

ASIA ROCSTA



Not a bad little car, just not as good as it looks since the engines are rough and the ride comfort is questionable with overly firm, bouncy leaf-sprung suspension. Made for the Korean army, the specification is basic, the trim cheap, the cabin small and cramped and there's minimal luggage space.

Since used examples are cheap – pay £500 for something five years old and not looking too tatty – it makes sense to consider one as an off-road plaything, just don't expect it to be much fun as an everyday family runabout. It certainly looks cute with its Jeep-esque styling, but like the current Wrangler it's too low-slung, so you'll need to avoid bigger obstacles and stay out of deeper mud or ruts for fear of grounding.

Four-wheel drive is a straightforward selectable type, engaged by a transfer lever, though the freewheeling hubs need to be engaged manually. The rigid axles give the Rocsta a certain extra ability over tortuous terrain, but it's nothing like as nimble in the rough as a Suzuki SJ.

The 2.2-litre diesels are plodders, you'll just about touch 70mph flat out, but better for off-road use with quite good low-down torque. We'd still prefer the petrol version since this is a little more refined and nippier, it'll just about touch 80mph.

Simple and solid construction means reliability will generally be good, most will never have been off-roaded and, of course, if you don't need performance or refinement a clean Rocsta does make a neat little city posemobile. But no matter how clean the car looks on the outside check carefully for signs of off-road damage like scuffed or bent steering gear or underfloor corrosion.

DAIHATSU FOURTRAK (85-91)



Fourtraks have always been regarded as good working tools, so when examining any used example check for farmyard neglect, damage to the load area floor and excessive corrosion from a mix of mud and agricultural chemicals, it's quite likely that anything with a £500 price tag will be difficult to MoT and probably too tatty even to trash off road.

With low ride height, not much articulation on its leaf-sprung axles and dull engine performance the Fourtrak was never particularly good at coping with seriously tortuous terrain, so it's no alternative to an old Suzuki as an off-road plaything.

The 2.0-litre petrol engine was never sold in large quantities but is the more refined option if you're using the Fourtrak as a road car, though don't expect much in the way of ride comfort from the crude suspension. Higher-specification examples offer a soft-ride option on the highway if the variable damper mechanism is still working. The 2.8-litre turbodiesel isn't as powerful as its capacity suggests, but it's by far the most common, reliable but only if it's been properly looked after.

On older models it'll be difficult to guarantee a service history, so check for excessive top-end rattles and excessive grey mixing with the black exhaust smoke, while too much black smoke might indicate a turbocharger problem, expensive to repair.

A sagging suspension and worn clutch may indicate heavy towing use, which might also have strained the transmission so look for one that's served mainly on the school run, such as one of the special-edition EL versions of '87, smarter on the outside even if still pretty rough and ready on the inside.

ISUZU TROOPER (87-91)



Rugged reliability might be a Trooper trademark, but examples of this vintage are unrefined and simplistic cars that won't have lasted well without lots of care and attention. Suspect anything with a price tag as low as £500 unless it comes with a new MoT and you don't expect it to last more than a year.

Since most Troopers were used as suburban off-roaders there will be some clean, well-maintained examples around, but even so be wary of the early 2.2-litre turbodiesels and 2.3-litre petrol versions because these underpowered engines will have worked hard and will probably show it with excessive noise, oil leaks and exhaust smoke. Pay £1500-£2000 for an early 2.8 D-Turbo, this engine having a much more relaxed air about it, particularly if you're intending to use the Trooper as a towcar. The 2.6-litre petrol engine is more refined and faster, though naturally quite thirsty.

Unrefined suspension, leaf-sprung at the back with torsion bars on the independent front, meant a rather harsh on-road ride but off-road agility is quite good – again the 2.8-litre turbodiesel being the best off-roading choice because of its lumbering, easy torque.

All Troopers were well specified with central locking, though only the five-door had electric windows. Duty models are the best off-roading bet since a limited slip diff is fitted – make sure it's working – and £1500 should secure a tidy '89 three-door. The top-specification Citation was the ideal highway car with air-con, a bargain at £2000 on a G-plate. Stretch the budget to a post-'89 model to enjoy heated seats on the Citation, and at this time automatic became available on the 2.6i petrol models.

RATING

PRICE RANGE £500-£3000

ON-ROAD	●●●●●
OFF-ROAD	●●●●●
PRACTICALITY	●●●●●
AVAILABILITY	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●

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