



NISSAN X-TRAIL DCI

THE FOUR-WHEEL-DRIVE OF the Year award was contested this year by some very competent products from the USA, Japan, and Europe.

Small to medium four-wheel-drives are still making inroads into fleets which are looking for a multi-purpose wagon with some off-road or towing capability.

Contenders for this year's award included the: Dodge Nitro CRD, Hummer H3, Jeep Grand Cherokee CRD, Nissan X-Trail dCi, Subaru Forester, Toyota Highlander and the Volkswagen Tiguan.

To be honest the diesel powered Volkswagen Tiguan was a very close second to the winning Nissan X-Trail dCi.

Had VW importer European Motor Distributors been able to price their newcomer under \$50 grand the result might have been different. The Tiguan is a very good performer but it's price premium over the X-Trail just pushed it outside contention.

The other four-wheel-drives were also very competent but none of them struck us as being particularly suited to fleet use as much as the X-Trail did. The Hummer was too niche and too thirsty, the luxurious Highlander is more suited to family use, just like the funky Dodge and the trailblazing Jeep, and the thirst of the new Subaru Forester was also a consideration. A diesel Forester however might have swung things differently, but that model is yet to reach these shores.

The Nissan X-Trail dCi won overall thanks to its blend of luxury, functionality, performance, economy and competitive

price. Here is a 4WD "soft roader" that presents an ideal blend of form and functionality to the fleet market.

Four people can easily travel in comfort and there is more than enough room for their luggage and there are cup holders everywhere. Nissan also retain the funky pull out drawers in the cargo for leisure seekers to place wet items into. Alternatively the rear seats fold down for larger loads to be carried.

The Renault sourced 2.0-litre four-cylinder diesel power plant delivers smooth, responsive performance, mated to a conventional six-speed automatic transmission. It produces 110 kilowatts of power and has 320 Nm of torque. More than enough power for towing when required, yet the engine is quiet at speed and always responsive.

To make the diesel-powered X-TRAIL dCi as attractive to all customers it is available in two grades, TS (cloth) at \$42,595 and TL (sunroof, leather) at \$45,895.

"The diesel X-Trail will be the first volume selling automatic in the compact SUV segment of the market," said John Manley, the Managing Director of Nissan New Zealand. "We were pleased to be able to respond so quickly to demand for this type of vehicle and expect that diesel X-Trails will make up 40 percent of our sales."

In European markets the M1D engine has been used in diesel versions of the Nissan Dualis, which will arrive into New Zealand in 2009. It boasts common

rail direct injection, turbo charging, 16-valves and a 1995cc capacity. It offers prodigious levels of torque from as low as 2000rpm, with 90% of peak torque available from 1750rpm. Fuel efficiency is excellent with Nissan quoting a combined fuel consumption of 8.1 litres/100 kilometres.

The new diesel X-TRAIL dCi TS and TL variants are extremely well equipped, with both featuring front, side and curtain airbags, stability control (ESP), ABS brakes, seat-belt pre-tensioners and Nissan's intelligent ALL MODE 4x4-i system which incorporates Hill Start and Hill Descent control. Further standard features include 17-inch alloy wheels, power windows and mirrors, air-conditioning, cruise control, a six-stack CD player, front fog lights and chrome door handles.

For the TL model, the specification list includes power adjustable heated leather seats, climate control air-conditioning and a panoramic sunroof.

It was a return drive from Gisborne to Auckland in a Silver TL model that convinced me that the diesel X-Trail would be our eventual winner this year.

I covered 680 kilometres in air conditioned comfort with the X-Trail dCi averaging 8.5 liters per 100 kilometres at an average speed of 80kph. What impressed me most was the quiet comfort of the vehicle and its ability to handle any surface from sandy mud, to loose gravel and pock marked state highway bitumen.