

FIRST DRIVE



Hard grey plastics don't look very nice, but overall fit and finish vastly improved. High gear lever within easy reach.



Window switches on centre console.



Hooks to tie cargo down in load bay.

works with the same feel as you could expect on a Safari or a Sumo.

The big difference is that the dashboard panel gaps seem to be even and fit and finish is now much neater. The front seats are comfortable, they have good bolstering and though they don't adjust for height, you have a good view out. The dashboard is uncomplicated, with three large knobs to control the air con and a tiny, scroll button near the driver's knees to control the Borg-Warner 4WD system. It's not particularly well designed, but there's a certain hard-wearing character to it that goes well with this car's image.

The rear seats are surprisingly spacious, but the backrest is a tad too

vertical and can't be adjusted. There is enough thigh support but no place to rest your arms, thanks to the weird doorpad design.

This engine is very familiar in the way it starts. Engage first gear on the extremely rubbery gearshift and you have to be careful not to stall the motor. This engine demands a few revs on the dial before it'll get the Xenon moving. This is especially true on hill starts. Once past 1500rpm, the DiCOR engine gets into its stride. It's noisy but peppy and there's a nice surge as the needle approaches 2000rpm and all the way to 3500rpm where power finally fades out.

With the same power as the Safari and 310kg less to lug around, the

Xenon 4x4 has a real spring in its step. Despite the taller gearing, part-throttle responses are good, and though there's a lot of whooshing and whistling from under the hood, you'll be happy with the power.

You will wish the ride was better though. Pick-up trucks are set up to ride better when fully loaded, and this is true with the Xenon too. When unladen, the long travel suspension is absorbent but there is, in general, too much vertical movement in the cabin. It also hates sharp bumps and crashes through them – the kind of crash that makes you wince. You'll wish the drivetrain was more refined too. The engine is way too audible in the cabin and the driveline 'clanks' every time you get off the clutch.

At high speeds over uneven surfaces, a pitching motion sets in – just like in a Safari or a Sumo. It's disconcerting and forces you to slow down. The steering is improved though – there's still some vagueness, but it feels more connected at high speeds.

In town, the vehicle's massive size makes it cumbersome. Reversing it is quite a pain and most parking slots will have the Xenon's tail sticking out onto the road. On the flipside, smaller vehicles scurry out of the way once they see the Xenon's grille filling their rear view mirrors.

But by using the Xenon in town you are missing the point. This is a 'get-out-of-town free' car. The outdoors is what it does best. It's



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The nose tends to pitch over undulating surfaces. Ride is mostly absorbent but crashes through sharp bumps. Improves vastly when truck is laden.

† good off-road – the four-wheel-drive system is easy to engage, works well and the suspension seems to be able to take all the abuse you can throw at it. At 200mm, ground clearance is good and the only thing you have to worry about are the road tyres not getting enough traction in the slush. Abuse the throttle on loose surfaces, and you'll find it's easy to break traction – the engine's torque easily overcomes the grip available, the tail will step out and, given the space, you'll find it

quite easy to catch it too.

You'll laugh at the brakes – despite the improvements (they are now twin caliper discs up front) there is no feel, and they lock up very easily. Believe us, this is the scariest part of this car. A set of wider tyres would have helped immensely.

Priced at an estimated Rs 9.4 lakh (on-road, Mumbai) for the 4WD version, the Xenon is not cheap. Equipment levels are basic – there are power windows, power mirrors,

power steering and an air-con.

Despite its pick-up truck nature, you can register it as a private car (saves you the trouble of running around with taxi plates) – just like the Mahindra Getaway, its only competition. As an everyday car, the Xenon doesn't make sense – it's just too big in city confines, and a bit too crude to really give midsize saloons nightmares. But if you need the utility and you like to do things in style, you now know where to look.

JOSEPH CHACKO

ACCELERATION (SEC)*

Kph	Manual
0-20	1.78
0-40	3.96
0-60	6.62
0-80	10.78
0-100	15.65
0-120	24.88
20-80	14.65
40-100	14.32

SO GOOD

- Torquey engine
- Pick-up's flexibility

NO GOOD

- Poor gearshift
- Refinement
- Poor brakes



Black protector is optional; rear seat back is a bit too upright; front seats are spacious and well bolstered.

FACTFILE

TATA XENON XT 4x4	
Price (est. on-road)	Rs 9.4 lakh
Length	5215mm
Width	1860mm
Height	1765mm
Wheelbase	3150mm
Turning circle	12.0m
Kerb weight	1860kg
Engine	4-cyls in-line, 2179cc, common-rail turbo-diesel
Installation	Front, longitudinal, rear/four-wheel drive
Power	140bhp at 4000rpm
Torque	32kgm at 1700-2700rpm
Suspension (F/R)	Independent, double wishbone, torsion beam/Non-independent, leaf springs
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Fuel tank	65 litres
Brakes (F/R)	Ventilated discs/drum
Tyre size	Goodyear Wrangler 205 R16



The Xenon's load bay is designed to carry 500kg. It is too shallow and too short because of the double cab's length.