

‘Mountain goat’ with a cult following

Eamonn Wall has been running a Panda 4x4 in his firm over the past few years. It has now covered 54,000 miles. So is it any good?

I have always been a fan of small cars and when as a student working in the Alps, I noticed that compact Mark One Panda 4x4s and Subarus were the favourite vehicles among mountain dwellers. So many years’ later in my role as a car reviewer I got the chance to test drive both the petrol and diesel versions of the current Panda 4x4 which is the third reiteration of this model.

The first Panda looked like a mini Land Rover Defender with its flat metal panels and flat windscreen. It was a well-loved vehicle and stayed in production for nearly 20 years.

The current model is also a great looking car in its 4x4 state, with raised ground clearance and different front and rear bumpers. All Pandas now have five doors, and with their upright stance are surprisingly roomy for their length. Much was made about the use of squared off circles (known as squarcles) in the design (for controls, pockets, steering wheel, inserts, etc) which is good fun.

The diesel version is a well proven four-cylinder 1.3 litre Fiat engine, which comes with a five speed gearbox and does 54mpg. The more unusual engine is the award winning two-cylinder 850cc 85bhp petrol Twin Air Fiat engine, which comes with a six speed gearbox and does 44mpg. The longer geared Twin Air model cruises quietly at high motorway speeds, whilst the diesel’s lower top gear gets noisy at such speeds. The Twin Air model is also cheaper to buy.

The interior design is good and our model’s pumpkin interior is novel and well liked. The boot is surprisingly spacious (fits a large dog easily) and the car is well kitted out, including Bluetooth, heated seats and windscreen.

The four wheel drive system is very good. In normal circumstances power goes to the front wheels and when slippage is detected power



is automatically shifted to the rear wheels, in the same way as it would in a Discovery Sport or VW Tiguan. However the Panda 4x4 has a special button for calling up drive to all four wheels which you can engage before moving off, say on a slippery steep snow covered incline. It works very well and removes front wheel slippage while power is being shifted rearwards. Even BBC’s Top Gear drove one to the top of a mountain beating Suzuki’s Ignis, for what it’s worth!

Over the past 50,000 miles our petrol Twin Air Panda 4x4 petrol has proved to be a great wee 4 x 4. It is great fun to drive and was excel-

lent in the snowy winter of 2018. It is great off-road, combining its light weight and clever 4x4 system and only its lack of mega ground clearance prevents it beating a Discovery off-road. Yes it’s the best small 4x4 x far being cheaper than a Suzuki Jimny.

A more extreme Cross version of the Panda 4x4 comes with even higher ground clearance, but perhaps is a bit jiggly on road.

Second-hand prices for low mileage Panda 4x4s start around £6,000 and new pre-registered ones from £12,000. It is not surprising these wee mountain goats of a car have a cult following. Enjoy!

*Eamonn Wall
FICFor is a
forestry and
arboricultural
consultant and
managing
director of
Eamonn Wall
and Co Wood-
land Design and
Management.*

