

READY TO ROCK

BY JOE SAGE

Rock Creek is a special new mid-trim level of the three-row 2024 Nissan Pathfinder (\$43,630 in a range from \$35,810-50,680). Its distinction is built around off-pavement use, including off-road tuned suspension with extra lift, beadlock-style 18-inch all-terrain tires, LED fog lamps, tubular roof rack, leather seating with second row captain's chairs and console, along with its own fascia, grille, badging and interior stitching. Built in Tennessee with a US-built engine and transmission, it shares a 295-horsepower 3.5-liter V6 and 9-speed automatic with the rest of the lineup.

Intelligent four-wheel drive is a bargain—\$1,900 added to any front-driver—though Rock Creek stands alone as 4WD-only. The fuel mileage penalty for 4WD is negligible—the same or one point off, or two points for Platinum/highway.

There are many other variables within the lineup—seating for eight or seven (Rock Creek is seven as standard). Legroom is the same on all, with a notably generous 44 inches up front. A moonroof is optional on some, standard on others and not available on either the base trim or Rock Creek—a welcome decision, providing over an inch more headroom for bumpy off-roads, while optimizing strength and rigidity. Ground clearance is more on Rock Creek only—7.7 inches rather than 7.1—increasing approach and especially breakover angles significantly, departure just a bit. Rock Creek and Premium are the only two with 6,000-lb tow rather than 3500, though this can be optioned up on some others. Put it all together, and it's clear this build is more than just badges and styling—Nissan engineers have addressed details throughout, some dramatically, some a matter of fine-tuning, but leaving no stone unturned.

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Though not aimed at ultra-intense rock crawling and such, Rock Creek with its full-time Intelligent 4WD system, plus seven drive and terrain modes, will easily get you to camping, fishing and picnic spots on any rocky creek or peak of your choice.

Driving performance was strong right out of the chute—a nice combination of power, performance and handling. The V6 powertrain has a healthy V8-like rumble, in line with the vehicle's overall feeling of strength. Yet cruising speeds deliver a drive quiet and smooth enough to feel like an EV.

Pathfinder nails a really good niche in terms of size both inside and out—a three-row with a turning circle rivaling many a two-row—equally great in those wild places or for routine U-turns in town.

The suspension build itself is most impressive. The only time we may have been aware of its length was an awareness of rear handling when hitting a paved curve, the type you find when ac-

celerating through an intersection and onto a freeway ramp in aggressive traffic. Experiments with modes in constantly changing conditions in town were inconclusive (we generally stayed in auto).

We drove plenty of town and freeway miles, as most owners will, but also took the Rock Creek to the ends of the earth (not far away) for a spin.

That route starts with an increasingly narrow paved road, with guardrails and hairpins, a stretch that relies upon precision handling, which the Pathfinder delivered. Our off-pavement trail is a familiar one to us and includes a sharp switchback onto a very steep and rutted road up to the top. We paused to put it in four-wheel drive, quickly realizing that's automatic, part of the high performance intelligent system. So for good measure, we opted for its mud/ruts drive mode (our best match with plenty of ruts but no mud; others include standard, sport, eco, snow, sand and tow, underscoring this vehicle's general flavor—no rock crawling or other extremes). This stretch is short and sweet, but can stop many vehicles in their tracks (and was in nastier shape than average). But there was no stop-

ping the Rock Creek, quickly climbing through gulleys and loose gravel. If on the verge of slipping, the system would dig right in. Our speed was very consistent, while the action beneath our feet was complex and dramatic—very impressive.

We've long associated top-view monitors (now more common) with Nissan, as they were the first we experienced and because they have been one of the best since day one. These are a minor miracle in daily use, but can be a big one on the trail. We took full advantage of them while doing a seven-point-or-so turnaround at the top of this high off-road spot, familiar to us from many visits, but enough to make the unfamiliar want a spotting crew. The cameras' accuracy is unbeatable, rivaling the direct view of mirrors for precision, while providing far more situational information.

This is a tough, competitive segment, and Rock Creek brings a tough and versatile new version of a proven contender to the mix. Widely balanced usability is its purpose, augmented and not compromised by its special skills. It's all well implemented and definitely worth a serious look. ■

Nissan Pathfinder Rock Creek will get you through a normal week and a wilderness weekend—in style and confidence, and with neither at the expense of the other.



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Smyrna, Tennessee
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	US / US
PARTS CONTENT	US/Canada 50%
SEATS: ROWS/PASSENGERS	three/seven;
	Rock Creek std 2nd row captain's chairs
ENGINE.....	3.5L V6 24v DOHC multipt dir inj
HP/TORQUE.....	(93-oct prem) 295 hp / 270 lb-ft
	(regular unleaded 284/259)
COMPRESSION RATIO	11.0:1
TRANSMISSION.....	8-spd auto, manual mode
	w paddles, electronic shift-by-wire select
DRIVETRAIN	Intelligent 4WD
SUSPENSION.....	twin tube dual-flow path
	shocks; F: indep strut, solid stblzr
	bar 29.0mm; R: multi-link indep,
	hollow tube stblzr bar 28.8mm.
	Off-road tuned, Rock Creek only.
STEERING	dual-pinion elec pwr,
	vehicle-speed asst
BRAKES.....	F: 13.78x1.18 vented;
	R: 12.99x0.63 solid
WHEELS/TIRES.....	18-in machined alum-alloy
	w black finish; 265/60R18 all-terrain
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	198.8 / 114.2 in
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	Rock Creek 7.7 in
	(other trims are 7.1 in)
APPR / DEP / BRKOVER	18.8 / 22.8 / 19.3°
TURNING CIRCLE	curb-to-curb 38.7 ft
HEADROOM (F/2/3).....	42.3 / 39.6 / 37.8 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3).....	44.3 / 35.5 / 28.0 in
CARGO CAPACITY.....	max (1 row up) 79.8 cu.ft
WEIGHT	4605 lb
WEIGHT DISTRIB.....	56/44%
TOW CAPACITY.....	std Rock Creek 6000 lb
FUEL.....	reg or 93-oct prem unl
FUEL CAPACITY.....	18.5 gal
MPG	20/23/21 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$43,630
ROCK CREEK INCL:	off-road tuned suspension,
	18-in wheels w beadlock-styled design, all-
	terrain tires, intelligent Around View monitor
	w moving object detection & off-road mode,
	tubular roof rack, unique front fascia & grille,
	LED fog lamps, Rock Creek badging, 2nd row
	captain's chairs, 2nd row removable center
	console, leatherette appointed seats w
	unique centers & stitching
	incl
ALL-SEASON:	Rock Creek all-season floor liners
	and all-season cargo area protector
	340
PREMIUM PAINT	395
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	1335
TOTAL	\$45,700

2024 NISSAN PATHFINDER LINEUP

	FWD	4WD
S	\$35,810	\$37,710
SV	38,630	40,530
Rock Creek		43,630
SL	42,230	44,130
Platinum	48,780	50,680

Rock Creek is spec'd as having 295 hp and 270 lb-ft of torque on 93-octane premium, or 284 hp and 259 lb-ft with regular. While it can run on either, further digging suggests that any of them can, though more power comes only to those with i-4WD (the only Rock Creek build), not to front-drivers. Since all other versions come with either drivetrain, we're thinking it's left off specs for others to avoid clutter and confusion, though they don't specifically say this.