

Funky, multi-talented Fiat Panda

By  [Henrie Geyser](#)

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The Fiat Panda is back on local shores with four models to choose from, ranging from two cute city slickers to two surprisingly capable bundu-bashers.



Three of the four new Pandas are powered by a two-cylinder, 63kW/145Nm engine that compares quite favourably with the power output of three-cylinder engines of the Volkswagen Up! and Renault Sandero.

The pickie-engined models zip around town without stress and they scoot along quite enthusiastically on the motorway when fed generous helpings of forecourt juice. When hustled along, the small engine produces a cheeky, gravelly growl which is actually more entertaining than intrusive.

The front-wheel drive models have a five-speed box linked via a short throw gear lever perched near at hand on the centre stack. The pedals are a tad small and close together which could make it tricky for the wearers of large-size shoes, but the sharp steering and comfortable ride (sans the dip-and-rise suspension typical of small cars) make up for that.

The only grumble some might have is the relatively small and narrow seats which could prove to be the proverbial pain in the

butt on long drives. The lay-out of buttons, dials and switches also takes some time getting used to.



The all-wheel drive models are kitted with a six-speed transmission with a first gear so low it makes tough hill-climbing and downhill crawling a doddle as I experienced on motorways and off-road terrain in the Midlands during the media launch.

Both drivetrains come in two trim levels ranging from the Easy, which has black mirror housings and door handles, 14 black rims, radio-CD player, Hill Hold, tyre pressure monitoring and remote central locking.

The more expensive Lounge model has front fog, multi-function leather steering wheel, four-speaker sound system with aux, Bluetooth and USB plug-in.

The 4x4 model has 150mm ground clearance and six-speed gearbox and all the rest of the trim found on the Lounge variant.

The flagship Cross version has the punch of an extra 66kW, terrain selector settings and Hill Descent control, 11mm ground clearance, body colour front skid plates, and distinctive headlight clusters (including LED daylight running lights).



The four Panda models are on the pricey side but they are stand-out cute, richly equipped and multi-talented enough to make up for it.

The models and prices are:

- Panda Easy – R184,900
- Panda Lounge – R199,900
- Panda 4x4 – R229,900
- Panda Cross – R249,900

ABOUT HENRIE GEYSER

Henrie Geyser joined the online publishing industry through iafrica.com where he worked for five years as news editor and editor. He now freelances for a variety of print and online publications, on the subjects of cars, food, and travel, among others; and is a member of the South African Guild of Motoring Journalists. henrieg@iafrica.com

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