

Great Wall Steed S

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GREAT WALL? Isn't that something to do with a series of fortifications built across the historical northern borders of China?

Well, yes and no. It's also the name of one of the most successful car manufacturers in China – and this year, Great Wall became the first Chinese automotive brand to begin volume vehicle sales in the UK, with the launch of the 2012 Steed pick-up.



On sale through a nationwide network of 40 dealers the Steed is a tough and practical motor, equally adept as a workhorse or a weekend getaway vehicle. It's also one of the most affordable pick-up trucks in Britain – both to buy and to run. Prices start at just £13,998 for the 'S' model and its 2.0-litre, 16-valve turbocharged diesel powerplant sips rather than guzzles fuel – returning an average fuel economy of 34 mpg.

The Steed's thickset appearance - enhanced by beefy wheel-arches and high ground clearance - indicates its resilience as well as its qualifications as a flexible load-lugger, both on tarmac and in the rough. Carrying capacity compares very well with well-known pick-up rivals - the roomy cargo bay measuring 1380 mm x 1460 mm x 480 mm (length, width, depth). The 1050 kg maximum payload is also very competitive – and towing capability is an impressive 2000 kg with a 'braked' trailer.

Inside, the four-door Steed's double-cab body is well proportioned. Slide behind the wheel and the driving position is good, with all the dials and controls easy to see and use. There is ample room for up to four passengers and storage space is decent, including a lockable glove-box, front centre console, front door pockets with cup holders and front seatback map pockets.

On the road, the Steed is certainly not quick. It takes an absolute age to get from 0-62 mph – 17 yawn-inducing seconds in fact. It also has a top speed of just 87 mph. That said, when it gets rolling (eventually), it does a good enough job of getting you from A to B. You have to really drive it though, it won't drive you, so you may well feel like you've had a work-out by the end of a long trip. Nevertheless, when the terrain gets more challenging than asphalt, you can engage the Steed's low-range gearbox, as well as the 'on demand' four-wheel-drive system – the latter at speeds of up to 12 mph. This is when the Steed comes in to its own. It will work hard and power across rutted tracks and fields with ease.

But the Steed isn't a stripped-down, utilitarian tool. It's well appointed, and no similarly priced pick-up on sale in the UK will rival its impressive tally of standard equipment. The entry-level 'S' model comes with a host of features typically offered as options in competitors, including 16-inch alloy wheels, daytime running lights, remote central locking, a Thatcham-approved Category 1 alarm, electric front and rear windows, an Alpine CD/radio with USB/MP3 and Bluetooth connectivity, steering-wheel-mounted audio controls, air-conditioning, heated fronted seats and a leather interior.

The Steed comes with a comprehensive three-year / 60,000-mile mechanical warranty, a six-year anti-perforation warranty, three-year paint warranty, and three years' roadside recovery and assistance.



PROS 'N' CONS

● Affordable ✓ ● Tough on and off road ✓ ● Spacious ✓ ● Good load-lugger ✓ ● Slow X

FAST FACTS

● Max speed: 87 mph ● 0-62 mph: 17 secs ● Combined mpg: 34.0
● Engine: 1996 cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbo diesel ● Max. power (bhp): 141 at 4000 rpm
● Max. torque (lb/ft): 225 at 1800-2800 rpm ● Max. towing weight (braked) 2000 kg
● CO2: 220 g/km ● **Price: £13,998 on the road**