



# Fresh face forward

By Jacqui Madelin

**Q:** QASHQAI HAS saved Nissan's bacon since its arrival in May 2009, taking it into a new segment where it proved popular enough to slow the sales slide that afflicted most car brands last year.

Now there's a facelift it'll need if it's to hold its own against Mitsubishi's soon-to-arrive ASX.

**What's new**

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. So there's a literal facelift, with alterations to the grille, bumper and bonnet, headlights and mudguards designed to impart a softer face.

The rear lamps and pleasant cabin get minor revisions as does the spec, with Bluetooth, and steering wheel controls for some features.

The top-spec Ti now has a panoramic glass sunroof, dual zone climate air and keyless start.

There'll be a longer, seven-seat variant by August; otherwise the same engine and underpinnings as before.

**The company line**

Cutting 10 million sales from last year's global total hit the industry hard; NZ was far from alone in feeling the pain.

But Nissan NZ managing director John Manley predicts a 6 per cent sales

rise this year.

"The Motor Industry Association includes lunatic pessimists and raging optimists, but the pessimists are probably covering their butts with their companies," he says.

Nissan aims to lift its market share to 9 per cent by 2015.

"That's realistic, but a genuine challenge. The only way anyone will grow is to nick sales from someone else, and to do that you have to have the product."

Clearly Qashqai is the right product to increase share; 80 per cent of 2009 buyers were new to Nissan. Equally clearly, Nissan needs to keep it fresh — hence these changes.

**What we say**

Nissan has kept it simple, with one reasonably frugal 2.0-litre petrol engine, in two wheel drive only. Your choice is two spec levels, plus the seven-seat variant that's mechanically the same, with ST-grade plus roof rails and 16-inch alloy wheels.

The base car has six airbags, ABS and stability control, Bluetooth hands-free phone capability, cruise control and a CVT auto, at \$35,900. The Ti adds 18-inch alloys, dual zone air, rain sensing wipers, the glass roof and front fog lights for a \$4000 premium.

The softer, more car-like look is

attractive; more high-riding hatch than planet-trampling SUV.

**On the road**

Qashqai delivers a good all-round view that'll be as appreciated around town as driving through beautiful landscapes.

It's happy to cruise, the CVT proving quietly efficient except under heavy acceleration, when it sounds a tad coarse.

We tackled some demanding roads during our extensive South Island drive, rediscovering a pleasant handler.

There is some SUV-style body roll, but those choosing Qashqai over a conventional hatch will feel that is more than an acceptable trade-off for the good view out, easy entry and egress imparted by the high hip point, and that whiff of off-roading style.

**Why you'll buy one**

You like the SUV look but don't need the extra grip or larger fuel and tyre bills that come with four-wheel-drive.

**Why you won't**

If you want a hatch or wagon you'll buy one; if you want the dynamics of a higher-riding soft roader, you want the four-paw benefits too.



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