Latest Nissan Navara Road Test

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New Nissan Navara Double Cab Arrives in a Growing Market Sector.

It’s assessed here by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

In the mid 1990’s UK sales of Double Cab Pick-Ups were at their peak with registrations led

by the Mitsubishi L200 range. Then the Government changed and upped the Benefit-in-Kind tax levels on these work and leisure vehicles, which dulled sales and then registrations of all new vehicles slipped further as the recession took hold.

But now Pick-Up sales are booming again in the UK with an 11% increase for the first six months of this year with almost 23,000 new vehicles being registered. And that is on top of the 20% growth in pick-up sales in 2015 over 2014.

So it's a growing and competitive market and the new NP300 Nissan Navara has gone down a storm with 4,330 UK sales so far this year. Around 95% of buyers have chosen a five seater, four door Double Cab version over the 2+2 seater King Cab model which has a door and a half on each side of the vehicle. There is also a Chassis Cab option for King Cab and Double Cab models.

There is one 2.3 litre engine, four cylinder turbodiesel engine, but with a choice of two power outputs, 160 and 190 hp. The lower powered unit comes with the choice of Visia, Visia Chassis Cab and Acenta trim and equipment levels. The 190 hp unit is available with Visia Chassis Cab, Acenta+, N-Connecta and Tekna spec levels. All but one version is 4WD but the 160 hp Visia version is also available as a 2WD model.

Pick-Ups of all types are classed as Light Commercial Vehicles and that governs their price, road tax and if applicable company car tax. Businesses can claim back VAT, retail customers pay VAT, VED road tax is a standard £225 a year charge whatever the CO2 emissions and the Benefit-in-Kind company car tax is £630 a year for the standard rate income tax payer and double that for a higher rate tax customer.

Retail on-the-road prices start at £22,000 and go up to £30,800. Commercial Vehicle on-the-road prices (not including VAT) start at £18,380 and go up to £25,714. My test drive version was the Double Cab 190 hp, 7-speed automatic 4WD Tekna which costs the top price of £30,800 for retail customers and £25,714 for VAT exempt commercial/business users.

These prices might look high for what is essentially a commercial vehicle but they are still a

cheaper alternative to heavyweight SUVs, especially for business users. This third generation new Nissan Navara uses the NP300 prefix to differentiate it from its predecessors. It's larger, faster and more fuel-efficient, using the latest 2.3 litre dCi four cylinder turbodiesel engine from the Renault-Nissan Alliance.



The Double Cab versions, the choice of 95% of UK Navara customers, uses a heavy duty ladder frame chassis but this time with a multi-link style rear suspension with coil springs rather than the widely used leaf spring layout of its competitors. This gives a more

compliant and comfortable ride and similar to SUVs. It also reduces the tendency for the rear end to slide-out during cornering on wet roads. However the tall Double Cab body has a high centre of gravity for its off-roader ground clearance so there is still body roll during cornering. The steering is light and relatively precise and thankfully that is needed because the latest Navara is a very big machine. With an overall length of 5,330 mm (17.49 ft), width of 1,850 mm (6.07 ft) and height of 1,810 mm (5.94 ft) it is a big vehicle to park in town and to handle around winding country roads. It felt less agile than say a Mitsubishi L200 Double Cab or the new Toyota Hilux, but the ride comfort is better thanks to the more modern rear suspension.

Another important plus factor is the larger than average load bed of 1,578 mm (5.18 ft) in length which allows for a payload of 1,052 kg (2,319 lb). It also has a braked towing weight of 3,500 kg (7,716 lb). Although this generation Navara Double Cab has a longer wheelbase of 3,150 mm (10.33 ft), the extra length has been given up to the load bay and not the passenger cabin. It is not as spacious as the award winning Mitsubishi L200 Double Cab or Toyota Hilux. There is just about enough legroom in the front for six-footers but the three rear seats are short of legroom and the shoulder room is better for two adults rather than three.

The interior takes its styling cues from other Nissan models such as the Qashqai and X-Trail SUVs. There is the recognisable multi-function steering wheel, switchgear, dashboard, computer function and on most versions the sat-nav screen. As well as the navigation system the Tekna models thankfully have a 360-degree surround-view camera which was much-used to shoehorn the Navara between other vehicles in car parks. The front and rear parking sensors are an absolute must-have as well. The overall interior build quality is good with soft touch plastic trim which looks pretty durable and my test version also had heated front seats and leather upholstery throughout. Of course air-con, electric windows and door mirrors and cruise control were also fitted.



The exterior styling is big and bold with a high bluff looking front end and dish shaped bonnet where the outer side edges are higher than the bonnet itself. The high side waistline leads to the rear business end and its drop-down tailgate. My test vehicle has the extra £3,300 option premium hardtop with lockable side and rear windows which allow easy access and security for valuable items carried in the load bay. It also had the £360 bed-liner to protect the metal floor and sides of the load area. Other load area cover options for Double Cabs include sliding shutter roll-tops and livestock tops with a mesh upper tailgate.



When it comes to on or off road driving it is a simple matter to literally switch between functions. The 4WD settings are selected via a dial on the lower dash giving 2WD, 4WD or 4WD low range with downhill descent control and electronic limited slip differential. My test vehicle had the easy to use 7-speed automatic transmission which I'm told is preferable to the heavy to use 6-speed manual gearchange. It also has the advantage with the auto gearbox of less wear and tear on the clutch and transmission when towing really heavy loads such as stock trailers, boats, caravans and car transporter trailers.

The 2.3 litre, four-cylinder turbodiesel engine in its 190 hp form I tried delivers 450 Nm (332 lb.ft) of torque from just 1,500 rpm so there is plenty of low down 'grunt' and response

for acceleration purposes. The engine, given its commercial vehicle roots, is relatively refined and smooth throughout its rev range and settles quietly at cruising speeds with its long-legged sixth and seventh gear ratios. Top speed is 112 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is an impressive 10.8 seconds for such a large and heavy vehicle. When loaded or towing of course acceleration will take longer and the fuel economy will not be as frugal. Officially for the Combined Cycle the fuel consumption figure is 40.3 mpg and during my test driving, with the vehicle not carrying any loads or towing, motorway cruising returned 37.8 mpg and finished up at 33.2 mpg overall once travelling on winding country roads and some in-town travel had taken place.

VERDICT

If size matters, both in terms of image or its workhorse load and towing capabilities, used either on or off road and with a comprehensive specification, then the new Nissan Navara Double Cab delivers on those fronts. But it has drawbacks; it’s big, its heavy and it’s cumbersome so sometimes less is more.

For: Imposing practical styling, high car-like specification, improved ride comfort, larger payload and braked towing weight than previous versions, strong engine, smooth auto gearbox, low company car tax.

Against: Not very agile on-road handling, not the roomiest space for rear seat passengers in this Double Cab class, overall size limits access to parking spaces.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Nissan NP300 Navara Tekna Double Cab, 2.3 litre, 190hp, auto 4WD.

Engine: 2.3 litre dCi, four cylinder, twin turbo diesel, 190 hp, 450 Nm (332 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm.

Transmission: Seven speed auto, high/low ratios, on demand 4WD.

Performance:

0-62mph: 10.8-seconds.

Top speed: 112mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 40.3 mpg (average on test 33.2 mpg).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 183 g/km, VED commercial vehicle road tax £225, BIK annual company car tax £630 standard rate/£1,260 higher rate.

Insurance Group: 10E.

Warranty: Five years/62,500 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 5,330 mm (17.49 ft), W 1,850 mm (6.07 ft), H 1,810 mm (5.94 ft), payload 1,052 kg (2,319 lb), braked towing weight 3,500 kg (7,716 lb), four doors + tailgate, five seats.

Price: Retail on the road £30,800 inc VAT, business use exc VAT on the road £25,714.