

# CARGAZING



The new Nissan Pathfinder Rock Creek adds a lifted off-road suspension to give it extra capability away from pavement.

## Pathfinder Adds Trail Cred

### Rock Creek Version Has Off-Road Suspension, Rugged Look

By Derek Price  
CARGAZING.COM

At its birth, the Nissan Pathfinder was a hardcore off-road truck with a brawny ladder frame to help it blaze trails and scale mountains.

Since then, the Pathfinder has flip-flopped twice between car-like unibody construction — what it uses today — and truck-like, body-on-frame construction, which helps withstand brutal off-road conditions but sacrifices gas mileage and on-road comfort.

This week, I'm driving a new version that tries to split the difference: the Pathfinder Rock Creek.

Based on today's comfy, quiet, car-like Pathfinder, the Rock Creek adds a lifted suspension tuned for off-roading. It gives the Pathfinder a bit more capability without sacrificing much in the way of silence, suppleness or nimble handling, three of its key selling points in a crossover-obsessed world.

Other goodies for the trail include all-terrain tires mounted to 18-inch beadlock wheels, a tubular roof rack that can hold up to 220 pounds, and a special version of Nissan's Around View Monitor with a mode for off-roading like the latest Frontier PRO-4X. It also comes standard with a



Orange stitching and lots of Rock Creek branding make this unique version of the Pathfinder stand out visually.

tow hitch receiver and harness that can pull up to 6,000 pounds.

Other changes to the Rock Creek are more about style than substance.

It looks sharp with a unique version of Nissan's familiar grille, giving it a dark finish and mesh insert in this iteration. Inside it gets orange stitching, captain's chairs in the second row and enough Rock Creek branding to leave no doubt which version of the

Pathfinder you're driving.

The Rock Creek also offers 11 more horsepower than the standard Pathfinder. When you use premium fuel it makes 295 horses, compared to 284 for other Pathfinders, because of "revised fuel mapping," Nissan claims.

That makes me wish Nissan would apply this magic fuel-mapping formula to every Pathfinder.

Nissan points out that you're not required to use premium fuel in

the Pathfinder Rock Creek. You can put regular fuel in it, but it won't generate as much power and torque. That means drivers can pick whether they care to pay for that extra performance.

I like a lot of things about driving the Pathfinder, but most of them still have to do with its on-road handling.

It makes a great family vehicle for road trips, with reasonably spacious seating for seven while still

leaving decent cargo space in back.

While the regular Pathfinder is almost luxury-car quiet at highway speeds, the all-terrain tires on the Rock Creek add a bit of noise. I didn't find it annoying, but it is a real tradeoff.

And, no surprise, the slight bump in horsepower results in slightly worse gas mileage. The fuel-economy works in Washington rate the Rock Creek at 20 mpg in city driving and 23 on the highway. For comparison, a standard Pathfinder with AWD is rated at 21 in the city and 27 on the highway.

On the plus side, I really loved the Rock Creek's look.

The bulky roof rack and two-tone paint on my tester evoked the image of a Land Rover on safari. It looks like you're ready to explore Africa, plunge into an Amazonian rainforest or cross the Australian outback, even if the underlying vehicle remains centered around family friendliness.

At \$43,140, pricing for the Rock Creek is in the middle of Nissan's Pathfinder lineup.

The base S version starts at \$35,320, while the luxurious Platinum trim with four-wheel drive is priced at \$50,190.

#### A CLOSER LOOK



#### AT A GLANCE

FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

**What was tested?** 2023 Nissan Pathfinder Rock Creek 4WD (\$42,820). Options: Two-tone paint (\$790), Rock Creek floor liners (\$345). Price as tested (including \$1,295 destination charge): \$45,250

**By the numbers**  
Wheelbase: 114.2 in.  
Length: 198.8 in.  
Width: 77.9 in.  
Height: 73.7 in.  
Powertrain: 3.5-liter V6 (295 hp, 270 lbs.-ft.)  
Fuel economy: 20 city, 23 highway

**Ratings**  
Style: 7  
Performance: 7  
Price: 6  
Handling: 7  
Ride: 8  
Comfort: 7  
Quality: 8  
Overall: 7

**Why buy it?**  
The latest Rock Creek version brings back some off-road credentials to match the Pathfinder name. It looks great in two-tone paint.

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