



More teeth for Murano

The newest Murano has 'I' factor, for it genuinely deserves to wear the badge of Nissan's US luxury division, Infiniti, rather than that of the mother company. This is most noticeable inside, where an appealing sculptural dash and centre console combine with new trim materials to create a much more convincing cabin. New gauges, a new information screen with menus, and an 11-speaker Bose audio system with a 9.3-gig music hard drive all help foster early impressions that this 3.5 litre crossover is more comparable to a Lexus RX350 than a Toyota Highlander.

Once you overlook the poorly designed luggage cover that will be banished to the garage after first encounter, there'll be genuine questions over whether the Rexus is worth the extra \$50K asked for it over Murano. Such value-driven pragmatism requires forgetting the mainstream logo attached to the Murano's grille, something that's quite hard to do given the badge is now the size of a town clock.

Either side of the badge, you'll find Murano's other polarising feature: rows of grille 'teeth' that can either be viewed as shark-inspired or crooked. Given the equally carnivorous 'eyes' presented by the new projector headlights, my vote is for the former.

New fascia aside, this upgrade really isn't

a radical departure from the original Murano, but the evolutionary steps the Nissan has taken are numerous. The new body is a little more curvaceous in form, but functionality is unchanged given that it is just as roomy as before. Dynamic improvements are more noticeable than extra passenger and luggage space in the full five-seater. Added reinforcements to the Maxima-based platform result in sharper steering, a characteristic aided by lower-profile tyres mounted on massive 20-inch rims. Had Nissan not chosen to tune the power steering of the made-in-USA Murano to the over-assistance preferred by its market of origin, this would be a driver's crossover.

A further aid to apex-hunting is the fact that the upgraded 3.5 litre V6/CVT powertrain is mounted 30mm lower. The motor remains a member of the acclaimed Nissan FQ-series V6 family, but is now closer to 370Z specification with the addition of a trick new power valve in the induction system, and its increased ability to optimise valve timing. The result is a 19kW power increase for a total of 191kW of peak power. Not quite the 204kW of the Lexus RX, but close enough to earn a cigar.

A new-generation CVT aids the transmission of power to the road, and more clinically targets the ideal ratio for the driving scenario via a boost in



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computing power. There's none of the 'slippage' that characterised Nissan's earliest efforts at CVTs, and Murano's relatively quick overtaking sprint should ensure its owners aren't too late getting to the next Kathmandu sale.

Loading the wares they score at the mall should also be a little easier now that Murano has a power-operated tailgate. And backing out of the lot afterward is made much easier by a reversing camera. These new convenience features and the body stiffening add a few kilos. At a claimed 1914kg, Murano is evidently 54kg heavier than the previous-generation model we weighed.

Yet performance is largely unchanged thanks to the new powertrain efficiencies, and there is a nine per cent improvement in fuel use, according to lab tests. We averaged 11.1L/100km during our Mackenzie cruise – just a little above the official 10.9 identified in the laboratory.

Best of all, Murano's new kit comes at no extra cost thanks to a deflated US dollar. At \$59,900, this better-trimmed and better-equipped bells-and-whistles family wagon is actually 50 bucks less than before. So while I may personally wish the Murano still retained the lightweight plastic tailgate of old, most buyers will recognise a better-value proposition for their money.

