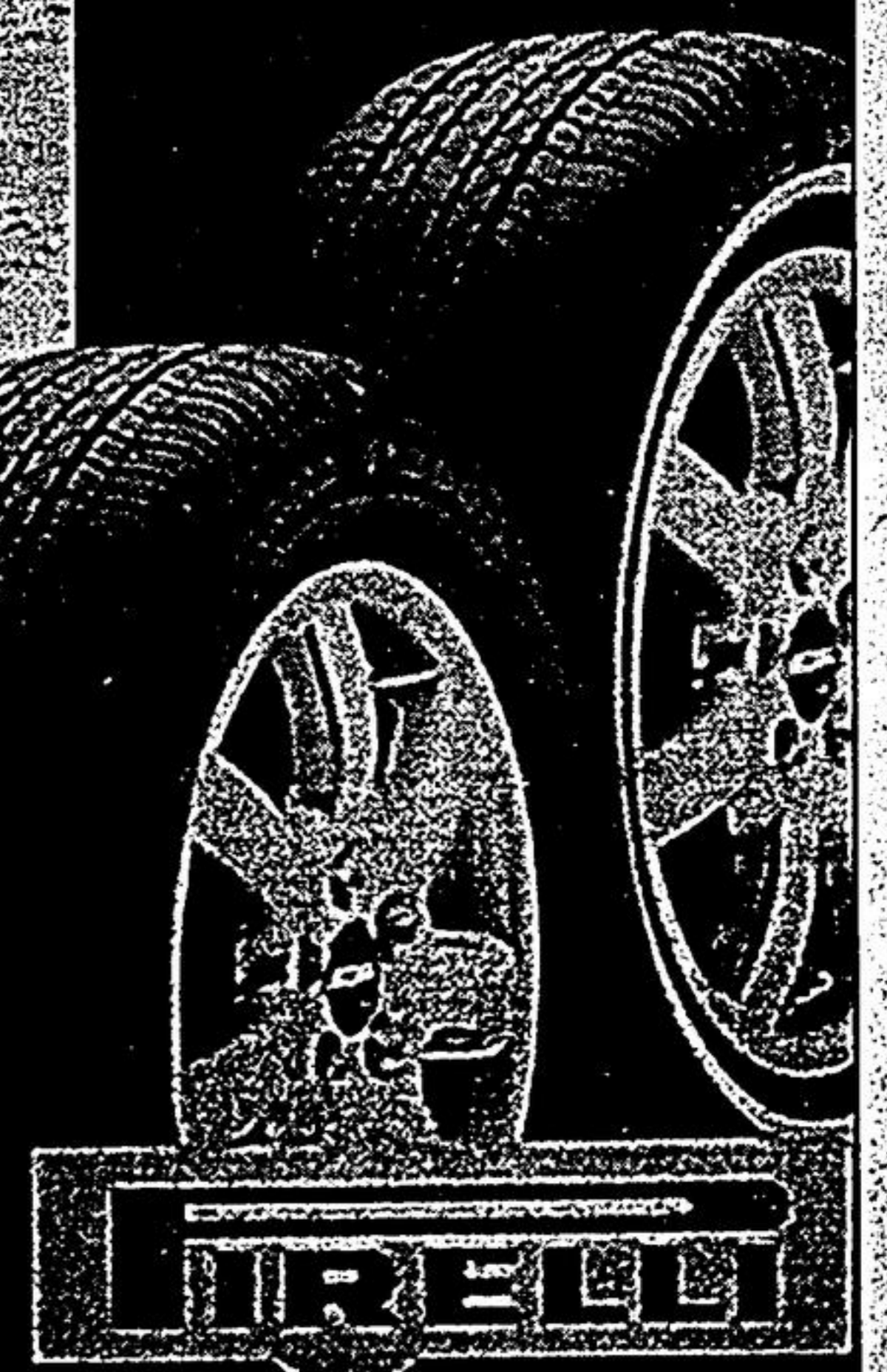
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