

## THE ENDEAVOUR (post 63 Harbir)

I just drove the endeavour. 3.0 AT and the pajero SFX. No drive in the Fortuner yet. the toyota dealer told me 3 times that she'd have someone call back but didn't and then on the 4th call she said that the schedule for the day is already made, test drives not possible till tomorrow. I called another dealer whose receptionist hung up on me after telling me to hold. A third dealer that I called yesterday had told me that their test driver scheduler would call. When he didn't and I called back, this person apologized and said they don't have a demo fortuner. A fourth dealer said their demo fortuner had gone to ambala and wasn't available right now. I am ready to strike the fortuner off the list for consideration but my dad tells me that the guy who services his accord has found a used fortuner for him. we'll check that one out, otherwise the fortuner is just about out of consideration.

Anyway, on to the test drives of the Endeavour and the Pajero.

the first impressions, respectively, were "american pick up truck" and "vintage japanese jeep".

I lived in the US for 18 years and it was nostalgic to drive the Endeavour. it has that classic american live axle pick up truck thing going for it. I first checked out the rear seat which was better than that of the montero I drove yesterday, then got in the driver's seat. The initial impression wasn't great because the interior looks cheap and down market, like a bargain basement product dressed up to look modern and chic in glossy brochures where the pictures can't convey any impression about quality and finesse. the design aesthetic and design aesthetic is kind of like the \$99 stereos you see in walmart. the floor of the vehicle is quite high and the seats are low to the floor, which creates a car like seating posture with the feet up closer in vertical height to the hips but stretched further out forward than you might expect in a vehicle of this type. The bonnet skims just below driver's straight ahead line of view, instead of being well down. The overall impression is of being in a car thats been lifted 12 inches.

On the move, the engine and transmission are impressive. the chassis much less low. The engine is very impressive in that it is very nearly petrol like in its refinement and noise levels (though not the best petrols by any means) and has responsiveness to the throttle that is downright startling for a diesel. The floor mounted transmission lever has a nice feel to it and the transmission is very responsive in terms of kicking down without ever frustrating the driver. As such the vehicle's ability to move and respond the driver's throttle inputs is absolutely excellent. Its easy to drive this vehicle urgently, especially since it has not only a responsive engine and transmission but also a very responsive steering.

but moving on from there, things start to come apart very quickly. The Endeavour drives like an american plumber's van. The american small commercial vehicle ethos places a high value on extremely inexpensive manufacture in vast quantities in extremely incompetent unionized factories and all that is expected is for the vehicle to last a long time and be safe to drive. Thats it. There is not the slightest grace in how the vehicle drives and steers. And the endeavour is just like that. Its soft suspension keeps the occupants from getting too uncomfortable from the the unruly motions of the wheels and axles, but the movement is too much and too uncontrolled, with the body springing around unnecessarily as the beam axle is felt to be wiggling and jiggling down there. Steering inputs produce the same kind of unnecessary indifferent and excessive sloppiness. Everything the vehicle does is accompanied with lots of excess uncontrolled and unnecessary movement and sensation.

This thing drives exactly like the Ford Explorer a saudi friend of my roomie in college used to have. awful.

I also got a bit of off roading in. There is highway construction site near my house that is inside a nalla and can be accessed by a dirt road that is littered with rocks, bricks and mud holes. the Endeavour made it to the end of this dirt track easily but bounced and boing-boinged and the steering and seat of the pants feel were not at all cooperative in helping me feel my way forward over the rough terrain.

on the whole, a crude and unsophisticated vehicle. It's off the list.

## **THE PAJERO**

5 minutes after the endeavour guy left, the pajero guy showed up. Immediately, the impression was superb. I opened and shut a rear door. then the rear door. in both cases, immediately after the "made in detroit" feel of the Endeavour, the Pajero felt built with the solidity of a tank and the precision of a swiss watch.

From the driver's seat the Pajero disappoints by being short on room. not a lot of leg room, not a lot of foot room, not a lot of knee room, not a lot of elbow room. but adequate. its got the classic jeep seating posture, upright, high above the beltline of the vehicle, pedals close to the seat, wheel low to the knees. the design aesthetic is vintage 1989. A problem if you expert modernity, not an issue if you're interested in how the vehicle drives and not how stylish it looks inside or out. but definitely a very dated look and ergonomic layout.

on the move, the pajero impresses by immediately feeling very small and narrow. The engine feels torquey and the shifter has really excellent feel, firm, crisp, accurate shifts. the steering is geared slow but has good feel and accuracy. The slow speed ride is truly excellent with all the road imperfections, potholes etc beautifully snubbed. At speed, the ride does get bouncy but in a different way from the endeavor. The endeavour has exaggerated long period body movement. the pajero has rapid short period jittering over the road at high speed. The pajero rides better than a normal car at slow speeds and worse at high speeds.

The engine I found entirely adequate. the lack of power is felt in the fact that acceleration on the strong end of normal maxes out the engine in 1st and 2nd so that in normal use the car gives you what you want, but not effortlessly and not leaving anything much in reserve to give even more. But once in third the vehicle moves pretty healthily. It is entirely adequate to the speeds we can now expect in the north. Traffic has reduces cruising speeds to the sub 100km/h range with only occasional bursts past 110 possible (how nostalgic I feel about the time 10 years ago when you could easily cruise for 140).

Still, while I was thinking that the power of the engine was more than adequate, it also occurred to me that if the engine has to be worked hard, it's going to guzzle gas.

Going down the road around town the pajero is very easy to drive because the sight lines out of the vehicle are superb, the steering is accurate, the shifter is excellent, the engine responsive, and the body is devoid of any excess motions (except the high speed bumpiness). It feels so tight, small, precise, kind of like the sports car of off roaders. It was a startling contrast to the expedition because virtually every motion and reaction of the pajero is deliberate, measured, and in exact and direct response your input. This feel of precision and control makes for a really impressive feeling vehicle.

then I took it onto that dirt track and almost bought the Pajero on the spot. Surely this thing was designed for military use, its that good. Its not about being able to reach remote places without getting stuck but about the sheer ease with which the pajero goes over rough terrain. It virtually GLIDES. It seems to treat rough conditions with the sort of relish that pianist might feel while getting down a Steinway Grand. The suspension

seems to flex and wrap around the bad surface as if adapting to it like a glove while keeping the whole body out of contact with the ground. More than that, the steering and the seat of the pants communicate so clearly with the driver, its simply breathtaking. The path is so easy to pick. and once you pick the path, the pajero just FLOWS down that path as if doing a slow motion ballet. This is a heroic off roader, not because it can go places where others can't but because it it can go the same places with the ease, finesse, mastery, and grace of an artist. I am sorry to get so cheesy and sickly sweet in the description, but I was really very very impressed.

To test it further, I put it 4LLC, engaged reverse gear and released the clutch. It was amazing to see the pajero stroll up and out of the awful track in reverse with no input from me at all. no steering, no throttle. the no steering and in reverse part is especially impressive because the track was full of obstacles (piles of broken rock and deep mud puddles) that I had carefully steered around in order to ensure the smoothest possible progress. going in reverse without steering input would be like not steering around obstacles that were unseen. I had no doubt that any 4x4 would make it out easily. What was impressive was that on the way out, the pajero just rolled out as if there was nothing there for it to clamber over. the body rocked a bit, the steering jiggle a bit. I was tensed up to expect some difficulty, some need to provide steering input to help the vehicle as it went over obstacles I could not see, but no. it just sailed through. So so impressive! I've no doubt that any other 4x4 would have made it too, but it was the ease, nonchalance, the total control that amazed me. There is no question, the pajero has really incredible axle articulation and the steering geometry is designed to work with that.

If I were buying for myself, I would have bought the pajero right there and then. I would say that if you are buying an off roader because you expect it to do well off road, this is THE one. if you're buying an off roader for on road use but only occasional off roading and are not looking for a master of off-roadery, then something less dated with a more modern, more spacious interior and more modern engine would be the trick.

the rear seat is still as lousy as I recall from my earlier test drive of the pajero. if my dad buys this, we'll have to look into getting one of the original spec non-flip-forward seats from an import.

the Pajero is an amazing vehicle.

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Edit: As I was typing this post, the seller of the Montero I test drove earlier called. he said that the vehicle had had a bearing in the steering rack replaced and would I like to test drive it again. so I went and test drove it again. The steering problem was indeed fixed but I walked away disappointed now that I had just driven a new Pajero

I need to test drive another unit of the Montero. This one showed me that the only advantage the Montero had over the Pajero was that the interior design and layout, ergonomics, driver position, control layouts, etc are leagues ahead of the Pajero. but the handling is sluggish, there is a lot of brake dive, the response to the steering is sluggish and in general it felt like a big lumbering slow witted beast. It did not feel like a modern version of the pajero I had just driven (which would have been flat out awesome).

It is entirely possible that the vehicle was not in good condition so I will be test driving one or two more but right I am very curious to drive the fortuner. it may very well be that it has waiting lists precisely because all the other contenders are flawed or deficient in some way.

on that note, its funny. A toyota dealer called and offered me a test drive after an agent at the same dealer had told me earlier that they couldn't give me a test drive.

## **T-FORT**

Hallelujah! a fortuner test drive! Galaxy Toyota came through! with a promise of a 6-8 week delivery time.

impressions:

The pajero is better than the fortuner for not 2 in 10,000 people. but I and my dad may be 1 or 2 of the ones for whom it is. Possibly. Maybe. Not decided yet.

first off I got in the middle row. This could have been a make or break thing. my dad is 6'3" and when not driving himself, he lounges in the back seat. So a rear seat suitable for a tall large body is a huge bonus. The Pajero had disappointed in that its middle row seats are not in line with the front causing the occupant to sit skewed. The Fortuner thankfully doesn't have this problem. but otherwise, its not a comfy seat for a 6'2" man. its merely ok. it has neither the thigh support, nor an adequately large back squab, nor is it adequately high off the ground (given how much room there is for legs), nor is the recline of the back squab satisfactory. On the whole, its a wash between the Pajero and the Fortuner as far as the middle row is concerned. If the Fortuner had scored here, it would have certainly have knocked the Pajero out of contention. but it didn't.

Then I got in the driver's seat. This is where the Fortuner scores the first of its two huge wins over the Pajero. Its like sitting in a car, and a decent modern car at that. the seating position, the reach to the pedals, wheel, shift lever, the relationship of the driver to the vehicle, its all extremely car like. very comfortable, very "normal". Compared to this, sitting in the Pajero is like sitting at the wheel of a freight truck. And there are no ergonomic nightmares (apart from a wheel that doesn't telescope but needs to), the audio system and the HVAC are not only integrated and coherent and with modern convenience, they're also so well located.

so right off the bat, the Fortuner has scored a bulls eye.

then we get moving and thats when the fortuner scores its second bulls eye. its engine is better than the one in the montero (atleast the old 165hp one, if not the new 199hp one), never mind the one in the pajero. Its quiet as a whisper, smooth as glass, and pulls like a freight train. and its responses to the throttle are both creamy and brutal. Again and again the impression is of muscle and cream. So very smooth, so very meaty, so very slick. Probably the best engine of any car in India that I have driven, making allowance for the fact that its a diesel. That combined with the superb feel of the shifter and the entirely lash free smoothness of the transmission, make this one slick smooth polished ride.

on the move, the fortuner is breathtakingly swift. unless a petrol engine that revs hard to produce speed, in the fortuner, you just find yourself propelled along with a great effortless force with rapidly increasing velocity, while the interior and the car's control exhibit not the slightest preturbance by the increasing speed. Truly astonishing. I would not be surprised if this truck out dragged my wife's honda accord without breaking a sweat.

Driving a fortuner feels like driving a fast car from the second story, and not an off road SUV.

thats to its positive attributes. So far so good. these traits make it the better vehicle for

virtually everyone. but its not a compelling package for me.

why not?

Firstly, like I mentioned in the beginning, its not a good car for a tall person to ride in the back seat in comfort while the driver drives.

Secondly, while it has a very good ride over smooth surfaces, it not good at all on bad surfaces. It causes a lot of head toss and stomach churn on bad surfaces. The bucking and jolting is very near the point of very quick discomfort. By comparison the pajero is never as settled as the Fortuner can be as its always fidgeting and jiggling, but its never as rough as the fortuner easily gets on uneven surfaces.

Thirdly, while it can obviously go anywhere a pajero would, it's nowhere near as effortless or as graceful or as masterly. it will get places by having high ground clearance and stiff suspension, not because it has masterly suspension articulation and steering architecture to match. I took it into the same rough that I took the Pajero, but it just didn't have the magic masterful feel of the pajero. It bucked and hobbled over the bad stuff unlike the pajero which glided. It did not climb up and over and down stuff with the consummate ease and grace of the pajero. It jolted and bucked and kicked the steering in the hands of the driver. No doubt it will go where ever the pajero will, but it will absolutely not do so with anything approaching the level of ease, stress, lack of effort, comfort, reward and fun that the Pajero will. There is just no contest here. The nail in its coffin was that backing out of the trail test I put the Pajero. The fortuner did not make out without input. It needed both steering and throttle input and a hawks eye on the mirrors. with close attention and inputs from the driver, the fortuner made it, but it certainly did not just glide over the bad stuff effortlessly. By comparison, the Pajero was like sitting in chauffeur driver lexus LS430, getting driven on sunset boulevard.

So.

In my view, the fortuner wins only if you really must have the looks, the image, the high driving position, and the road presence of this vehicle. If you can forgo those, then the fortuner fails because it is neither an exceptionally good on road car, nor a brilliant off roader. If you must have those (which most SUV drivers must) and you can put up with the rough ride and less than exception off roading, then the fortuner is your choice. If you want a vehicle because you will be going off roading and you want a vehicle thats great to be driven around in, the Fortuner fails.

What the fortuner does best is to be good for the driver on the road. but thats hardly the winning trait as far as I am concerned.

and the fortuner is no match at all for the Montero manual transmission. what it tries to do better than the pajero, it can't dream of matching a Montero on. but its got a great engine though.

lastly, there is one other thing. The fortuner, for all its comfort and speed, is a very vanilla vehicle. you might as well be driving a diesel Corolla with a lift kit. It has no personality at all. there is nothing special about it, no sense of occasion.

The pajero on the other hand for all its awful ergonomics, feels like a event, like you're driving a purpose built vehicle with an ethos that has gone out of style but which had a purpose and which fulfilled its purpose. Its like you're driving a vehicle meant to explore the world to look for survivors after the apocalypse has wiped out most of civiliztion. like a vehicle meant to get across enemy lines in a war zone.

the fortuner by comparison feels like fast tall minivan.

but dear god, does the fortuner have an engine and does the pajero suck on the engine front!

except for one thing. the pajero makes a ton more torque right at idle than the fortuner. the pajero feels like it would idle up mount everest with low range engaged, while the fortuner's engine feels like a high strung petrol motor. powerful and fast, but not likely to pull tree stumps out of the ground at idle.

The fortuner is like brad pitt. The pajero is like John Wayne.

I think the fortuner is out. though my dad might have different priorities.

right now its looking like its going to be a pajero. I'll give it another 2 weeks to find a good montero and if nothings come up, it will be a pajero. the fortuner remains in contention till I've had a chance to talk to my dad, but its a very distant third right now.

### **THE BEST OVERLANDER/HIGHWAY CRUISER**

an overlander by definition is an offroader. it may not do very serious mudplugging but it is inherently a vehicle that goes over land, ie not over roads.

Not having driven the montero off road, I say the Pajero takes it with the Montero coming in second and the Fortuner coming in third.

if you mean for road use only, the montero is first, the fortuner second, with a huge caveat about its jolting ride on rough surfaces, which however does not demote it from second place, and the pajero in third.

finally, I cannot imagine why anybody would buy any of these vehicles if the objective is primarily a good road car. buy a proper car and if you want the big and tall thing, buy a soft roader like the CRV or the santa fe. the only reason to buy a fortuner is if you want serious off road credentials, but if you are that serious about it, you should compromise on road excellence and buy a pajero.

I think the fortuner sells on the strength of its looks, style, presence, image, brand name. If you turn a blind eye to that, and you don't need or want the best off roader for the money, then I can't imagine why you wouldn't buy a soft roader like the santa fe.

but I must pause here and admit that my view of off roading is not the same as that of other people. No doubt there are people who would choose the on road superiority of the Fortuner and would be content with the relatively clumsy off roading of the fortuner because clumsy though it might be, it will still get there, to places where soft roaders wouldn't, and the combination of on road competence and will-get-there off road ability are the flavor of the day.

Maybe I need to rethink my own perspective for myself.

but as soon as I think that the fortuner's on road credentials are really very good, I find myself thinking that if I don't get the sort of off roading that the pajero does, then I want a lot better on roading than the fortuner does.

but then I have always been a purist, all or nothing at all and have always had trouble with compromise.

decide for yourself.

### More test drives. **(post 69 Harbir)**

1. Montero Automatic 170PS with 40,000km. This one was much much better than the one I drove previously. It wasn't all that pleasurable to drive in absolute terms but its steering, engine, shock absorbers, and brakes were all much better than those of the one I drove previously. It did leave me ambiguous though. In absolute terms its not a great vehicle to drive. I mean just driving around town isn't fun or pleasurable. its got a nice modern interior and a ton of space but the general impression is that its a painless and decently comfortable transport all the times that you are not making it work hard off road. its great size requires it to be threaded carefully in traffic which is some work and causes you to drive slowly. I didn't drive it in rough conditions, but on the whole it didn't scream "buy me!".

2. A new 200PS Montero Automatic. this was both much better than the above but also not that different. The big difference was in the steering. it spins very sweetly and has a smooth light well oiled feel that has become the norm for modern vehicles. The steering is light, sharp and tight. The engine was also impressive not in terms of outright power but in being substantially more refined with much better NVH characteristics. But the overall impression of great girth requiring slow and deliberate driving in Indian traffic remained.

This last point is something I have noticed in all three monteros. I am wondering if it isn't a matter of the automatic transmission. threading the vehicle with a manual gearbox gets a direct response but the automatic loses microresponsiveness as you try to use the throttle to thread through traffic.

The mitsubishi dealer has a customer buying a new montero and looking to sell an '08 manual. I'll go check that out and see how i feel.

3. I also drove another Pajero. It felt like a sports car compared to the Montero. or rather the Montero felt like I was driving a house compared to the pajero. The Pajero is so much more agile and responsive in traffic and thus so much more fun to drive. but its obviously very underpowered relative to the Montero. I found myself going flat out in 1st and 2nd gears just keeping up with traffic. the ride is pretty unsettled compared to the Montero with a lot of body movement and the ergonomics are primitive. Compared to the Montero the seating posture is from the stone age and really cramped. the rear seat is laughably deformed. but the Pajero manual is much more responsive and manueverable in Indian traffic than the automatic montero.

Right now its looking like its going to come down to between a new Pajero and a used manual montero that I still haven't drive. We'll see how that goes.

Edit: the Pajero's sound system looks like a nightmare to operate. its down near the feet and virtually impossible to operate without taking your eyes off the road for many seconds at a time. what madness. looks like you memorize a few essential buttons that you can operate with a glance and thats it

Edit#2: I really need to find a solution for the rear seat of the Pajero before we buy it. replace with a non split/flip seat from an import pajero? get a new rear seat custom made? who from?

### **Post 66 Traveller**

As a recent owner of a new Pajero (now done 11K), I totally agree with your test drive impressions. The Pajero is like no other. Even after 10-20 years there is nothing on the road in this segment that beats it.

Everyday I drive it, everyday I feel good. Off-Road or On-Road, it simply is amazing. It may be old, but is so well sorted out that it beats the competition hands down. Everything is engineered to perfection, the gear shift, the steering, the brakes, the splendid 4x4, the puny but very effective fog lamps, the flat folding front seats, the list is endless. It even comes with a full tool set and an inspection lamp. For what's it worth even the Air Filter housing is steel and so is the Power Steering Fluid Bottle. Last time I saw a steel Air Filter was in a Fiat 1100.

Infact I like it the have kept it the same over the years, it gives a product time to mature to perfection. Unlike today when we see everything being pushed out to market too soon and then product recalls being announced. Worse the product is just pulled off the market to be replaced with a newer model with it's own set of issues. From Cell Phones to Cars, everything is in a vice like grip of this upgrade vicious cycle. Haven't seen or heard this sort a thing happening with a Pajero. It just keeps rolling.

I finally feel that I wont need to change my vehicle for a long time to come.

I have been driving it on the highway for a fair bit (almost 7K out of 11K) and haven't felt the engine to be under any strain even at high speeds. Sure it's comfort zone is around 100-120, but it goes well above that mark. I haven't experienced any fuel economy dip either. It has been returning a constant 9.6 Kmpl in local traffic with full time A/C even when I have pushed it hard.

I had booked a Fortuner but dropped it instantly when I first test drove it. Too much roll, bumpy ride and truck like feeling. Pajero is one sophisticated vehicle. Not a screw has come loose and not a drop of coolant has reduced since I bought it in April. Have been driving in peak summers and I was amazed at the second service. There was nothing, absolutely nothing out of shape. They took just 3 hours to service and deliver it back to me.

Last but not least, it still sells upwards of 150 Units a month, apparently it sold 180 in July. I think that says more about it than anything else.