

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

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CARReport

1997 Nissan Pathfinder makes the grade

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

This year's Nissan press guide has a little present in it — a couple of chuckles in a parable about what's inside a Nissan "dream garage." Let me share a few with you during this column about the 1997 Nissan Pathfinder.

Redesigned and re-engineered less than a year ago — February 1996 — the Pathfinder now has prettier and softer lines, a longer wheelbase, a new engine and quite a bit more cabin and cargo space.

"Those who doubt the concept of eternity have never taken a road trip with a 3-year-old."

The 1997 lineup consists of 6 distinct models, each for a different type of driving experience — 4x2 XE and LE and the 4x4 XE, SE and LE.

All five models feature a 3.3-liter single overhead cam V6 engine that provides 168 horsepower. This is a more powerful engine than the previous model, but we still need a few more horsepower here, guys. Sure it gets you there, but not in an all-fire hurry. It just seems a little underpowered. It can get you around town with little annoyance, however.

The new engine provides great flexibility and torque for towing and off-road driving. The zero-to-60 mph time is 10.5 on the 4x2 automatic and 11.2 on the 4x4.



ROAD
TEST
By
Anne
Fracassa

"Need a hug? Try fastening your seatbelt a little tighter."

A couple of things have been added to the 1997 Pathfinder to make it even better, such as storage pockets on all doors (SE model), seat back pocket added to the passenger side of the XE models, a new exterior color and an advanced Bose 6-speaker 15-watt AM/FM CD system on the LE models.

You can mate the 3.3-liter engine to either a 5-speed manual or electronically controlled 4-speed automatic transmission with overdrive. If you choose the 4-wheel-

drive models, you'll be happy there is a shift-on-the-fly feature that can be activated at speeds of up to 60 miles per hour. What convenience.

And this thing is as quiet as a mouse inside. Comfortable to drive and ride in as well. Heavy-duty strut-type front suspension allows better tire contact with the road and comfort all around — whether you're on or off-road.

"Without cars, how would the world know your child is an honor student?"

Nissan also installed the proven 6-link rear suspension design with springs and shock on the outboard for better stability and exquisite body roll control. There are stabilizer bars both in the front and rear.

"In a million years, will bugs evolve a way to bounce off windshields? Or will they simply learn not to fly near highways?"

Four-wheel anti-lock brakes are standard equipment on all models of Pathfinder this year. When on the highways and byways, the ABS works like your ordinary run-of-

the-mill traditional ABS. But off-road, it's a little different. It incorporates a special "G-sensor" that reads the road surface and adjusts braking controls accordingly. That eliminates the "skimming effect" you get on dust, gravel or sand.

Also, every Pathfinder is outfitted with a standard power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering system for better and easier maneuverability. It has a really tight turning radius, as well, something you wouldn't expect on a vehicle this large.

The Pathfinder is a large vehicle that provides comfortable seating for five. In front, there are large bucket seats that can provide comfort for even the largest buckets. In the rear, there's a 60/40 split fold-down seat that folds flat for added cargo area.

"The earth spins at 1,000 miles per hour. Please wear your seat belt."

Also in the rear, you'll find large rear door pockets, a concealed side storage bin and a mini-storage compartment under the floor of the rear cargo area. What's in there is a spare tire. You can opt for an out-

side spare tire carrier, but you know what? The car looks so much cleaner and sleeker without it.

Ahead of the driver is a really smart instrument cluster. Nissan engineers listened to the consumer when designing the IC because all the gauges are arranged "according to need." That means the most used displays are center in the driver's field of vision and switches are varied in size and shape to avoid confusion.

The Pathfinder XE is available in 4x2 and 4x4 models that have 15-inch steel-belted radials, smartly styled 6-spoke alloy wheels and fabric seats. The SE, which is only available as a 4x4, has shift-on-the-fly, 15-inch radials on alloy wheels, chrome trim, fender flares, step rail roof rack, fabric seats, cargo tie downs, cruise control, power remote windows, door locks, heated outside mirrors, remote keyless entry, security system and driver's seat lumbar with height adjustments.

"Without cars, how would shopping carts stop?"

Finally the LE is available in 4x2 or 4x4 models and come standard with 4-speed automatic transmission, limited-slip rear differential (on 4x4), running boards, fog lights, aluminum alloy wheels, roof rack, simulated wood-grain interior trim, air conditioning and automatic temp controls, leather seats, cruise control, remote-controlled power windows, door locks and out-

side mirrors, keyless entry and vehicle security system.

What really struck my eye about the Pathfinder is its sleek look. Even the rear door handles are recessed and up high. It actually looked like a 2-door at first. The lines are softer and it doesn't look boxy, like the previous generation Pathfinder did. It's become a little more Americanized, where before it looked too Japanese.

"Look into your heart for wisdom and under your seat for change."

The Nissan Pathfinder has changed, and this change is really good. It's good looking, better powered, more comfortable and user friendly. Good option to look at when considering a sport utility.

Here's just a few more:

"Maybe traffic jams happen because cars like to be with other cars."

"Why can't there be double yellow lines between right and wrong?"

"If you name your car you'll have someone to blame when you lock your keys in it."

"Have fun. Smile. Drive happy. Enjoy the ride."

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures.

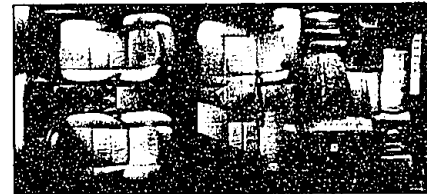
1997 Nissan Pathfinder

Vehicle class: Special purpose sport utility vehicle.

Engine: 3.3-liter single overhead cam 12-valve V6.

Mileage: 18 city / 15 highway.

Where built: Kyushu, Japan.



TAMAROFF

ON 12 MILE ROAD, JUST WEST OF TELEGRAPH ROAD

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