



X-Trail gets more serious

Don't consign Nissan's revamped soft-roader to the urban runabout category. It now has the chassis and technological wherewithal to shrug off the Dunstan Trail as if it was born to it, writes **Dave Moore**.

IT MAY look almost the same as the original, but there's not a matching panel between the first and latest X-Trails, though you may notice some new V and X-shaped details around the grille and rear pillar.

Drivers will now find it easier to gauge the car's front extremities thanks to a bonnet lid revamp.

Under the skin, as well as a much more ergonomic and space-efficient asymmetric dash design, and a terrific enlarged double-layer load area, there's an impressive new development of Nissan's drive system, called All Mode 4x4-i, which is fitted to all but the base version of the new X-Trail.

I made good use of the system while enjoying the X-Trail on its launch event, driving through Central Otago's spectacular Dunstan Trail.

You can turn a console knob from two-wheel drive to an auto position that means up to half the torque that's nor-

mally fed to the front axle can be fed to the back if the system senses any loss of traction.

Turning the dial to lock maintains a 50:50 torque split between the front and rear at speeds up to about 40kmh.

The key to the new system is the use of sensors monitoring side, front and rear G forces, yaw rates and steering angles.

The information provided by them to the central ECU leads to improvements in stability, as well as reducing understeer and oversteer, off-road and on-road in all conditions.

All Mode 4x4-i applies brakes to any wheel that's short of grip or losing traction, and feeds torque to the wheel or wheels that still have purchase.

Handy additional tricks include a Hill Descent Control (HDC) and Hill Start Assist (HAS), which operate on slopes of greater than 10 per cent gradient.

HDC is engaged manually when the system is in Lock mode and uses the ABS to maintain a controlled descent speed of



about 8kmh. It works in either reverse or forward directions.

HSA works automatically on and off-road.

It comes into play when the X-Trail starts off from rest in any gear, and prevents the vehicle from rolling backwards for the second or so it takes the driver's foot to go from the brake to the throttle.

It also works when reversing uphill.

On-road activity is helped by the car's ESP system, which does its best to mitigate under and oversteer when a driver is cornering too enthusiastically.

Driving the new X-Trail on the approaches to the Dunstan Trail, I found it a pleasantly nimble vehicle with an astonishingly good level of refinement, even on lousy surfaces and coarse chip.

Its ride quality, especially on standard 16-inch rims, is exemplary, and it doesn't suffer on the higher-echelon models' 17-inch rims.

While a 2.0-litre Renault-sourced

turbo-diesel power unit is promised for some time in the future, the X-Trail's petrol 2.5-litre engine has power and torque increases to 125kW and 226Nm, and a continuous valve timing control setup.

The original car's five-speed manual and four-speed automatic transmissions have been swapped respectively for a six-speed manual and a six-step CVT unit with paddle-shifter.

Smooth, unfussed and possessed of a useful mid-range, the X-Trail feels altogether more mature than before, with a sense of flexibility that makes it an easy companion off-road.

On the highway, the square-rigged Nissan settles into a relaxed 1950rpm cruise in top gear at 100kmh.

The new X-Trail looks like an evolution of the original, but it's more than that.

It is now based on Nissan's new Dualis platform, and feels the better for it.

The whole package is so much more flexible and easier to live with than older





models and, judging by its performance through a variety of obstacles and over the full gamut of road and off-road surfaces, the new X-Trail will hold together better too.

Pricing will be critical to the car's success, but Nissan won't need to worry much about that.

The X-Trail ST six-speed manual starts at \$35,395; it's \$36,995 for the CVT automatic.

Appointments includes a drive computer, exterior temperature gauge, cruise control, height-adjustable driver's seat, airconditioning, CD sound system, power windows, remote keyless entry, 12-volt cargo area power outlet, cargo area tie-down hooks, double luggage floor, a cargo cover and roof rails.

The mid-range ST-L is priced from \$36,895 for the manual and \$38,495 for the auto.

It has 16-inch alloy wheels, the full

4x4-i system with ESP, Hill Start Assist and Hill Descent Control, but adds just \$1500 with each transmission.

The top-spec auto-only Ti is \$40,595 and has 17-inch alloy wheels, climate-control airconditioning, a leather-trimmed steering wheel and a six-speaker sound system with six-stack, in-dash MP3-capable CD player, a large glass sliding power sunroof, front fog lights, leather-trimmed gear knob and hand brake lever, and a chromed grille and door handles.

For another \$2300 the Ti adds leather-trimmed seats with power operated seats and front-seat heaters.

The entire Nissan X-Trail range represents terrific value.

It looks particularly good when you add up the chassis improvements, extra load space and engine upgrades, and the pricing starts and finishes at \$4500 less than its predecessor.



Nimble: The Nissan X-Trail has an astonishingly good level of refinement, even on lousy surfaces and coarse chip.

Saturday, 17 November 2007, p. 3