

**4WD
OF THE YEAR**



Nissan Murano

THE four-wheel-drive of the year award was contested this year by some very competent products from Korea, Japan and Europe.

Contenders for the award this year:

Ford Territory Ghia Turbo
Hyundai Santa Fe CRDi
Honda CR-V
Land Rover Freelander SE
Mitsubishi Outlander
Nissan Murano
Nissan X-Trail
Renault Koleos
Suzuki Grand Vitara
Toyota RAV-4

It was a reasonably interesting year in the SUV world. The Ford Territory had a makeover this year which was largely cosmetic and we are still waiting for a diesel powered version to arrive.

The Koleos impressed us with its diesel engine that it shares with the Nissan X-Trail which won this award last year, but it was the petrol X-Trail we tested in a group test with the Outlander, Grand Vitara, RAV-4 and CR-V. All were very competent products but none really shone out as an award contender.

The Freelander SE arrived some \$10,000 cheaper than the HSE variant which won the award two years ago, so again although competent there wasn't much that was new about the vehicle.

Another very competent vehicle was the Hyundai Santa Fe, but again it's due for a

revamp this year, hence it was discounted as an award contender. Ironically the diesel powered Santa Fe got the nod from a major banking corporation to be used as a replacement vehicle for their ageing fleet of Ford Territory vehicles.

The brand-new Murano is designed for both American and European markets, and it's built on the entirely new D platform, as used on the latest Maxima, and although at first glance styling – except for a different grille design – appears to be much like the outgoing model, every single panel on the vehicle is new.

The new platform is much stiffer – 150 percent stiffer in fact – and this makes the vehicle more responsive, both on-road and off.

The latest Murano, gets Nissan's award-winning 3.5-litre VQ 24-valve V6 engine as also found in the original 350Z and this pushes out 198 kW, a healthy 20 kW increase over that of the previous model, with a commensurate hike in torque, too, from 318 at 3600 to 334 Nm at 4400 rpm. But Nissan has made the car more economical.

The changes feature variable induction and continuous valve timing control systems, as well as lots of detail improvements to reduce friction and enhance refinement.

Getting the right driving position is easy thanks to height and reach adjustment of the seat, plus tilt adjustment of the



steering. Once on the road you're immediately impressed by the ride quality of the new Murano, and how well it handles.

The previous model suffered from under-steer, but the latest version is much more neutral, thanks to the stiffer platform that is more resistant to lateral and twisting forces, as well as tweaks to the geometry of the new multi-link rear suspension and revised front strut suspension.

The result is more responsive handling combined with improved levels of comfort. Speed sensitive power steering system also improves ease of driving at low speeds and gives a more direct feel at higher speeds.

The Nissan Murano won thanks to its blend of functionality, performance, economy and competitive price. Here is a four-wheel-drive soft roader that presents an ideal blend of attributes for the fleet market.