



Qashqai eye-catcher

A vehicle in a class of its own

by John Jones

ONE of a kind — that is Nissan's Qashqai, which has surged ahead both nationally and overseas in the 12 months since its original launch.

The Qashqai sits in a niche all its own. It looks like an SUV and has many of the assets of one, but it is a two-wheel-drive hatch, and in fact a whole new concept.

The design and styling take their inspiration from an SUV, sitting high above the road with wide vision in a sleek and contemporary vehicle.

It drives like a hatch with precise handling and smart acceleration and good road-holding qualities. But there are some important differences from an SUV, not the least of which is the fuel economy — a scant 7.6-litres/100kmh.

The Qashqai comes in three variants. There is the base ST which also has a +2 alternative which provides two extra seats in the back to make a total of seven.

Then there is the Ti, the vehicle used for the test drive which has a full book of desirable extras.

All the Qashqais have the same two-litre engine delivering 102 kW of power and 198 Nm of torque. It works perfectly in tandem with the automatic transmission with its six-speed manual mode.

The Qashqai has obtained the highest possible ANCAP rating of five stars, thanks

to an impressive combination of safety features and systems. That includes a rigid body cell, six airbags, vehicle dynamic control, traction control system, anti-lock braking system, and electronic brakeforce distribution.

The cabin is extremely well planned and user-friendly from the large knobs for the dual climate control (in the Ti) for the passenger to the driver to a well-lit and placed information system containing a plethora of facts from the average fuel usage to the remaining distance before refuelling.

Add to that audio and cruise control buttons mounted on the steering wheel, Bluetooth hands-free phone, six-stacker CD player and MP3 player.

Extra goodies for the Ti are automatic headlights, rain sensing front wipers and the daddy of them all, a glass panoramic sun roof that extends back forever to flood the cabin with light.

Those who do not want the two extra seats of the +2 still have plenty of room with a 60-40 split and large boot at a height that makes loading and unloading easy.

The reaction to the Qashqai must have made Nissan happy. Its eye-catching appearance, versatility and drive quality have caught the attention of a whole range of people from families to mature people. It really does sit happily in a little world of its own.



Pictures by BURT LAMONT