



# Maxima looking smarter

**L**ike a good vintage, Nissan's revamped big car – the Maxima – gets better with age. The 3.5-litre V6 has been with us for a wee while now but Nissan has upped the ante with a smaller-engined sibling, offering a 2.5-litre sixer as well.

We've had time in the big brother 350-L and there is plenty about the car that lingers in the memory. With some subtle work coming off the drawing board, the new Maxima looks sharper than the previous model. Before it looked a bit bulbous, but by reworking some of the exterior design cues, the car looks sharper.

And it's not just a revision at the front end either, although the new grille, bumpers and headlight assembly alone does it for us. The side panels flex a bit more muscle and bring a much better balance to the whole.

Nissan touts the Maxima as is luxury model and that's born out by the fit and finish of the car.

In terms of space, the car is voluminous in every respect. With the power front seats at the maximum reach, there's still ample legroom for those riding in the back seat.

And while the rear seats don't flip down – relying only on access through a portal in the middle of the back seat – it boasts a massive

luggage space. There's more than 500 litres available and that's plenty. The V6 driving the 350-L delivers 185kW and that's adding another 15kW above that the outgoing VQ35DE engine provided. And while torque peaks at 326Nm, 80 percent of that torque is there from 1600rpm, meaning the engine's barely out of idling speed to get there.

For the 2009 model, Nissan has matched the engine to its new continuously variable transmission (X-TRONIC CVT) that comes with adaptive shift control (ASC). It's the ASC that gives the Maxima an edge in terms of performance and economy because it will recognise driving styles and adapt the transmission's response accordingly.

In general, the transmission will settle into its comfort zone very quickly and the V6 simply chugs along at low rpms. But demand more and its response is very clean. They've dropped a manual mode into the mix as well, which means the driver can make the changes if they feel the need. In that form the continuously variable box becomes a six-speed option.

With a mix of urban and open-road motoring over a week our fuel

consumption was 10.1 litres for 100km. That was a fraction under the maker's claim of 10.2 litres. And

that's not too shabby a return for a big car.

The hallmark of the Maxima is how it delivers the energy and it manages to do that with a minimum of fuss. And it also does it very quietly. Nissan has gone to extra lengths to ensure as quiet a ride as possible and to this end says it's bunged paint sealer and foam material to block any little holes or gaps in the bodywork.

Along with the efforts to dampen noise levels, the new car comes with a revised suspension set-up.

Built-in rebound springs in the front shocks has given the steering end a better platform. So while the car carries everyone in comfort there's nothing unruly in terms of handling.

There's a raft of active and passive safety features, including vehicle dynamic control, ABS with traction control, brake assist and electronic brakeforce distribution. Dual front, side and curtain airbags are standard as too the active head restraints on the front seats.

While the Japanese-made car has a long list of standard features, there are some specific design elements that have been added for the Kiwi market. These include the rear spoiler on the 350-L, new design for the 17-inch alloys and seat trim. The leather seat trim is standard



to both the 250-L and 350-L and both front seats are powered. The driver's side has eight settings and the front passenger seat four settings. Both seats have a high and low heat setting and the driver's side has two memory settings available.

Nissan has reshaped the centre console layout in the new model and everything is ideally located. Controls for the dual zone, climate controlled air-conditioning sit above the audio controls but all are

within easy reach. Audio functions can also be managed from the steering wheel, which is also home to the cruise control functions. Power windows and mirrors (with a fold-back function), a six-disc in-dash CD player and auxiliary MP3 jack, auto headlight setting (the headlights also have a washer function) and tilt and slide electric sunroof round out the interior picture.

The car gets Nissan's "intelligent keyless" entry system. As long as

you've got the key on you, you can open the car by touching a button on the door handle. The remote also opens the bootlid. And with this keyless system, the Maxima is started and stopped via push button on the dashboard.

Nissan's new-look Maxima keeps things simple. There's nothing ostentatious in its design but what changes have been made present the car in a better light.



### ► TECHNO STUFF

**Price** \$46,995  
**Engine** 3.5-litre V6  
**Power** 185kW at 6000rpm, 326Nm at 4400rpm  
**Trans** Continuously variable with 6spd manual mode  
**Suspen** Independent strut (f), multi-link (r)  
**Brakes** Discs (ventilated up front)  
**How big** 4850mm long, 1785mm wide, 1485mm tall, 2775mm wheelbase  
**Wheels** 17-in alloys, 215/55tyres  
**Fuel** 70 litres premium

### ► SHE SAYS

This is a stately and solid vehicle and probably better suited to a mature audience. Beautifully appointed inside and there's acres of space, especially in the boot. Design changes have been for the better. Best bits: If you're after a roomy car then the new Maxima should tick all your boxes.  
 - Nanette Maslin