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UNLEADED PATROL

TEXT SRINIVAS KRISHNAN



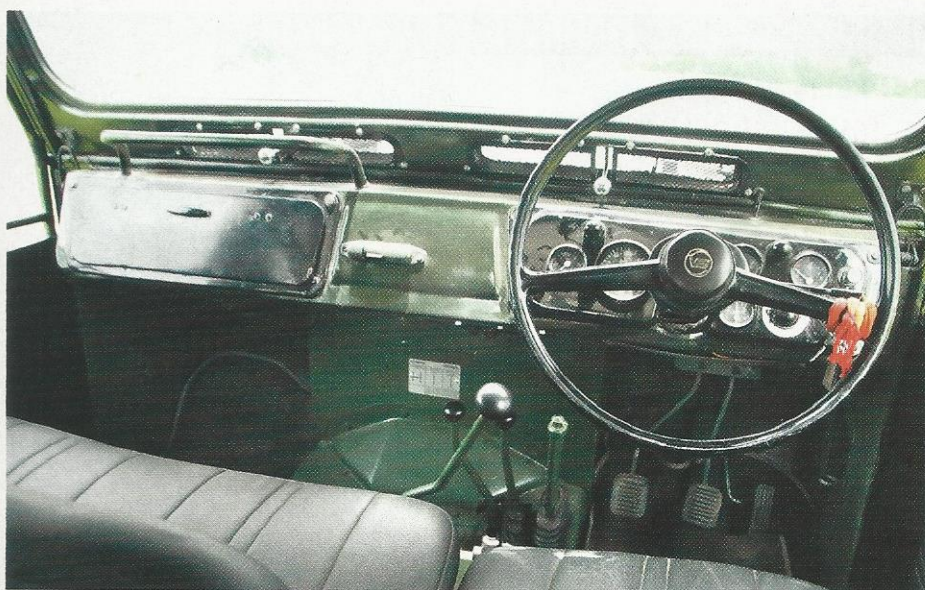
Compared to the Jonga, these new-fangled SUVs look like wimps. The Jonga has a face that only Carlos Ghosn would love and neighbours would love... to hate. Cue our friendly neighbours with whom we had arguments with back in 1965 and 1971. The Jonga was born at a time when reportedly the only tools utility vehicle designers had were rulers; how they managed to fit round wheels and tyres is a mystery that has not yet been solved.

Born as the Nissan Patrol in 1960 and inducted as a light vehicle for the Indian Army sometime around 1963-64, the Jonga was built at the impressively named Vehicle Factory at Jabalpur. And I am sure you already know that the Jonga is actually an acronym for Jabalpur Ordnance And

Guncarriage Assembly. Well, the rough-and-ready name certainly suits this machine better than Patrol. Jonga... I get images of thick jungles and tribal drum beats.

After spending some time thrashing these three fancy SUVs and their state-of-the-art four-wheel drive systems in our muck fest, it was time to take their mamma out for the same course. It was like going inside a time machine, turning the knob to 1960 and exiting out of it. All the bits in the insides of the Jonga have a purpose, nothing is superfluous. The instrument lighting is by a small lamp shining on the instruments. There is a map reading light. There is a lever to open vents (with a mesh tool!) below the windscreen if it got too claustrophobic. Well, what else do you need?

The Jonga has a monster 3956cc inline-six underneath that nasty bonnet, but even with such a big capacity motor inside, the engine compartment looks empty. You could fit in an additional backup six-cylinder engine just to be sure. Not that you'd it, of course. The engine block looks like it was part of a monumental Soviet sculpture during the heydays of the Revolution and somehow got smuggled out of the USSR. Developing 110 bhp at 3200 revs and 26.9 kgm at just 1200 revs, the petrol drinking inline-six has a lot of cubes to spare. Which is why the performance is not frantic but relaxed. It has enough go, actually, and second-gear wheelspins are easily achieved. By the way, this engine also powered the Nissan light trucks called



the one-tonners which were used by the army, and after decommissioning, by scores of tow truck operators who replaced it with diesel engines and also had their 4WD system removed. I drove one many, many years back – does anyone remember reading the story?

Anyway, back to the Jonga. It has an H-shift pattern three-speed manual gearbox, with reverse where we usually have first. Besides that, the four-wheel drive system is pretty simple – one lever for shifting between rear-wheel drive and four-wheel drive and another for engaging high or low. That's easy. Though this machine could have easily dismissed our slush fest course in two-wheel drive (perhaps even without a driver inside), just

to be sure I drove off in four-high. The spindly two-spoke steering wheel may have a life of its own on tarmac, but here, it felt perfectly at home. It sailed through the gravel stretch, went up and down the ditch as if it were a mere Mumbai pothole, went up and down across the undulating, rock-strewn plains and tracked straight over the slush. That's right, it went straight, as if it were the Mumbai-Pune Expressway. It's a bit wayward on tarmac, but very single-minded and straightforward in no-road conditions – so now you know exactly where its priorities lie. Only the bump over the last stretch went through me like artillery fire, and the Jonga came to a rest several metres ahead of where I wanted to stop. That's right, it has the go,

but it does not have the stop!

Unlike the other machines which had power steering, in the Jonga, there was nothing of that sort. So I had to really keep my hands busy, navigating this army veteran through the course. That was the only challenge, otherwise it was literally a romp in the park for the Jonga. Really, this was the one time I desperately wanted it to rain so that I could have seen what this machine was capable of, but that was not to be. Maybe there will be a next time, maybe we'll get a Gypsy and a Willys along... **BSM**

We'd like to thank Abhilash Nambiar for allowing us to go wild with his immaculately maintained Jonga. Do visit his site myjonga.com