



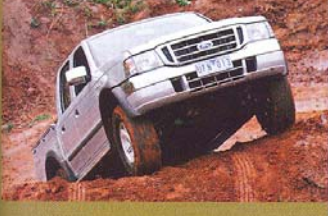
WORKING-CLASS CHAMP

After an exhaustive test on- and off-road, laden and unladen, the judges cast their votes for 4x4 Ute Of The Year 2006. DEAN MELLOR tells the story



▶ VALUE

	COURIER TD	COURIER V6	RODEO TD	RODEO V6	BRAVO TD	BRAVO V6	TRITON TD	TRITON V6	NAVARA TD	NAVARA V6	HILUX TD	HILUX V6
Dean	14	14	12	10	15	15	14	16	15	17	14	14
Ron	13	14	12	14	14	14	15	16	16	15	12	12
Allan	10	10	5	5	15	15	15	15	15	15	5	5
Marcus	10	10	10	10	10	10	15	15	14	14	12	12
Brad	14	12	10	12	15	12	18	16	18	16	12	10
Rob	14	12	12	12	14	12	16	14	16	17	16	15
TOTAL	75	72	61	63	83	78	93	92	94	94	71	68



MODEL

PRICE

POINTS

12 HOLDEN RODEO LT DUAL-CAB V6 \$41,990 348

The Rodeo is off the pace in a lot of areas and in V6 guise it simply didn't stack up when judged against the five 4X4UTY criteria.

The Aussie-built 3.6-litre V6 engine develops decent power but lacks low-rpm torque, limiting performance when there's a heavy load on board. On-road ride was less than ideal and the Rodeo is skittish on

corrugated gravel roads. Selecting 4X4 via the push-button system is fussy and not always effective – it sometimes gets stuck in 4X4. Ground clearance is limited by its rear axle which is located on top of the leaf springs and by its transfer case that hangs quite low.

Prior to the launch of new HiLux, Navara and Triton, the Rodeo was on the money, but how quickly times change.

11 HOLDEN RODEO LT DUAL-CAB TD \$44,990 358

The turbo-diesel Rodeo is a better option for bush tourers than the V6 model, but it too is off the pace compared with its more modern rivals.

It wasn't long ago that 96kW of power and 280Nm of torque was impressive for a one-tonne ute, but this old-style oiler simply can't compete with the modern common-rail turbo-diesel engines. As a result, performance

is lacking when there's a decent-size load on board.

When it's unladen, the Rodeo feels too soft up-front and too firm in the rear. The tray isn't as big as some others and little effort has gone into versatile cabin design.

The Rodeo LT turbo-diesel also loses out in the Value criterion. It costs \$3000 more than the V6 model.

10 FORD COURIER XLT DUAL-CAB V6 \$43,190 390

The Ford Courier is another ageing ute but it still managed to surprise the judges in a number of areas.

Along with the Mazda Bravo, the Courier offered the best ground clearance of all the utes assembled here. Its five-speed auto transmission made climbing steep hills a doddle, but steep descents could be difficult with minimal engine braking. On-road ride is

reasonably good but once there was a load in the back it became floaty and too light in the front. While the V6 offers reasonable performance, it is noisy when revved and not nearly as powerful as the Navara or HiLux.

Courier V6 scored poorly in the Breaking Ground criterion because of its old body and chassis design. Interior versatility and rear seat comfort were both rated as poor.

9 MAZDA BRAVO SDX DUAL-CAB V6 \$41,840 394

As you'd expect, the Mazda Bravo V6 performed much the same as the Ford Courier – after all, they're essentially the same vehicle except for styling differences and trim and specification levels.

Like the Courier V6, our Bravo V6 was fitted with the optional five-speed automatic transmission which is a smooth-shifting gearbox. So why did Bravo finish ahead of

Courier? Essentially it came down to value for money. The Bravo SDX offers a similar equipment package to the Courier XLT but costs \$1350 less.

The likely discrepancy in prices can be attributed to the fact the Courier XLT V6 auto has dual airbags and ABS brakes, but the Bravo does not. Note that Ford only offers these safety items on the auto Courier.

8 TOYOTA HILUX SR5 DUAL-CAB V6 \$47,420 395

Coming home in eighth overall doesn't look too impressive for the HiLux V6, but bear in mind that if this was a petrol-powered-only ute comparison test, the HiLux would have finished on the third step of the podium.

HiLux strengths include its excellent build quality, wagon-like safety features, comfortable ride whether laden or unladen,

good on-road dynamics, predictable handling and powerful V6 engine.

On the downside, touring range is limited (like all of the V6 utes tested here), ground clearance isn't nearly as good as the previous-generation HiLux and the 15-inch wheel tyre package limits the choice of off-road rubber compared with 16-inch-shod utes.

HiLux resale value will appeal to many.

7 FORD COURIER XLT DUAL-CAB TD \$44,790 416

Despite its ageing design and the modest output of its indirect injection turbo-diesel engine, the Courier is a strong package both on- and off-road.

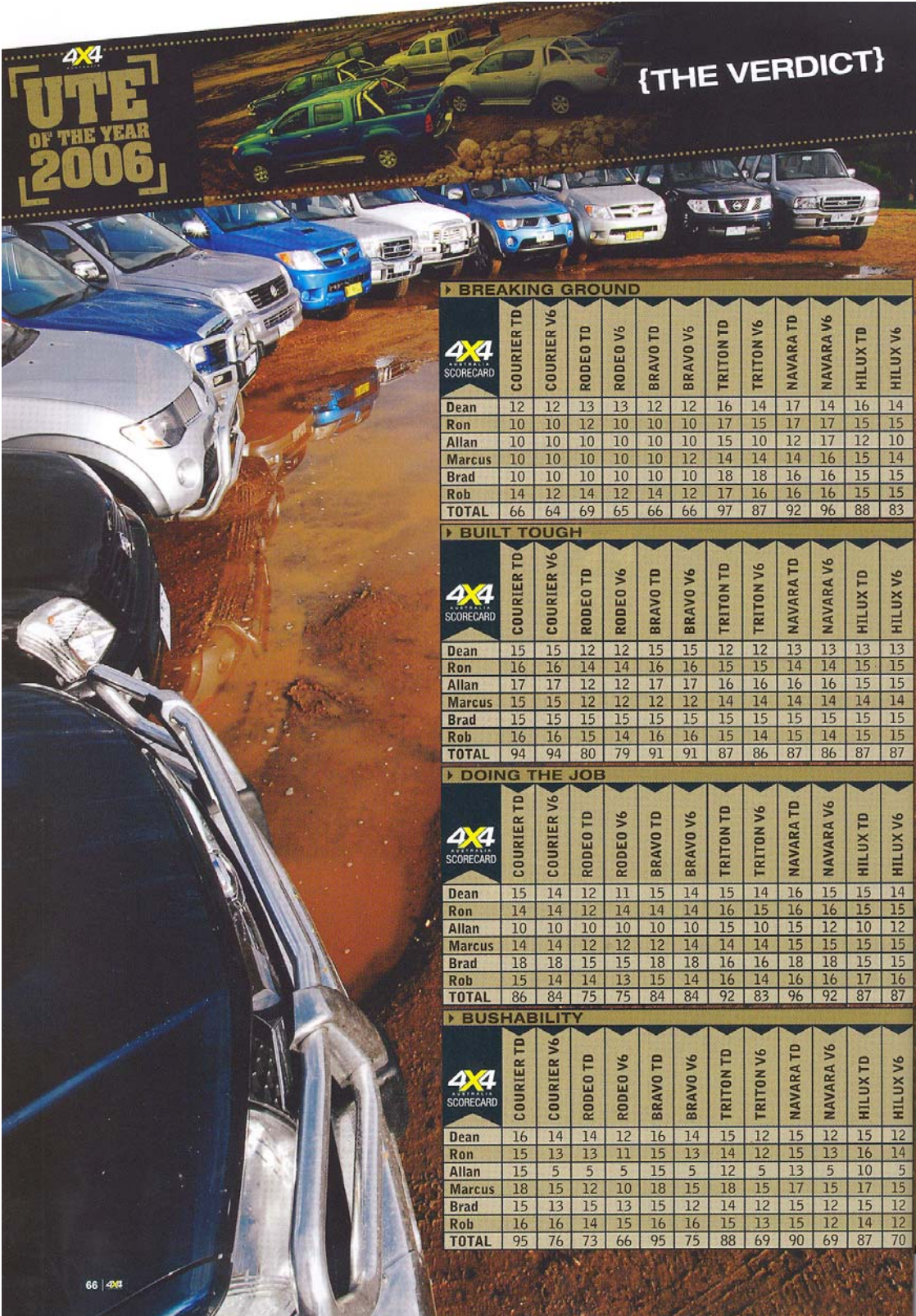
Low overall gearing makes up for Courier's lack of power and torque on the road, giving it decent-enough acceleration and pulling power on long hills. It's only with a heavy load on board that the Courier starts to lose

touch with its more powerful rivals. The downside of this low gearing is that Courier doesn't feel relaxed at highway speeds.

Off-road, the Courier works better than most. Its low gearing gives it strong climbing ability and good control on steep descents; its rear LSD works well; its AT tyres are a good on-/off-road compromise; and it has better ground clearance than more modern utes.

4x4
UTE
 OF THE YEAR
2006

{THE VERDICT}



► BREAKING GROUND

4x4 SCORECARD	COURIER TD	COURIER V6	RODEO TD	RODEO V6	BRAVO TD	BRAVO V6	TRITON TD	TRITON V6	NAVARA TD	NAVARA V6	HILUX TD	HILUX V6
Dean	12	12	13	13	12	12	16	14	17	14	16	14
Ron	10	10	12	10	10	10	17	15	17	17	15	15
Allan	10	10	10	10	10	10	15	10	12	17	12	10
Marcus	10	10	10	10	10	12	14	14	14	16	15	14
Brad	10	10	10	10	10	10	18	18	16	16	15	15
Rob	14	12	14	12	14	12	17	16	16	16	15	15
TOTAL	66	64	69	65	66	66	97	87	92	96	88	83

► BUILT TOUGH

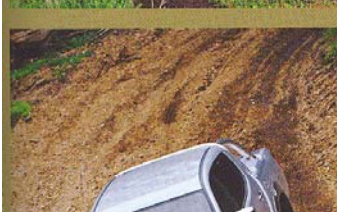
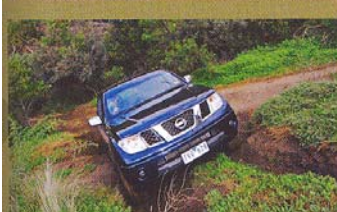
4x4 SCORECARD	COURIER TD	COURIER V6	RODEO TD	RODEO V6	BRAVO TD	BRAVO V6	TRITON TD	TRITON V6	NAVARA TD	NAVARA V6	HILUX TD	HILUX V6
Dean	15	15	12	12	15	15	12	12	13	13	13	13
Ron	16	16	14	14	16	16	15	15	14	14	15	15
Allan	17	17	12	12	17	17	16	16	16	16	15	15
Marcus	15	15	12	12	12	12	14	14	14	14	14	14
Brad	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Rob	16	16	15	14	16	16	15	14	15	14	15	15
TOTAL	94	94	80	79	91	91	87	86	87	86	87	87

► DOING THE JOB

4x4 SCORECARD	COURIER TD	COURIER V6	RODEO TD	RODEO V6	BRAVO TD	BRAVO V6	TRITON TD	TRITON V6	NAVARA TD	NAVARA V6	HILUX TD	HILUX V6
Dean	15	14	12	11	15	14	15	14	16	15	15	14
Ron	14	14	12	14	14	14	16	15	16	16	15	15
Allan	10	10	10	10	10	10	15	10	15	12	10	12
Marcus	14	14	12	12	12	14	14	14	15	15	15	15
Brad	18	18	15	15	18	18	16	16	18	18	15	15
Rob	15	14	14	13	15	14	16	14	16	16	17	16
TOTAL	86	84	75	75	84	84	92	83	96	92	87	87

► BUSHABILITY

4x4 SCORECARD	COURIER TD	COURIER V6	RODEO TD	RODEO V6	BRAVO TD	BRAVO V6	TRITON TD	TRITON V6	NAVARA TD	NAVARA V6	HILUX TD	HILUX V6
Dean	16	14	14	12	16	14	15	12	15	12	15	12
Ron	15	13	13	11	15	13	14	12	15	13	16	14
Allan	15	5	5	5	15	5	12	5	13	5	10	5
Marcus	18	15	12	10	18	15	18	15	17	15	17	15
Brad	15	13	15	13	15	12	14	12	15	12	15	12
Rob	16	16	14	15	16	16	15	13	15	12	14	12
TOTAL	95	76	73	66	95	75	88	69	90	69	87	70



▼MODEL▼

▼PRICE▼

▼POINTS▼

6 MITSUBISHI TRITON GLX-R DUAL-CAB V6 \$41,990 417

The new Triton is one of the most adventurously styled utes yet, which indicates that Mitsubishi is going after the recreational ute buyer rather than commercial sales. This also explains why Triton is available with such high specification levels.

Triton V6 offers lively performance. The ride is firm, giving the Triton a sporty feel. It steers and handles amazingly well for a ute.

There's plenty of space inside the Triton's cabin and its rear seat was judged the most comfortable, with the most raked backrest. Like its exterior, the Triton's interior styling is funky yet functional.

On the downside, Triton has a small tray area, its forward-facing air intake could be a problem in water crossings and ground clearance is limited (especially at the front).

5 MAZDA BRAVO SDX DUAL-CAB TD \$42,710 419

It may be one of the oldest utes on the market but the Mazda Bravo SDX turbo-diesel represents good value.

Like its Ford Courier sibling, the Bravo turbo-diesel makes up for its lack of power with low overall gearing. While on-road ride and handling doesn't match the Navara, Triton nor Hilux, it is better than the Rodeo.

The Bravo works well off the road thanks

to decent ground clearance, a good rear LSD and reasonable AT tyres.

Bravo doesn't have the safety features of more modern utes. Airbags and ABS brakes are not offered and the old-style body doesn't match the crash-safety standards of more modern utes like Navara, Triton and Hilux, all of which have car-like crumple zones and passenger safety-cell construction.

4 TOYOTA HILUX SR5 DUAL-CAB TD \$49,920 420

Whoa! \$50k for a ute! Its hefty price saw the Hilux SR5 turbo-diesel suffer in the Value criterion.

Hilux turbo-diesel offers excellent ride quality; decent performance; great fuel economy; a comfortable rear seat; and a decent-size tray area. Its common-rail turbo-diesel engine has a nice spread of torque and is quiet and refined.

On the downside, the Hilux's manual gearbox is slow and clunky; ground clearance is limited, especially at the front; underbody protection is poor and the rear-step bar and side steps are prone to off-road damage.

While we find it hard to see why Hilux costs so much more than its rivals, at least Toyota customers are consoled by the fact that Hilux has good resale value.

3 NISSAN NAVARA ST-X DUAL-CAB V6 \$43,990 437

With a stonking 198kW of power on tap the Navara V6 was a favourite with the judges. Rob Emmins wants to take one racing!

Of course, the rest of the Navara V6 package, including decent tray, good towing capacity, interior versatility and rear-seat comfort helped it onto the podium.

Navara rides well, even when unladen.

It's the only ute with a decent standard load-securing system with lockable cleats that can be adjusted in runners along the floor and walls of the tray.

Navara has a 60/40 split/fold rear seat that adds to cabin versatility.

Navara negatives include a lack of underbody protection, its low-mounted alternator and dim headlights.

2 MITSUBISHI TRITON GLX-R DUAL-CAB TD \$44,990 457

After three solid days on- and off-road, it came down to just two points.

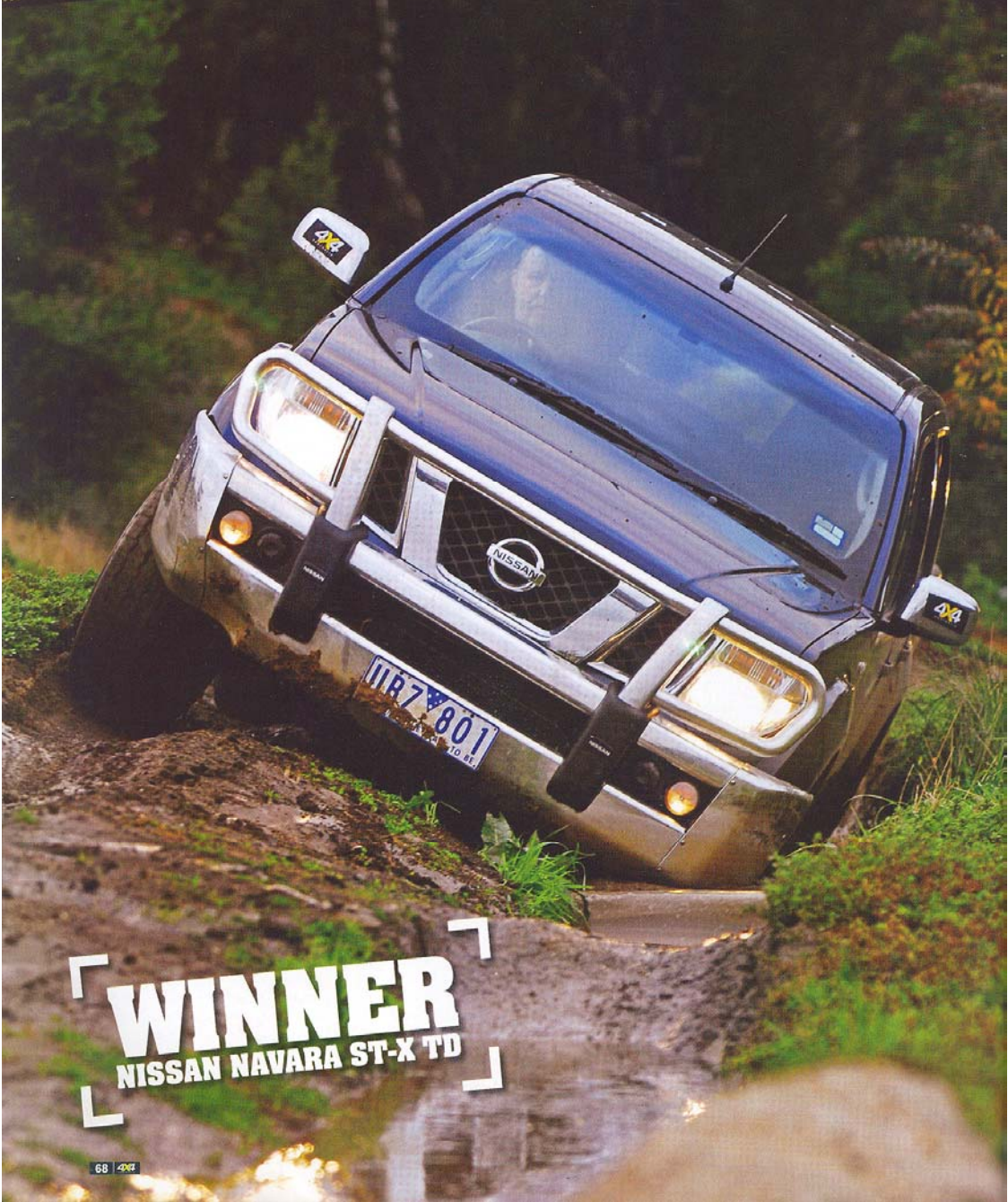
A couple of the judges finished with the Triton GLX-R ahead of the Navara ST-X but, in the end, the Navara's better load carrying ability, towing capacity, interior versatility and innovative load securing system got it across the line in first place.

Nevertheless, a lot of recreational ute customers will opt for Triton over Navara for a variety of reasons. Triton's new 3.2-litre common-rail turbo-diesel engine offers loads of power and plenty of torque. Its five-speed gearbox has a light, positive shift and tall overall gearing makes it a relaxed highway tourer. The Triton's chassis is lively and well balanced; and firm spring and damper rates give it a sporty characteristic unmatched by any other one-tonne ute.

Off-road there's not much between Triton

and Navara, unless you opt for Triton's optional locking rear diff (\$500) which gives it the off-road edge.

Triton also has the highest spec level of any one-tonne ute. Standard gear on the GLX-R includes power windows and mirrors, airconditioning, remote central locking, four channel ABS brakes, driver and passenger airbags, alloy wheels, tonneau cover, sports bar, power rear window, MP3-compatible CD sound system with six speakers, Bluetooth hands-free phone system and a multi-function display with trip computer, compass, altimeter and barometer. If that's not enough, you can order the turbo-diesel Triton GLS (\$49,990) which adds eight-way power adjustable leather seats, climate control aircon and optional sunroof (\$1600). When it comes to recreational utes, Triton is the real deal – a genuine alternative to a 4X4 wagon.



AWESOME OFF-ROADING

■ If you want to have a crack at some of the toughest off-road tracks around, or for 4X4 driver training courses at Melbourne Off Road Training and Proving Ground, contact Rob or Joan. (Rob also has an awesome Centurion tank on-site!)
 135 Dukelows Road
 Werribee
 Victoria 3030
 Phone: 03 9748 1202
 Fax: 03 9748 1204
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 Web: www.melbourne4x4.com



Navara shows off its impressive low-range gearing on climbs (this pic) and descents (above)



TOTAL

4X4 SCORECARD	TOTAL											
	COURIER TD	COURIER V6	RODEO TD	RODEO V6	BRAVO TD	BRAVO V6	TRITON TD	TRITON V6	NAVARA TD	NAVARA V6	HILUX TD	HILUX V6
Dean	72	69	63	58	73	70	72	68	76	71	73	67
Ron	68	67	63	63	69	67	77	73	78	75	73	71
Allan	62	52	42	42	67	57	73	56	71	65	52	47
Marcus	67	64	56	54	62	63	75	72	74	74	73	70
Brad	72	68	65	65	73	67	81	77	82	77	72	67
Rob	75	70	69	66	75	70	79	71	78	75	77	73
TOTAL	416	390	358	348	419	394	457	417	459	437	420	395

MODEL

PRICE

POINTS

1 NISSAN NAVARA ST-X DUAL-CAB TD

\$45,990

459

The Nissan Navara ST-X dual-cab turbo-diesel is a deserved winner of the inaugural 4X4 Ute Of The Year.

The Navara's 2.5-litre common-rail turbo-diesel engine has a class leading 403Nm of torque and punches out a decent 128kW of power. Even with a load on board, the engine makes enough low-rpm torque to climb most highway hills in top gear. It's a relatively quiet engine (for a diesel), exhibits minimal turbo-lag down low and revs freely to its redline.

The engine is mated to a six-speed manual gearbox (a five-speed auto is optional) with a short throw and positive shift action. The six-speeder ensures there's a ratio for all occasions and the clutch is light and progressive.

Slip the Navara into low range and point it off-road and there's a class-leading low-range reduction in first gear of 43.576:1, giving Navara great hill climbing ability and effective engine braking.

Visibility from the driver's seat is excellent – the short bonnet allows good forward visibility and the tray doesn't hinder rearward

visibility as much as some other utes.

Navara has a practical and versatile interior package. The rear doors open wide for easy access to the back seat, which has a 60/40 split/fold arrangement. The front passenger seat can be folded flat so you can fit long items inside the cab.

The standard equipment list is impressive on the Navara ST-X with 16-inch alloy wheels, cruise control, remote central locking, power windows and mirrors, six-stack CD player, sports bar, side-steps, ABS brakes, dual airbags and Nissan's innovative Utili-Track tie-down system in the tray.

Navara's tray isn't the longest in the class, but it offers plenty of width. Braked-trailer towing capacity is a class-leading 3000kg.

Judged against the five 4X4 Ute Of The Year criteria, the Navara ST-X turbo-diesel package is a deserved winner. It's great value, it features the latest-generation turbo-diesel engine technology, it's economical, does the job it was designed to do and is well suited to off-road adventures. **4.4**