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AUSTRALIA

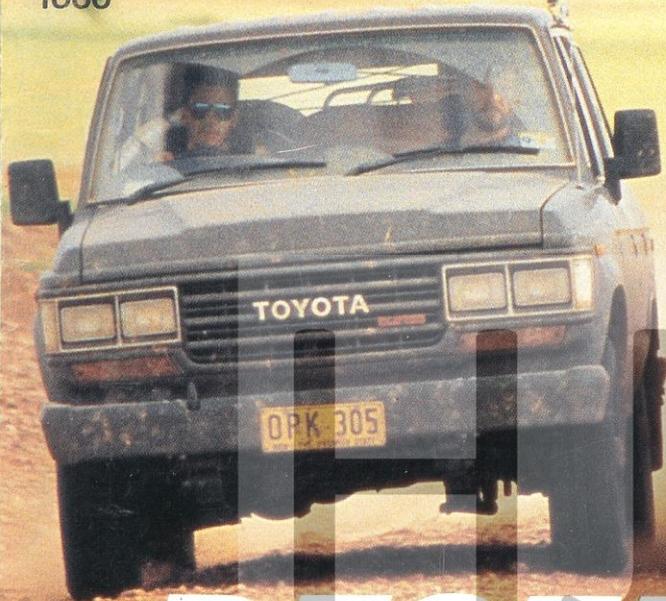
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DESERT DUEL!

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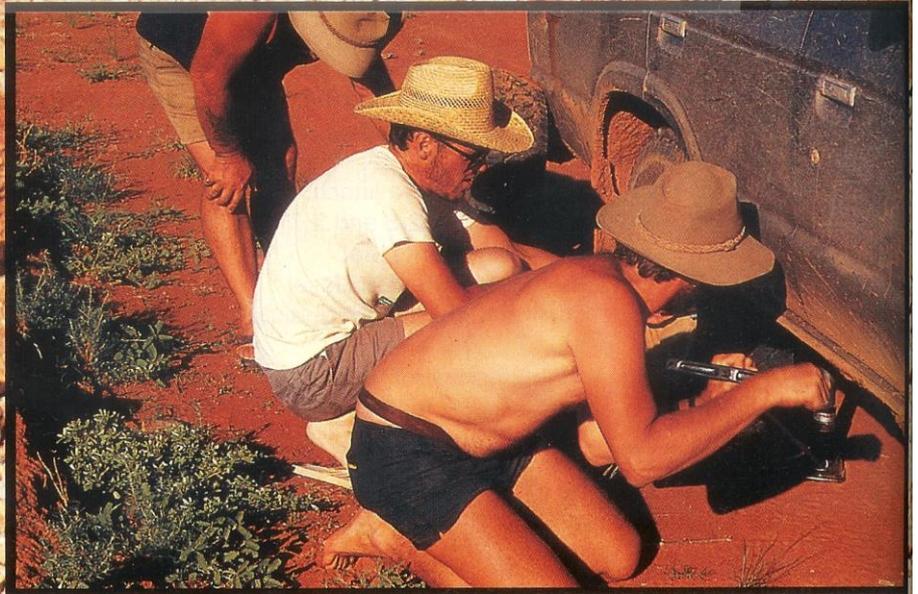
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One flat tyre was the only problem on our 5,000 km compare.



DESERT DUEL



**5000 KMS IN 5
DAYS THROUGH
OUTBACK
AUSTRALIA HAD
SOME SURPRISES.
RON MOON
REPORTS.**

Nissan led the way up the steep, rough hills.

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Outback Australia. Harsh.
Unforgiving. Unrelenting.

Here giants are cut down to size.
Heat. Vast Distances. Seasons that
chop and change in no apparent
sequence.

Here, those that strive can reach
the very top.

Desert, dust, rock! Water. Mud.
Here nature combines to equalise
everything – breaking down
mountains, crushing men's spirits,
torturing equipment.

If there is any one region in
Australia where the Toyota Land
Cruiser has been the unchallenged
king it is in the outback. Few cattle
stations, mining camps, road making
crews and survey teams have had
anything but Toyota.

Nissan and Patrol are names people
sometimes hear, but rarely take
seriously.

Maybe the time has come when
that will change!

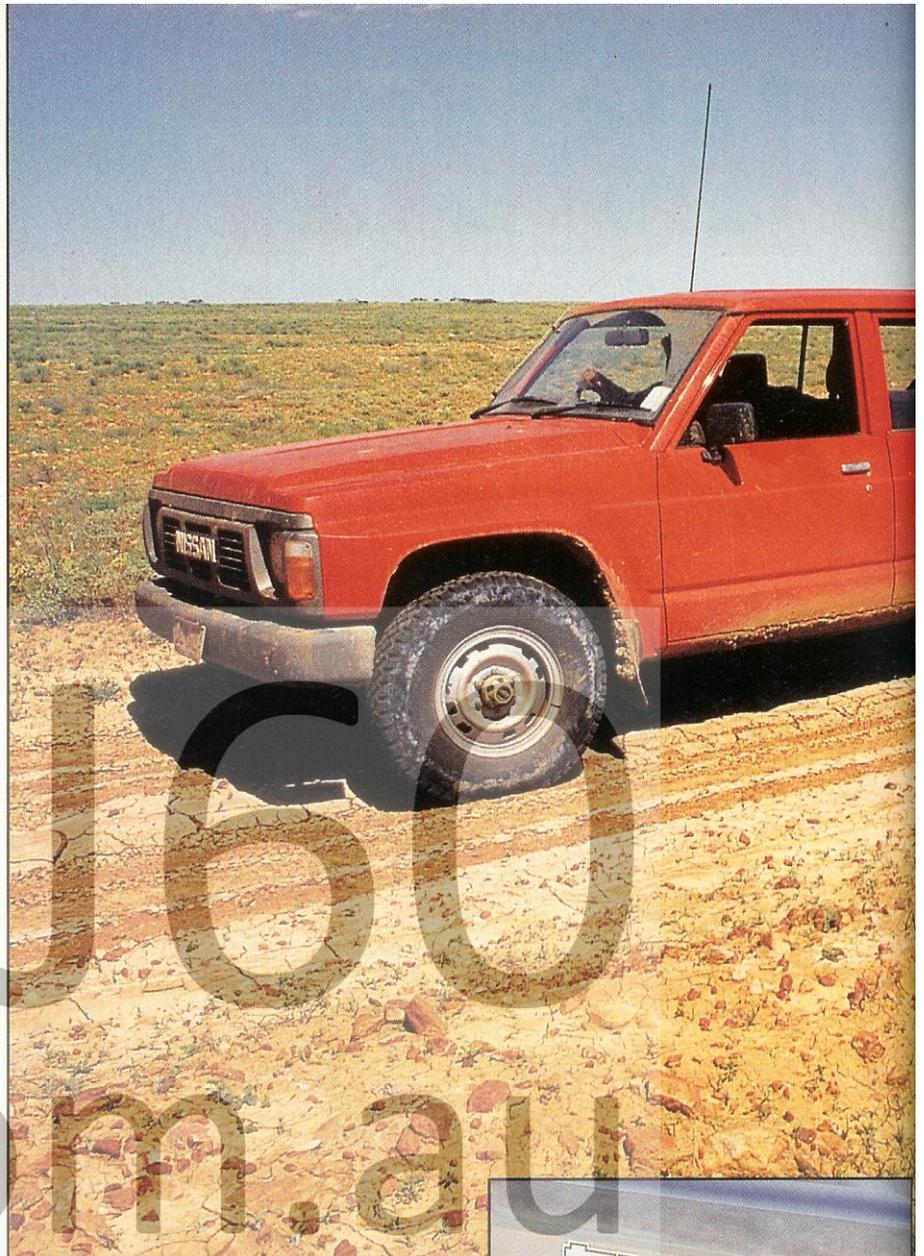
With those thoughts, and the
results of the Nissan versus Rover
still hot in our minds, we decided to
take a new Cruiser and Patrol for a
spin around the outback.

Five days and 5,000 kms sounded
like a good figure. Melbourne to
Broken Hill then to Wilcannia,
Wanaaring and Hungerford on the
border fence before pushing on to
Eulo and Cheepie in south-west
Queensland. From there we'd dash
west on the bitumen to Quilpie and
Windorah before thumping down to
Betoota. Haddon's Corner, via
station tracks and compass bearings,
was next before hitting a good
station road running south to
Arrabury where it degenerated as
we pushed onwards to Nappa Merri
and Coopers Creek. From the
infamous Dig Tree we'd blast down
to Warri Gate on the border before
getting to Tiboooburra and then back
to Broken Hill and Melbourne.

Apart from the weather dropping
inches of rain on this country in the
fortnight preceding our visit, we had
a couple of hiccups that upset our
planned "Perfect Comparo". As is
the wont of the plans of mice and
men, nothing ever goes perfectly
right, and our two test vehicles
didn't quite end up the way we
would have liked.

The Toyota was a mid-range
Cruiser station wagon with carpets,
nice bucket seats for the driver, a
reasonable 2/3 seat for the
passenger, great little stereo/cassette
recorder and air conditioning!

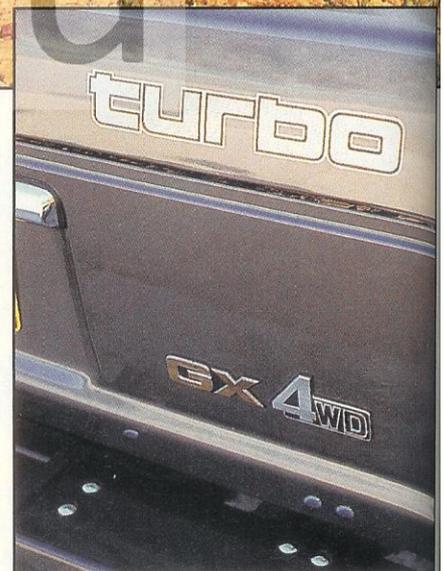
Our Nissan on the other hand was
a base model GQ station wagon with
vinyl floor coverings (more practical
I feel anyway), basic seats, including
a 2/3 front bench for the passenger,
and a not-too-good bucket for the



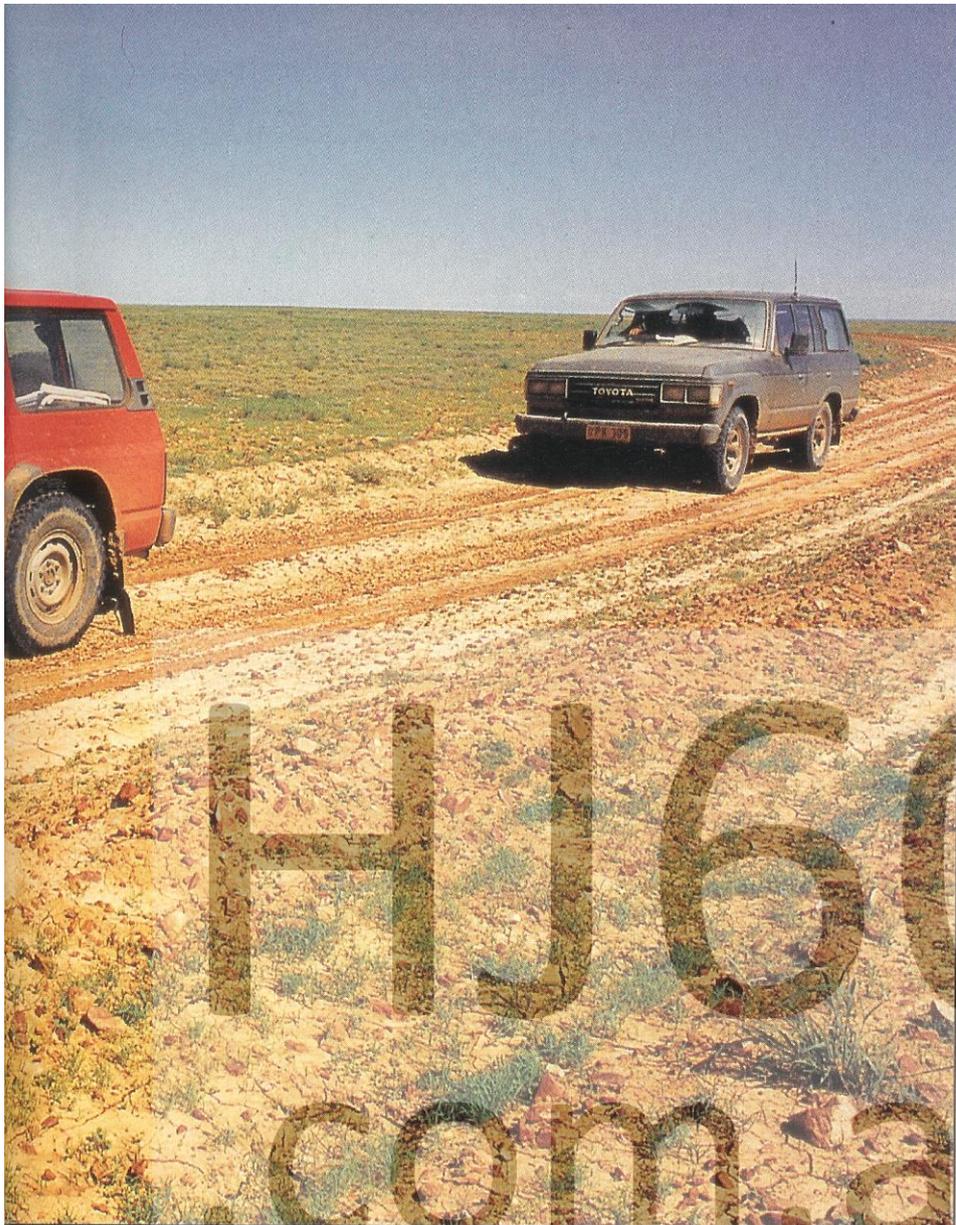
driver, a rough radio that wasn't
brilliant and no air conditioning! And
here we were going into the wilds of
central Australia in January!

Under the bonnet the Toyota had a
mammoth 100 kW of power at 3500
rpm and 315 Nm at 1800 rpm. The
Nissan had a normally aspirated
diesel motor developing a very
credible 85 kW of power at 4000 rpm
with 264 Nm of torque at 2000 revs.
As Nissan has yet to (and probably
won't) include a turbo in its GQ
range, this well-performing oiler is
the same in all the diesel models,
including the ST top-of-the-line
wagon.

Apart from the obvious big
difference in suspension
configuration, which was the main
reason for the test anyway, the
vehicles were shod with different
tyres. The Cruiser had 16 inch
Dunlop Bushrangers on, while the
Nissan, once again being a basic
model, had a set of 16 inch Dunlop



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DUEL**



Typical test road in south-west Queensland.

The Toyota blazing a track westward.



standard 6 plies making contact with the ground.

All of the above added to a pretty spectacular difference in price. The Cruiser as tested, came in at \$45,650, while the Nissan was some eleven thousand dollars cheaper at \$33,995. Now that's a big difference!

It would have been fairer to have had a Nissan ST wagon to put up against the Cruiser. The ST sports carpets, good bucket seats, good stereo radio/cassette, 15 inch Bridgestone Desert Duellers, and air conditioning! As well the ST has lockable rear diff and a rear sway bar. The price of the ST diesel manual wagon is \$43,730, making it a little more comparable with the Cruiser on price as well.

Anyway, as it turned out we didn't have an ST, so with the early morning sun at our backs we stoked the two vehicles up for the run up the bitumen.

I guess it was through the hills around Hill End and out to Bendigo that we noticed the extra power and torque of the turbo Cruiser. For sure the Nissan Diesel is without doubt the best normally aspirated diesel motor I have ever driven. Its response characteristics, its flexibility and its good power and torque figures make it a real pleasure to drive. It was only on the steep uphill that the Nissan couldn't keep up with the Cruiser, especially when accelerating from around the 70 to 80 km mark. It was still reasonable, especially for diesel, but it definitely wasn't as good a performer as the Toyota turbo. That motor's got grunt!

Out on the flat plains further north, which was our playground for the next few days, the extra whoomph of the turbo proved to be, however, almost inconsequential. Certainly once much above 100 kph the vehicles performed very similarly, running out to their top speeds together.

Down low though there was a big difference in the machines. The Nissan was much smoother and in the rough could idle along nicely without a hint of a problem. On the other hand the turbo Cruiser didn't like idling over anything. It needed at least 12-1500 revs to get going and as the turbo starts to work around these figures, its response was very erratic and touchy!

Now we've heard that this is a problem of the factory turbo on the Toyota but we hadn't experienced it before. It is not good, and if it is only a tuning problem it should have been fixed before we received the

machine. If it's more that that, well Toyota ought to do some work to remedy it!

One of the surprises of the trip was the fuel economies of the two vehicles. On the whole they were similar, but in nearly every case the turbo was slightly more economical. Only on a steady cruise up the bitumen at an easy 100 kms did the Nissan do better than the Toyota. Then, both vehicles came in around 25-26 in mpg

(11-11.5 l/100kms). Pushed hard on the black top the fuel economy plunged to around 16-17 mpg (14-14.5 l/100kms). Mind you that was pushed hard, and was the worse we achieved for the trip.

It was also on these runs that we noticed the Nissan speedo was reading higher than the Cruiser. On checking it with the kilometre pegs, the Cruiser was certainly more accurate, with the Nissan being 8-10 kms out at 110 kph.

Of course, as was to be expected, the Cruiser was more comfortable – airconditioning and better seats saw to that. However there was one other surprise in store. As soon as we swapped vehicles we all noticed the difference – there was more room in the Cruiser!

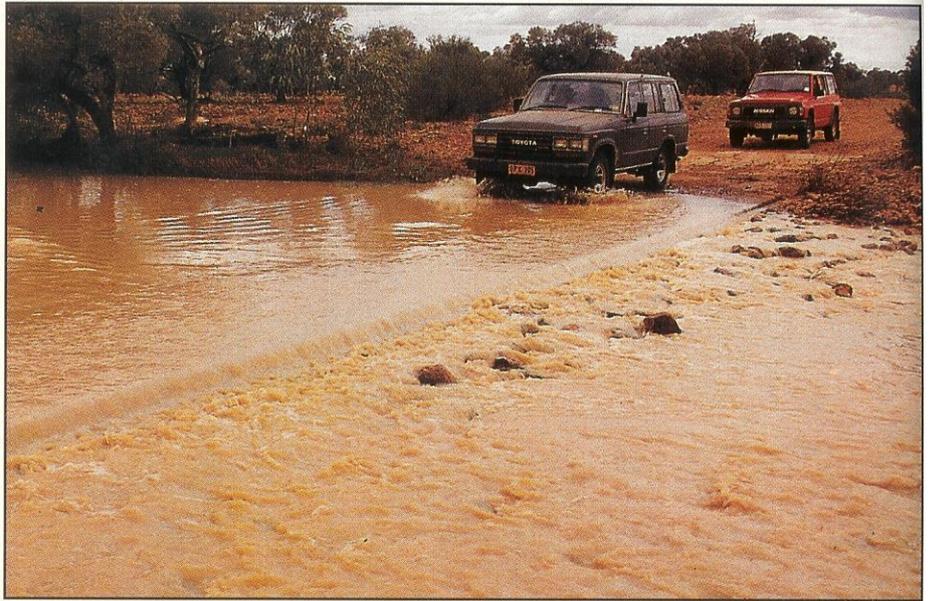
Now this was hard to believe, given that the Nissan is nearly 100mm (or 4 inches in the old terms) wider in its wheel base than the Cruiser. Out came the measuring stick, and across the front seat there is an unbelievable 90mm, at least, in favour of the Cruiser. It mightn't sound much, but believe me it is immediately noticeable. One plus the Nissan has in its favour though is a little more leg room for the tall drivers amongst us. The seat retracts further, making it a little more comfortable for those 1.8m (6 foot) or taller.

It's obvious too, that both the vehicles are better suited to bucket seats. The two-thirds of a passenger bench seat is fairly acceptable in the Cruiser – it isn't in the Nissan. Such a big chunk of the seat has been removed for the gear/transfer shift levers that you'd be hard pushed to fit a third full-grown adult in the front anyway. Being narrower, as well, certainly didn't improve the oh-so-squeezy feeling!

Now how did the suspensions perform?

Well, once again we had a few surprises. The Cruiser performed better than first envisaged. Certainly it's a big improvement on previous Toyota suspensions and as there were three Cruiser owners in our group of four test drivers, this point came through loud and clear.

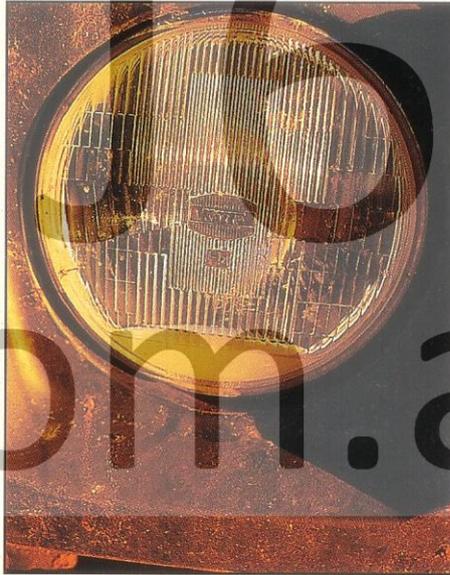
The Nissan suspension was, as was



Water proved to be an unexpected hazard.

The coil springing of the Nissan only really stood out in the very rough stuff.

Nissan's water-loving lights are a little worrying.



to be expected, good. It went much of the way to nullifying the effect of the base seating in the Patrol when compared to the upmarket seats in the Toyota.

However, on most of the roads – the high speed bitumen and the good dirt sections – there was little between the two vehicles in ride comfort. It was when we got into washouts and deep pot holes that the all-coil-suspension of the Nissan proved its worth. It was markedly better.

Along with that, the GQ handled better. Coming into corners, or in the rough sections of dirt, the steering was more precise and predictable. Even with poorer quality rubber on its feet it outperformed the Cruiser.



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Back in Melbourne, after the trip, Toyota mechanics found a few things "wrong" with the front end of the Cruiser. The vehicle had been subjected to a hard introduction to life and a rod or two had been bent in the process. We tested it again for the few days after it was fixed and, while there was an improvement, it's pretty hard to qualify as the conditions were different and we had already parted company with the Nissan.

If there was any one single time that showed up the difference between the two vehicles, it was the time we took the rigs up to the top of a steep, mesa-type hill

The country was extremely rocky, with sharp edged boulders and low, steep ledges to climb before the top could be achieved. It was here that the Nissan really performed well, walking over the boulders and climbing the ledges in a brilliant

DESERT DUEL

show of dexterity and agility. The Cruiser got to the top too, but it did it slower and harder with a lot of black smoke huffing and puffing from its exhaust.

Coming down, the story was the same. The Cruiser slipped over the ledge heading downward first, but within 50 metres the Patrol had cruised past making no apparent effort and giving an excellent ride in the process.

It was a stunning show!

Our little adventure also took us through heaps of water with quite a few creeks and river crossings to attend to. While none were really deep or dangerous, we did discover that the Nissan has a definite peculiarity that we had only just heard whispers about before we left. The headlights fill up with water! And, once full ... or half full, more correctly..., they don't want to empty. Now this is not going to do the headlight chrome reflector any good at all, let alone what will happen to the bulb when you switch the power on.

Now basically the globe/holder/headlight assembly is much the same from vehicle to vehicle, so what happens in the case of the infamous GQ fully-floating headlight? Our guess is that during a water crossing the body design channels the water up and into the area where the globe mounts into the headlight assembly. Simple!

To stop the flooding, Nissan will have to improve their rubber covering somewhat and hopefully soon!

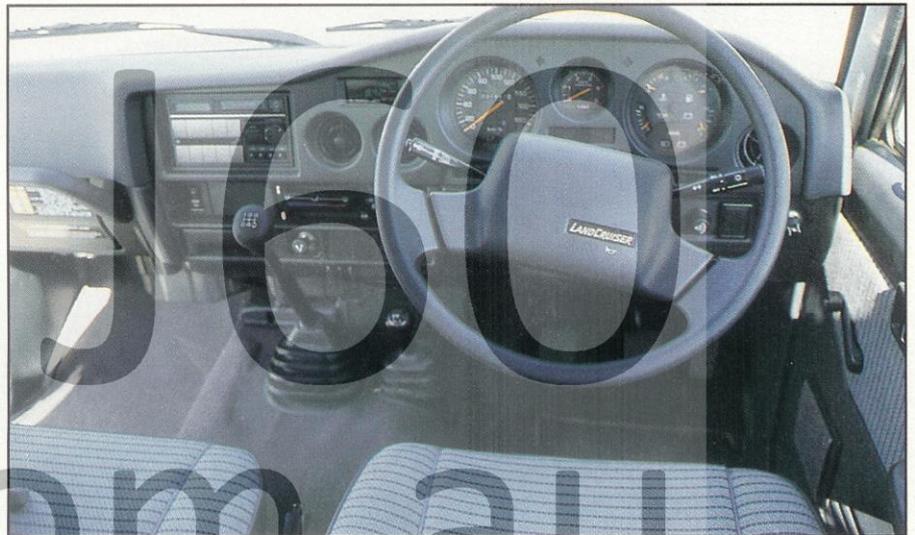
So what else did we like, or didn't like, about the two vehicles?

About the only thing we haven't mentioned is the gearbox, transmission side of things. Once again most people commented on how light the clutch was on the Nissan and how easy the gear shift. The Cruiser's clutch was heavier and the gear shift more notchy and truck-like, but even so it was still very reasonable to drive and definitely no heart-ache. The difference was really only noticeable when you changed from vehicle to vehicle.

Nissan have, on the GQ, gone to front doors without quarter vents. I guess it's done for cost reasons, but I don't like not having a quarter vent. First, and especially in a non-air conditioned rig, (and we know all



The interior of the Nissan was spartan — testimony to its much cheaper price.



Interior of the 'Cruiser was luxurious.

about this), air flow into the cabin is poor. Secondly, without support along its leading edge the window does not want to close properly when you are travelling at any sort of speed.

It's a bad blue. Toyota tried this years ago and quickly reverted to quarter vents. The Nissan MQ had them, and now, in the well-engineered and generally fairly well thought out GQ, they've dropped them. Not good!

Conclusions

So after our little jaunt what were the overall impressions?

We started this article in a rather esoteric way, but I think in the end we all felt that both vehicles were more equal than we first thought. It seemed as if the outback had nullified the great differences we had perceived.

The Toyota's power and torque seemed to be matched by the steady performance of the Nissan. The wide

sweep of plain and long flat stretches of road and track were eaten up equally well by both machines. Mind you, if I were towing a trailer I'd probably go for the turbo.

Similarly the incredible suspension of the Nissan didn't stand out like we thought it would. For sure, in the rough stuff it was markedly better, but in 98 percent of the cases there was hardly any difference . . . well . . . maybe just a touch in Nissan's favour!

Reliability-wise, both vehicles performed without a hitch and so they should have. In the long term only time will tell. Certainly here Toyota has the points on the board, while Nissan has yet to prove itself.

Like we said, in outback Australia those who strive can reach the very top while giants can be cut down to size. The battle lines are drawn, the battle field awaits, and the battle in earnest is about to begin. To the victor will go the spoils!