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GOOD MOTORING **The macho machine**

There are very few vehicles that can boast of a record like the Mitsubishi Pajero. Twelve wins in the gruelling Paris-Dakar Raid, and seven of those consecutively. As if that is not enough, in 1997, 1998 and 2002 they took the first, second, third and fourth positions. Rallies, raids and races are the test tracks for auto manufacturers. The paddle shift gear change that is found on some cars is a result of Formula One racing.



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The Pajero and its sibling, the Montero, have had their agni pariksha in the Paris-Dakar Raid. The Pajero, standing in a city showroom, has gained popularity following participation in rallies around the world. The new Pajero SFX is much the same as its predecessor. Like a pretty woman, it has had a lipstick and nailpolish job, which makes it a lot sweeter to look at but the hardcore Pajero is there under the skin.

The changes to the exterior that draw immediate attention are the flared wheel arches. It gives the Pajero a macho look, as opposed to its predecessor, which was a lot more timid looking. The square radiator grill with the bright red three-diamond logo leave no doubt as to who is coming your way. A two-tone inter-cooler vent on the passenger side backs up the Pajero statement.

A clear lens headlamp cluster flanks the grill. The vehicle is equipped with a wide broad bumper below the grill, fancy headlights and fog lights. The centrepiece of the bumper is removable, and there is provision to house a winch. For serious off-roading, a winch is a must. In the Pajero, the winch is mechanically operated.

I don't agree with this. The winch should be electrically operated. Which means that if the engine has stalled, the battery-powered winch will pull you to safety. Under the flared wheel arches are 265/70x15-inch tyres mounted on six-spoke alloy rims, which gives the Pajero a solid stance on the road as well as looks. The spare wheel is carried on the rear gate covered in a dual tone cover.

The Mitsubishi diamonds are prominently displayed. Chrome has been used liberally on the ORV mirrors and the door handle as well as the windscreen glass frame. The footboard is wide and a power antenna is standard. Slip into the driver's seat, and leather surrounds you—the seats, the steering wheel, the gear-shift covers.

The padding in the doors is also leather and dual tone. Possibly, one of the unique features of the Pajero is the two-tone paint scheme. A lot of cars are two tone but the colour separation is horizontal. In the Pajero it is vertical.

Like it or not, it is eye-catching. This colour scheme is now carried into the interior. The see-through headrests are colour coordinated with the exterior colour. Sitting atop the centre console is the multi-meter. It houses an altimeter, barometer, inclinometer and outside temperature gauge. Safety features abound in this SUV. Dual airbags in front, 3-point ELR seat belts, side-impact bars in the doors and the ABS braking system. There are numerous cub holes to help you get organised—bottle holders, cup holders, and pockets for papers. Keeping the Pajero company in the showroom is the Montero, also with a string of victories in the Paris-Dakar Raid, and the Outlander. The Pajero retains a 2.8-litre engine, the Montero has a 3.2-litre engine and the Outlander has a 2.3-litre one. All are diesel engines. The price of the Pajero and Outlander is Rs 20.70 lakh approximately. The Montero is about Rs 42 lakh.