

Getting back to basics



A question of choice: The Prado GLX (above) and the Discovery 2.7 are both accomplished offroaders

Offroad

By FRASER STRONACH

AS a change from testing top-spec offroaders, Carsguide thought it would be a good idea to compare two base models — and the Toyota Prado 150GX and Land Rover Discovery 4 seemed prime candidates.

The 150 GX is the cheapest of the Prado diesel range, but we opted for the automatic (\$58,490) rather than the \$2500-cheaper manual for several reasons.

First, we wanted to compare apples with apples (the D4 is automatic only); second, according to ADR figures, the auto Prado is more fuel-efficient than the manual and, third, automatics are generally better offroad than manuals.

The base-model Discovery 4 is exactly \$10,000 more expensive (\$68,490) than the Prado GX auto and comes with the carried-over 2.7-litre V6 turbo diesel from the Discovery 3 rather than the new three-litre twin-turbo version.

The Prado 150's engine is also carried over from the previous generation but has new injectors and a front-mount, rather than top-mount, intercooler. Power and torque are unchanged at 127kW and 410Nm, but claimed ADR fuel economy has been improved by 8.6 per cent, thanks largely to better aerodynamics and changes to the five-speed automatic gearbox's shift protocols.

Despite its smaller capacity, the Discovery's claimed power and torque —

140kW and 440Nm — are better than the Prado's figures.

On the road, the first thing you notice is that the D4's V6 is quieter, smoother and more refined than the Toyota's four.

Gearboxes also play a part here, as the D4's six-speeder trumps the Prado's five-speeder for shift quality and in its ability to better time the changes.

At normal road speeds, the Discovery is stronger than the Prado, but the Toyota bettered it at the top end of the rev range, where the D4 felt a bit flat.

There's no doubt about its superior on-road dynamics, however. With revised steering and suspension, it's far more convincing than the Prado. The D4 is sharp and tidy, the Prado loose and vague.

Much of this comes down to the fact that the Discovery has fully independent suspension, whereas the Prado has a live rear axle.

The Toyota's suspension is also softer and more compliant, and there's more travel at the rear. The upside of this is that the Prado rides better, especially at low speeds and on rough roads. The Discovery is much firmer, but still far from harsh.

Unlike the more expensive 150s, the Prado GX doesn't come with KDSS-equipped suspension, but the standard suspension still offers generous travel, especially at the rear. It certainly has more travel than the D4, giving it a theoretical advantage.

The D4 counters this with more ground clearance, thanks to its height-adjustable air suspension, and electronic traction control that is more seamless in its application.

The proof is in the driving, and on our