



# Nissan polishes its niche car

The five-door Qashqai has been given a facelift and will soon be gaining a seven-seater sibling, writes DAVE MOORE.

Car seat design is more and more critical for me as I get older, and at its launch in New Zealand about this time last year, I was effusive in my praise of the Nissan Qashqai's front seats. Supportive, well-shaped and able to touch and cosset one's back from tailbone to shoulder, while proving a squab of pleasingly sculpted contours, these perches were right up there with Volvo's and Renault's as the best I've experienced.

I'm relieved to announce the car's facelift has left the front seating well-enough alone, though later in the year, a Qashqai+2 with seven-seats will be added to the lineup, which will please those with sufficient family members to fill them, or at least popular children with lots of mates.

The car's facelift may seem a little soon after its launch here, but the Sunderland-built, European-designed Qashqai had already had two seasons in the marketplace before it came to New Zealand to replace Nissan's Primera model.

The Qashqai will remain a front-wheel-drive car only, which makes sense, as otherwise a 4x4 version would surely cannibalise sales from Nissan's X-trail which already has all-wheel-drive.

You can tell the new Qashqai from the original by its new frontal treatment, with softer edges to the grille surround, a slightly higher bonnetline, a reshaped upper intake

mouth which extends slightly into the front bumper and larger headlamps. At the back, there are clear glasses for the backing and indicator lamps. While the base \$35,900 ST model retains its steel wheels with plastic trims, the posher Ti shows off some finely-detailed new 18-inch alloy wheels, not unlike those on the new BMW X1.

The \$39,900 Ti model has been up-specced for the facelift, with a standard panoramic sunroof, dual zone climate control, those fancy alloys, Xenon headlights and keyless starting and locking. Both the ST and Ti come with steering wheel controls for the sound system, Bluetooth and the standard drive computer.

Cruise control, air conditioning, ABS/EBD with Brake Assist, Vehicle Dynamics Control (VDC) and Traction Control System (TCS), are all part of every Qashqai, along with MP3 input, front, side and curtain airbags.

Design-wise, the Qashqai's interior has changed in detail only, with its instrument cluster framed with brightwork, while an on-board computer window is sited between the speedometer and rev-counter, providing fuel use, distance to fill, and time elapsed information on a white screen.

The Qashqai retains its single choice of drivetrain for its revamped models, using a 102kW 2.0-litre fuel injected DOHC 16 valve power unit driving through a six-step CVT

transmission. The same set-up will be employed by the seven-seater model which, despite weighing 106kg more and being 211mm longer with a 134mm longer wheelbase still manages an 8.0L/100km EU combined economy rating against the five-seater model's 7.6L/100km, itself an improvement of 0.29 l/100km, thanks to the car's more aerodynamic nose.

The Qashqai+2 will be a middle specification model. To the five-seater ST model's kit, it adds a set of 16-inch alloy wheels and roof rails and extra seating. The seven-seater is expected to arrive in late July or early August. The price is not confirmed, but Nissan New Zealand expects the Qashqai+2 to cost about \$40,000.

The mid-2010 Qashqai feels similar on the road to the original, but the addition of Bluetooth and an on-board computer, shows attention to being able to communicate on the move, and to be attuned to our vehicles' fuel consumption habits.

The model has notched up 600 sales in New Zealand since its launch a year ago.

With the addition of a seven-seater and increasing interest in crossover models, the Qashqai should reach Nissan's expected 55 to 60 sales a month fairly easily.

The good news for anyone with a back as bad as mine is that the Qashqai has the same supremely designed front seats, and a comfy driver is a safer than a grumpy one.



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**Exterior changes:** A softer, redesigned nose and larger headlamps feature, while the sunroof and alloy wheels show that this car is the top of the range Ti model.