

Brutal Softness

Pathfinder Has Tough Looks, Comfy Ride

By Derek Price

CARGAZING.COM

To understand the 2024 Pathfinder, you have to ignore what Nissan says about it.

Everything about the Pathfinder implies that it's rugged, brawny and ready for adventure. The macho name, the 6,000-pound tow rating and especially the "return to rugged" styling overhaul in 2022 all point to an SUV that eats mountain-trail boulders for breakfast and violently bruises anyone unlucky enough to ride inside it.

But that's not what the Pathfinder is about.

It only takes a quick drive in today's Pathfinder to realize it's as comfortable, practical and gentle as a minivan, despite all Nissan's bluster about adventure.

The Pathfinder has some off-road capability, sure, especially in the Rock Creek version I tested with four-wheel drive and a lifted suspension.

What strikes me the most about it, though, is just how smooth and quiet it is, a more perfect vehicle for long highway trips than for scaling mountains.

That's true even in this Rock Creek version with its all-terrain tires, roof rack and extra .6 inches of ground clearance. The standard Pathfinder is even smoother and quieter, a sensation enhanced by soft



A recent redesign made the Nissan Pathfinder look more brawny and truck-like, but it remains a surprisingly soft, quiet, comfortable way to travel with a family.

seats and a thoroughly sealed-up cabin that keeps wind and road noise to a minimum.

Every Pathfinder is powered by the same size engine, Nissan's tried-and-true 3.5-liter V6, which makes 284 horsepower and 259 pound-feet of torque in most versions of the Pathfinder. The Rock Creek bumps those numbers up to 295 and 270.

Weirdly, the two-wheel-drive version gets slightly worse city gas mileage than

the 4WD Pathfinder, according to the fuel wonks in Washington. You get 21 city mpg with the 4WD and 20 with the base model.

Both versions get a not-so-bad highway mpg rating of 27.

Not surprisingly, the Rock Creek version with its higher profile and extra power is noticeably thirstier, rated for 20 mpg in the city and 23 on the highway.

Apple CarPlay worked flawlessly all week on my tester. Android Auto also

comes with every Pathfinder for easy smartphone connection.

Nissan's touchscreen interface also responds to inputs quickly and is easy to learn, something I can't say about all its competitors.

My favorite Pathfinder tech feature is ProPILOT Assist. It combines adaptive cruise control with steering assistance, and it does an exceptionally good job keeping the vehicle centered in the lane and smoothly flowing with traffic, including

bringing the Pathfinder to a standstill in stop-and-go situations.

I also love how easy it is to change the cabin layout for hauling cargo or people. The second-row seats slide with a simple movement to adjust the leg room forward or backward, and you can fold them completely flat for loading bulky cargo.

With the third row folded down, there's a whopping 45 cubic feet of space for cargo. Fold the second row, too, and capacity increases to 80.5 cubic feet.

Overall, I think the Pathfinder does a great job mixing family-friendly comfort and road-trip smoothness with potent SUV styling. It's a roadgoing magic act, looking like a deadly lion but driving like a cuddly kitten, making it an unusually comfortable and easy SUV to live with.

Pricing starts at \$35,810 for the base S grade with two-wheel drive. It comes with Apple CarPlay and a three-zone climate system.

The version that tempts me the most is the SV that adds heated front seats and the ProPILOT driver assistance features for \$38,630, still a good value.

The SL adds leather seats and a bigger, 9-inch touchscreen starting at \$42,230, while the four-wheel-drive Platinum tops the lineup at \$50,680 with its luxury-car feature list, including

20-inch wheels and cooled leather seats.

The Rock Creek edition I tested starts at \$43,630.

AT A GLANCE

What was tested? 2024 Nissan Pathfinder Rock Creek 4WD (\$43,630). Options: Rock Creek floor liners and cargo area protector (\$340). Price as tested (including \$1,295 destination charge): \$34,635

By The Numbers

Wheelbase: 114.2 in.
Length: 198.8 in.
Width: 77.9 in.
Height: 73.7 in.
Engine: 3.5-liter six cylinder (295 hp, 270 ft. lbs.)
Transmission: Nine-speed automatic
Fuel economy: 20 city, 23 highway

RATINGS

Style: 8
Performance: 9
Price: 9
Handling: 7
Ride: 9
Comfort: 9
Quality: 8
Overall: 8

Why buy it? For a vehicle that looks so rugged, it's surprisingly smooth, quiet and car-like from the driver's seat.

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Upper trim levels of the Pathfinder come with a nine-inch touchscreen and lots of soft-touch materials in the cabin. An eight-inch screen is standard.

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A CLOSER LOOK



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FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

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