





Double duties for new Maxima

NEW MODEL

by Colin Smith

WITH Primera running out of road it's been about 12 months Nissan since Nissan has been able to offer any passenger car that's sized — or priced — between its 1.8-litre Tiida sedan and hatch and the 3.5-litre Maxima sedan.

Now two familiar names and a new one are arriving in Nissan showrooms. The extended range was previewed last week by a long-range drive through spectacular South Canterbury and Otago scenery.

Comfortable and fuel-efficient long distance driving was the common theme of the press launch for the new Nissan trio which has the task of putting some momentum back into the brand's sales figures.

The newcomers are the hard-to-pigeonhole Qashqai (that's pronounced kash-kai) and new generation Maxima sedan and Murano crossover.

For the fifth generation (J32 series) Maxima there is new multi-task job description.

A two-engine strategy — for the first time since the Maxima debuted in 1990 — not only drives the new Maxima into its traditional large car role and also into competition with smaller engine cars.

So the 2.5-litre V6 powered 250-L model priced at \$43,495 is the biggest news in the Maxima lineup. It will give Nissan a much-needed medium car alternative for the first time since the Primera was discontinued last year.

The role of Maxima 250-L will be complemented by the Qashqai with its 2.0-litre engine and lower pricing to give five-door coverage of the lower end of the medium segment.

Nissan now has that hole in its range covered not by one conventional model but by two slightly alternative choices.

With the likes of Ford Mondeo at 2.3-litres, Honda Accord Euro and Toyota

Camry at 2.4 and Mazda6 now at 2.5-litres the Maxima 250-L difference is simply two cylinders rather than engine displacement. And its fuel consumption — officially 9.5 litres per 100km — is competitive with the four-cylinder opposition.

The smaller V6 offers 134kW output at 6000rpm with peak torque of 228Nm at 4400rpm and, like its bigger brother, drives through the stepless XTRoid CVT with six-speed manual mode for sequential shifts.

When it comes to its traditional match up against the Honda Accord V6, Toyota Aurion and the Falcon and Commodore the Maxima 350-L now has a 185kW at 6000rpm (up 15kW on the previous model) and 326Nm of torque at 4400rpm.

The surprising thing is the similarity in specification and price between the two variants.

Leather is standard on both models along with keyless push button entry and start-stop, 17-inch alloy wheels, steering wheel audio controls, eight-way power driver's seat adjustment, dual temperature control airconditioning and Xenon headlights with automatic levelling.

Differentiation between 250-L and 350-L is provided by a power sunroof, a bootlid spoiler and heated front seats with memory on the 350-L which is priced at \$46,995.

The Maxima has an all-new platform with increased body rigidity while its styling and dimensions are a progressive evolution of the previous generation.

Thanks to some styling details such as grille colour, side sills and alloy wheels, the appearance of the Maxima is unique to Australia and New Zealand.

Changes to the suspension include a high caster front strut layout and revised rear multi-link geometry while new variable speed power steering provides more secure road feel at highway speeds.



On the long stretches of Waitaki Valley the smaller V6 was smooth and responsive. The extra capacity — and in particular the extra 98Nm of torque — from the 3.5-litre engine becomes evident on longer climbs and for overtaking.

While the bigger engine accelerates eagerly, the combination of lower torque and the stepless CVT lends a sensation of the smaller engine Maxima "winding up" to get its work done.

While the performance difference is marked there's a feeling that \$3500 and 0.7 litres per 100km fuel consumption isn't enough differentiation between small engine Maxima and the big engine version.

The question was asked whether a lower priced 250-L with cloth trim might have been a better option but Nissan says

the only cloth available was a light beige and the maker didn't want that colour interior.

Nissan rates Maxima as its most successful nameplate in the New Zealand — other than Navara in the ute market — and over 25,000 have been sold in New Zealand since the first generation was launched in 1990. It's not been as successful more recently and Nissan sold only 284 Maximas last year, the numbers much reduced from earlier years as the J31 has reached six years old.

The only forecast being offered last week was it would sell more of the new Maxima than it did of the old model last year and the expectation is the 350-L will initially be the bigger seller but over time sales will move to a 50:50 split between big and small engine Maxima.





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