



New Prado a cracker

The new fourth-generation Toyota Prado is a cracker. An upgrade to the rugged four-wheel drive has done away with two five-door variants in favour of two new three-door SWB models.

So the Prado model range now consists of SX and ZR three-door (SWB) diesel auto variants and GX, GXL, VX and Kakadu five-door (LWB) models. These come with a choice of petrol or diesel engines and automatic or manual transmissions, depending on the model.

With 220mm of ground clearance, the new Prado still sports a separate ladder chassis which now provides improved on-road characteristics and additional passenger safety.

Front and rear track is 30mm greater and all models, with the exception of Kakadu, come with a revised all-coil suspension package. In line with this major improvement, the new model offers far better ride and handling characteristics, with flatter cornering, greater stability and less tendency to sag when towing heavy loads.

Kakadu comes with variable dampers and adjustable/self-levelling rear air suspension. Kinetic Dynamic Suspension – a system first seen on LandCruiser 200 Series in 2007 – further enhances the on- and off-road ability of VX and Kakadu.

LWB Prado is now 80mm longer and 10mm wider than its predecessor, resulting in a bigger interior, reminiscent of the superseded LandCruiser 100 Series. It is also 15mm lower, which means better aerodynamics and subsequent fuel savings.

The carry-over 4.0-litre V6 engine is up on power by 13 per cent (202kW, 381Nm) while the 3.0-litre common-rail turbocharged four-cylinder diesel still produces 127kW and 410Nm.

The five-speed automatic transmission comes with new software, which results in smoother and more efficient changes and a new sequential manual mode as opposed to the previous gated shift pattern.

Spec levels have improved across the board but prices have risen as a consequence. Cheapest in the new range are

the three-door SX and five-door GX diesel manual (\$55,990). The volume-selling GXL five-door petrol manual is priced from \$60,990, with the diesel coming at a \$1,000 premium. Automatic transmission adds \$2,500 to GX and GXL.

The GX and GXL auto diesel models are impressive. The three-litre common-rail diesel comes with new injectors; and the intercooler is now positioned behind the grille rather than on top of the engine.

It might not be the most powerful diesel in this class but it is clearly one of the smoothest and quietest and offers plenty of torque for any task. The diesel is also more frugal – 8.5 litres/100km for five-door auto models and 8.3 litres/100km for three-door diesel models, according to Toyota.

The GX undertakes highway cruising, while towing, as effortlessly as it does overtaking and climbing. It is more stable with a load than was the previous model and less prone to bouncing at the rear end. On a test drive involving a combination of suburban and highway driving, as well as towing, the GX

returned impressive economy of 11.1 litres/100km.

The GX once lacked the fruit to interest buyers, but it is now a cost-effective alternative for those who want a serious on- and off-road wagon. Its lack of side steps will be a plus for some; and with third-row seats now stored under the floor, GX features a deeper cargo bay.

It costs \$6,000 less than a GXL diesel and comes with:

- » Seven airbags.
 - » Vehicle stability control.
 - » All-terrain traction control.
 - » ABS with EBD and Brake Assist.
 - » Air conditioning
 - » Cruise control.
 - » Smart entry with push-button Smart Start.
 - » Tilt and telescopic steering column.
 - » Six-disc audio with Bluetooth and USB/iPod inputs.
 - » A ventilated (cooled) console box.
 - » Alloy wheels.
 - » Optional third-row seats with extended curtain airbags (\$2,500).
- GX auto also comes with Hill-Start Assist and Downhill Assist control.



Fit for any task

The new Mazda CX-7 Diesel Sports is a fantastic package. Its substantial torque and slick manual transmission work marvellously well together to produce spirited acceleration for a vehicle of 1,928kgs. Mazda has introduced the sporty diesel SUV along with entry model CX-7 Classic.

Classic features a naturally-aspirated 2.5-litre (120kW, 205Nm) four-cylinder petrol engine which drives only the front wheels through a smooth five-speed automatic transmission with manual mode. It comes to the market at \$33,990, and includes such standard items as:

- » Stability control.
 - » Traction control.
 - » Anti-lock brakes.
 - » Six airbags.
 - » 4.1-inch display with ambient temperature, reversing camera, trip computer and maintenance monitor.
 - » Auto climate-control air conditioning.
 - » Auto headlamps.
 - » Power windows, remote locking.
 - » Six-disc audio with auxiliary jack for MP3 player.
 - » Seventeen-inch alloy wheels.
- Spacious inside, CX-7 seats

five adults comfortably. The driver's seat comes with a height adjuster and the leather-bound steering wheel features reach and rake adjustment as well as cruise, audio and trip computer function buttons.

One can enhance the already abundant cargo space by dropping one or both of the 60/40 rear seats.

The 2.5-litre four has sufficient grunt for any task. It is smooth, relatively quiet and well matched to the new five-speed auto. Mazda claims fuel economy of 9.4 litres/100km. A *Police Journal* test drive in the suburbs achieved 11.2 litres/100km. The diesel used 8.5 litres/100km.

CX-7 Diesel Sports (\$43,640) features a 2.2-litre four-cylinder DOHC intercooled turbo diesel engine, which produces 127kW of power and 400Nm of torque. Drive is to all four wheels through a six-speed manual transmission.

The diesel comes with additional features such as:

- » Eighteen-inch alloy wheels.
- » Bluetooth.
- » Satellite navigation.
- » Leather seats (front ones heated).
- » Premium Bose audio system with nine speakers.



Smile-maker

Australia's

most fuel-efficient car is the trendy Ford Fiesta ECONetic, which looks like fun and drives that way. It is a cute little four-door hatch powered by a lively 1.6-litre turbocharged diesel engine. And it boasts combined fuel economy of just 3.7 litres/100km and low emissions of 98grams (CO2) per km.

This makes ECONetic slightly more fuel-efficient than Toyota's Prius, a petrol/electric hybrid which achieves 3.9 litres/100km and costs around \$15,000 more.

With a drive-away price of \$24,990, it is not the cheapest small car around but it is very well equipped. And it will bring a smile to the faces of its owners every time they stop to fill up – this thing runs on just a sniff of diesel.

After a week of testing around town, ECONetic averaged 5.0 litres/100km. Zeroing the trip computer and driving for economy brought that figure down to just 4.1 litres/100km.

And, last October, an ECONetic achieved 2.9 litres/100km in the Alice

Springs to Coober Pedy leg of the Global Green Challenge.

It is roomy enough for four adults, and the hatch is big enough for a couple of medium-size cases.

Its modern dash is user-friendly and features a sporty gauge layout with digital readouts for trip computer and outside temperature. The steering wheel comes with audio and cruise buttons, while the slick central facia features an info display and integrated audio system with USB port.

ECONetic is a great little car on the road. Its modest 66kW engine can crank out 200Nm of torque, making it a spirited car to drive. It is willing, smooth enough for a diesel, and relatively quiet. The clutch is light and the five-speed gearbox a breeze.

ECONetic comes with stability and traction control, a full suite of airbags including driver's knee, and a five-star ANCAP rating. On the downside, the spare wheel has been tossed out to save weight.