

2009 Nissan Maxima 3.5 SV

The sophistication of a sedan or the thrill of a sports car?

By DURHL CAUSSEY

Extra padding in the bolsters provides superior lateral support during high-performance driving. During distance driving, I used the manual thigh support extension design to help reduce fatigue. However, once again I felt the bucket seats were too small. It is

It's comfortable to drive, has great energy, is robust in attitude, slick in design, and affordably priced.

not that my rear is extra large, but I drove in a "pucker" because the seat was just too small for me.

The smaller sport steering wheel gives you a better grip on the wheel, leading to better handling on the road. Within easy reach, the paddle shifters allowing

manual control were available. The shifter is offset, situated closer to the driver, for improved engagement. I rarely use the paddle shifter, but my oldest son loves to use it. "Where else can you get a sedan ride with the feel of a sports car?" he asked.

The engine is an award-winning 3.5-litre V6 that unleashes 290 horsepower, and rules the road powerfully. The intake valve design coupled with variable valve timing on the 12 exhaust valves helps the power plant generate incredible torque for off-the-line acceleration, improves power at higher engine speeds, and provides more thrills than you ever thought possible. Yet, the week I drove the Maxima I got just a little better in mileage than the official 12.4 km/100 L city and highway 9.1.

The 2009 Maxima is sold in sport, sport and tech, and premium packages. All the extra items like trunk chassis reinforcement, XM satellite radio, memory system, rear spoiler, 19-inch aluminum-alloy wheels, and parallel-seamed heated wrapped steering wheel with paddle shifts are additional expenses that add about \$2,300 to the base price of \$38,700.

The power-sliding moon roof, leather-appointed seats, 60/40 split fold-down rear bench seat, and 4-wheel anti-lock braking system are just a few features in comparison to the dozens of other



2009 Nissan Maxima. COURTESY OF NISSAN MEDIA

features that are part of the standard package.

My Maxima had the Ipod friendly feature, and the compact flash card slot. This feature allows you to download your MP3 music files onto a flash card, insert the card into the card slot, and play away. My favorite was the satellite

radio. I was able to scroll through the channel lineup to find the programs I wanted, whether it was sports or talk radio, and just enjoy. There are 170 channels of music and radio shows, most are commercial free.

In the auto literature they talk about the Nissan Safety Shield.

Advanced air bags that include dual-stage supplemental front air bags equipped with seat belt sensors and an occupant-classification system are part of this system. In Maxima, six standard air bags, including roof-mounted curtain side-impact air bags and front-seat Activated Head Restraints are



Maxima interior. COURTESY OF NISSAN MEDIA

just some of the examples mentioned in the literature. Front seat belts utilize pretensioners to help tighten the belt when the front airbags deploy. And if your body puts much force on the belt, load limiters give a bit. Front-seat active head restraints help reduce the chance of whiplash injuries to front-seat occupants by moving up and forward during certain rear-end collisions.

The 2009 Maxima drives like a sports car but is as roomy as a sedan. It's comfortable to drive, has great energy, is robust in attitude, slick in design, and affordably priced. It kind of made me want to ask the manufacturer if I could drive it a little longer. They wouldn't agree; apparently my trick wouldn't work. Too many others had tried.

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Mercedes GLK350

By CHRIS JACKSON
MyCarData

As fuel prices rise, fuel efficiency becomes a bigger selling point, putting sales of large SUVs on the decline. The market for smaller sport-utes and crossover vehicles is still robust, though, as customers move into more economical vehicles that maintain a high level of bad-weather control and versatility. Mercedes' GLK350 is the way to have your luxury compact crossover and your three-pointed star, too.

The GLK-Series is a comfortable step below the ML-Class on Mercedes' SUV ladder. It's based on the C-Class platform and is new to the U.S. for 2010. The smallest SUV yet offered by Mercedes is no cheap entry-level crossover, though. The GLK350 packs serious luxury and utility into its compact body.

The clean styling is as crisp as a tuxedo, and marks the GLK as a member of the Mercedes SUV

family. The GLK combines elements of the upright G-Class with the angular C-Class, and the result is a capable-looking urban SUV. A long hood and bold two-bar Mercedes family grille give this vehicle a more assertive look than the snub-nosed ML-Class, and if the upright windshield makes it look a bit like a Subaru Forester in formal wear, that's not an entirely bad thing. At the rear, the standard dual exhaust and stainless steel sill protector provide an upscale look. Strong character lines at the sides and a roof spoiler prevent the design from looking too boxy. It's also functional, with integrated roof rails, short overhangs front and rear, and a decent amount of ground clearance should you want to tackle an unpleasant road. Nineteen-inch wheels are standard, with optional twenties available.

Slide inside, and the GLK is relentlessly elegant, with piano-black trim and a very clean in-



Mercedes-Benz GLK350. COURTESY OF NETCARSHOW

terior. Some compact crossovers are little more than dressed-up economy cars, but the GLK350 is a first-class ticket. The upright seating, long wheelbase, and ample headroom make for an airy cabin—the standard panoramic sunroof doesn't hurt, either. Mercedes has paid extra attention to driver comfort, and the pedals and steering wheel are aligned to complement the upright seat-

ing position and provide long-distance comfort. Mercedes' signature driver-information screen in the speedometer is a part of the GLK's design, while the COMMAND infotainment system, a navigation system, and Mercedes Parktronic parallel-parking assist are available. Cargo space is generous, and the GLK includes a cargo cover, tie-down hooks and an under-floor storage

compartment.

Power is provided by a 3.5 litre V6, and acceleration is surprisingly robust. Credit the 268 horsepower, two-ton curb weight and seven-speed automatic transmission, or just credit the fact that it's a Mercedes. The GLK tops out at 230 km/h, which is faster than many family sedans, let alone the average compact SUV. The 4MATIC all-wheel drive system is biased toward the front wheels and tuned for predictable understeer in emergencies.

On pavement, the GLK is comfortable and composed, with sedan-like road manners. Unibody construction is used, and a fully independent suspension with MacPherson struts up front and a multi-link rear. Mercedes has even performed some aerodynamic magic with the chassis to enhance high-speed stability, so the GLK drives like a Mercedes sedan at freeway speeds. The GLK features Mercedes "Agility Control" selective damping system, which provides active-suspension comfort and security. A tire pressure monitor and Electronic Stability Program (ESP) with trailer sway reduction are standard. An "Adaptive Brake" system is also

standard equipment. In this system, Mercedes has bundled a number of brake-assistance features, including the anti-lock brakes, acceleration skid control, and anti-yaw programming, into a cooperative unit that detects driving conditions and applies the brakes accordingly to keep the GLK-Class stable and level during emergency braking. The system also pre-charges the brakes whenever the accelerator is released, and has a brake-drying feature for wet weather driving. One of the hallmarks of the crossover segment is excellent road manners, and the GLK350 has this quality down.

As luxury crossovers go, the GLK350 quickly made itself one of my favourites. The styling is crisp and elegant, the interior is comfortable without losing its "Mercedes-ness," and it's as comfortable on the road as a C-Class. Since the GLK350 could be considered a C-Class wagon, it's not much of a surprise that it's priced similarly, with prices starting at \$41,800. 4MATIC all-wheel drive is standard, making the GLK350 one of the first Mercedes vehicles in recent memory that didn't have me reeling at the sticker price.

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