

# OF THE YEAR 2003

## LADA NIVA



Really rough but also very ready, a Niva makes an ideal starter off-roader with its permanent four-wheel drive, all-coils suspension and willing Fiat-derived petrol engine. Built to last in the Russian badlands, the Niva is a tough little car that ought to have survived well with a little bit of care, though the componentry was never of the best quality so seals do go – check for oil leaks from engine, transmission and axles.

Many owners might never have used low range, but more importantly some may have left the centre diff lock engaged while driving on the road which might have resulted in excessive strain on the transmission; expect some whine in lower gears but reject anything that sounds really noisy.

In later years the cars were subjected to some fairly serious mechanical checkovers at the Bridlington-based import centre so post-'93 examples are a better bet, also boasting better sound insulation and improved brakes as well as smart wheel-arch extensions and natty alloy wheels, even though you'll be paying up to £750 for a good one, compared with £400 for an early '89 example.

Best buys are the Hussar or Cossack versions, even though the add-ons were largely cosmetic, with eye-catching new seat upholstery and smarter alloys, as well as a better four-speaker stereo – pay up to £2000 for a late '98 example.

No Niva will be a particularly refined road car, and the interiors even on Cossacks are too ropey for the Niva to pass as a fashion icon. However, as long as the transfer lever is still able to engage low range and the centre diff lock still works the Niva should be good for years of very competent off-roading fun.

### RATING

PRICE RANGE	£400-£2000
ON-ROAD	●●●●●
OFF-ROAD	●●●●●
PRACTICALITY	●●●●●
AVAILABILITY	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●

## MITSUBISHI SHOGUN (83-89)



Reliability is a Mitsubishi byword, but that won't have stopped early examples from rusting, particularly in the tailgate area, and older engines and transmissions do develop oil leaks. Listen for excessive transmission noise because gearboxes and differentials do wear, as do turbochargers on turbodiesels that haven't been impeccably maintained – listen for any sign of roughness from the turbo or excessive black exhaust smoke suggesting that the blower isn't as effective as it should be.

Though originally sold as a Range Rover alternative and priced to match, older examples look and feel dated so shouldn't command high prices. Even so, anything priced around £1000 is likely to be a shed so be prepared to pay at least £2500 for a reasonably clean '89 2500 TD 3-door, potentially a good fun off-roader with its selectable four-wheel drive system and auto-locking front hubs. Axle articulation was never the Shogun's best point, so check if a limited slip or locking rear differential is fitted, and make sure it works before buying if you intend to do much off-roading.

A five-door of similar age will cost around £2800. Versions with the lustier but thirsty 2.6-litre petrol engine are excellent second-hand value, being some £500 to £800 cheaper than the turbodiesel depending on age, the 3.0-litre V6 offering even better on-paper value from £2600 for an '89 model to £3000 for a run-out '91 example – seemingly costly but well equipped, potentially a serviceable and comfortable family seven-seater. Note that many will have been used as towing vehicles, which need not be a problem unless they've been abused.

### RATING

PRICE RANGE	£2000-£3000
ON-ROAD	●●●●●
OFF-ROAD	●●●●●
PRACTICALITY	●●●●●
AVAILABILITY	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●

## NISSAN PATROL (82-98)



A truck of an off-roader, but a thoroughly genuine car with few pretences to refinement and the potential to make a totally competent off-road workhorse or recreational machine.

Everything about this Nissan is big, from the huge boxy body to the rumbling 4.2-litre diesel engine available from '92, really the only power plant to go for if you're using it extensively off-road because it has true stump-pulling torque. Pick an SLX three-door from '93 for best off-road fun, £3000 for something that looks a bit used, closer to £4000 for a pristine example. The five-door SGX of the same era is a luxurious bargain even at £5000 for a smart '93 model, because it was loaded with kit including leather upholstery and air conditioning.

The heavy-duty leaf-spring suspension on big rigid axles doesn't give matching on-road refinement, but axle articulation is excellent, backed up by a locking or limited slip rear diff depending on the model – check the spec before buying. Four-wheel drive is selectable, with automatic freewheeling hubs common.

The 4.2-litre petrol engine is a delightfully peppy performer giving the huge Nissan impressive highway sprinting capability, but it's thirsty hence used prices are much keener, £7000 getting you a '98 SE five-door with auto transmission. The range included a 2.8-litre turbodiesel and 3.0-litre petrol versions – note that the earlier turbodiesel was a breathless 92bhp affair, replaced in '96 by a punchier 112bhp engine so look for a P-plate at least, even though this will mean around £6000 for a three-door, and £8000 for a five-door SE. In comparison the 3.0-litre petrol versions are veritable snips at £2000 for a low-mileage '93 three-door.

### RATING

PRICE RANGE	£1000-£7000
ON-ROAD	●●●●●
OFF-ROAD	●●●●●
PRACTICALITY	●●●●●
AVAILABILITY	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●