

best
bakkie
2009

2009 BEST BAKKIE 2009 TATA XENON 3.0 SC 4X4

Optional alloy wheels shown



OLD SCHOOL, BUT COOL, Xenon improves its act

that's so high off the ground and lacking ABS brakes, it locks up and oversteers quite easily. It also rides like an older-generation bakkie, it's not quite bone-jarring like a Land Cruiser, but still somewhat bouncer than most modern bakkies. The 3-litre turbo-diesel engine is old school too, and a bit on the noisy side but feels very strong, thanks to very decent 300Nm being on tap from low in the rev range. We couldn't help but wonder if it's operating less efficiently than it should, though, as the temperature gauge never moved above the quarter mark. As a workhorse, this version of the Xenon works well. It has a 1090kg load capacity in an albeit fairly shallow load bin. This 4x4 version should make the utility farm bakkie, with a hardy four-wheel drive transmission and good ground clearance to boot.

We just hope the farmer driving it isn't too 'frts'. Even an average-sized person will have to sit quite upright because there's not enough cab space to recline decently. Consequently there's not much storage space behind the front seats either - even the little Nissan NP200 gets this right. The interior quality proved mostly decent and we only found one loose panel in there.

Overall, the Tata Xenon has improved its game and though it still has some way to go, it is quite cheap, thanks to the old-fashioned mechanicals that sit below the stylish body.

-Jason Woosley

Remember prize giving back at school and being forced to watch all the boffins step to centre stage with smug faces as they received academic awards? And then suddenly they'd call the name of some bloke you'd never expect to see up there, for the 'most improved award'. That's not to say his marks had become very good, but they were a marked improvement over the last year. Well, Best Bakkie's 'most improved' award for this year goes to the Tata Xenon. Last year we were left disappointed when this good looking Indian bakkie came horribly short of delivering the kind of driving experience we expect from a modern bakkie. Well, Xenon qualifies again because the single-cab version was introduced this year.

We praised the styling of the double cab but believe the single cab looks even better. It's butch, cleanly styled and has quite a presence thanks to those massive wheel arches.

Mechanically it's not very different from the double cab we tested previously, but there seems to have been some improvement to the steering rack. The one we drove last year had so much steering play it actually scared us, and while the latest version's steering doesn't feel very positive by any means, the play is at least minimal.

You still have to be quite careful under braking. Like almost any low-priced bakkie

Tata Xenon 3.0 SC 4x4	
Engine	3000cc 4-cyl turbo-diesel
Power	85kW @ 3000rpm
Power to weight	44kW per litre
Torque	300Nm @ 1600rpm
Torque to weight	155Nm per tonne
Transmission	RWD-4WD/5-speed
Payload	1090kg
Tank capacity	65 litres
0-100km/h (g)	18.4 seconds
quarter mile (g)	20.8 secs @ 109km/h
80 - 120km/h (g)	12.5 seconds
Price	R178 995
Warranty	3-year/100 000km
Service Plan	3-year/60 000km
Bakkie rating	6

