

Taking on the big guns

The latest Tata Xenon, with about 300 improvements over the original model (introduced here in 2008) and with a new 2.2 litre turbodiesel engine under the bonnet, could be considered to be an underdog in this company. With all the improvements, though, Tata was confident that it could run with the big boys, and that it had brought a gun to a gun fight.

"You're gonna need a bigger boat."

- From the movie *Jaws*

This is probably what some of the other drivers in the Big Name double cabs thought when the latest Tata Xenon 2.2 DICOR 4x4 arrived at the Komatipoort meeting point, ahead of the Mozambique adventure.

But there's that old saying that one should never judge a book by its cover.

Let's look at the cover first. The Xenon you see here is the latest version, only due for local launch in mid November. Although the basic Xenon shape remains, there are subtle upgrades over the original model. Like a chromed grille, indicators in the side mirrors, and stick-on decals on the flanks.

However, it is what happens under the latest cover that really matters. Since the first Xenon hit local shores, more than 300 improvements and upgrades have been made, according to customer feedback and ongoing development programmes. This includes more comfortable seats, a smaller steering wheel and a new steering system, to name but a few.

Also on the menu is a new focus on safety. So the Xenon 2.2 DICOR now comes standard with ABS-equipped brakes.

The biggest news, though, is the much vaunted 2.2-litre turbodiesel engine. Much

Henry King and Francois Griesel



THE LOW-DOWN

Indian company Tata has been building bakkies since 1988, when the Tatamobile 206 was launched. Over the years the Telcoline, 207 DI and Loadbeta followed, and in 2006 the all-new Tata TL was shown at the Bologna Motor show. It was released late in 2007 as the Xenon. The Xenon is assembled in Thailand by Tata-Thonburi, and in Argentina by a Tata-Fiat joint venture.

Trivia: Fiat will soon start selling the Fiat-branded Terra in Europe. The Terra is a Tata Xenon, with a Fiat badge.

THE TATA TEAM SAID:

Good: Performance of the 2.2 litre engine

What would make it better: Fix a rattle in the door (on the test unit)

Specifications

Name: Tata Xenon 2.2 DICOR 4x4

Engine: 2179cc, four-cylinder, turbodiesel, intercooled

Power: 103 kW @ 4000 r/min

Torque: 320 Nm @ 1700-2700 r/min

Gearbox: Five-speed manual

4WD: Shift-on-the-fly system with high and low-range, rear limited slip differential

vaunted, because it finally gives the Xenon the running legs it needed. This newly-developed engine boasts direct injection common-rail technology, a turbocharger and intercooler. The net result is 103 kW of power at 4000 r/min, and 320 Nm of torque between 1700 and 2700 r/min. Essentially, it is light-years ahead of the low-revving 3.0-litre DICOR diesel engine it replaces.

The new engine's eagerness to happily spin to the 4500 r/min mark, where the limiter halts its progress, is also very impressive. As is its tractability, its quietness, and its smoothness.

Okay, so the Xenon now has the engine, and a beefed-up appearance. So what about 4x4 ability? Well, the naysayers who predicted that the Tata would need the occasional tow in tough 4x4 conditions had to swallow their words. And comprehensively so.

The Tata rides on the tough-as-nails Telcoline chassis, and the shift-on-the-fly four-wheel-drive system gets the full high and low-range treatment, boosted by a limited-slip-differential-equipped rear axle and 210mm ground clearance.

Together with the 320 Nm, free-revving turbodiesel engine, it made light work of the biggest sand dunes we could throw in its path. Truth be told, even the Tata drivers seemed amazed at how easily their Xenon dealt with the sand! It certainly raised more than a few eyebrows.

Right, so you get a powerful and modern diesel engine, loads of standard kit including ABS, a payload of a ton, and a reasonably good-looking and luxurious double cab bakkie, with a host of accessories that can be added too.

But the best news, besides the new engine, is that at R229 900 it still costs almost half the price of some of the other double cabs on this adventure. Throw in a five-year/90 000km service plan and a three-year/100 000km

