

2010 Ford Transit Connect

By DURHL CAUSSEY

The Transit Connect is a cross between a truck and an SUV. It is a kind of traveling billboard. With its payload capacity of 1600 pounds and over 135 cubic feet of cargo space, the Transit Connect is to your business what the pony was to the Pony Express.

Two sliding side doors and two swing rear doors makes Transit Connect easily accessible for side and rear loading heights.

There are scores of ways to put Ford's new Transit Connect to use. Whether you are making deliveries, providing a service, hauling children, or moving the in-laws, Transit Connect is there for you.

Wow, does Transit Connect get your attention. You can advertise your business with full body graphics. Talk about having a great profile.

The Transit Connect is street smart, and bred for the city. It slides into parking spaces with little or no care; 39 feet turn curb-to-curb and a height of 6 ft. 8 inches gives it an additional advantage. This vehicle has an attitude matched by fuel economy over 20 mpg, with a price starting around \$20,000.

Peter Ulrich runs an upscale floral shop in Dallas, Texas. On the day I drove the Transit Connect, we visited. He had been test-driving

the vehicle for some time. "Transit Connect allows me to park nearly anywhere, making deliveries easy whether at a curb or in an alley," he said.

Transit Connect can carry items up to 6 feet long, or 4 ft 9 inches wide or 4 feet 7 inches tall. Rear doors open wide (180 degrees standard, 255 degrees optional). The 2-passenger XL or XLT van is great for storage. The XL can be 4-passenger and the XLT wagon is 5-passenger.

Bronwen Weber is a wedding cake designer in Dallas, Texas. Her business, Frosted Art Bakery, has been test-driving the Transit Connect. "The Transit is configured so my cakes can ride smoothly and safely to their destination. The cake, along with all the serving instruments, packs nicely and conveniently in to the truck." Weber goes on to say that the Transit is the perfect option between a small SUV and large commercial van. She took me out to the vehicle and showed me just how her beautiful cakes fit into the Transit Connect safely and made-to-order fresh, ready for delivery. "Since my favorite color is pink, I just may wrap my delivery van in pink," she said.

Voice command navigation and



2010 Ford Transit Connect, hauling cargo and advertising at the same time. COURTESY OF FORD MEDIA



Transit Connect interior. COURTESY OF FORD MEDIA

keyboard are included with the Ford Work Solution, along with in-dash window CE computer. This system acts like your mobile office when you are away from your real one.

The 2.0 L Duratec 1-4 engine puts out the power to deliver projected best-in-class fuel economy. Convenient, time saving, and eco-

nomical, all associated with a rolling billboard; these factors make Transit Connect the kind of delivery wagon your small or large business needs in this tight economy.

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Nissan Maxima - A Stylish and Sporty Flagship

By JIM MEACHEN & TED BIEDERMAN
MyCarData

The 2009 Maxima may be the most stylish family sedan that Nissan designers have ever penned. Sitting on a front porch swing and sipping a cold lemonade on a hot late spring weekend afternoon gave us the opportunity to study at great length the Maxima, parked in profile at the curb. As we enjoyed the cool sweet bitterness of homemade lemonade, we drank in the Maxima's beauty.

The sedan flows artfully from front to back, curvaceous in a modern mature way with muscular fender flares, sharp, flowing, character lines, and with rear haunches that rise ever so slightly. The stylized headlights and the wrap-around taillights set off the look. The boat-tail rear, we decided, nicely fits the overall design. We studied—and studied—and decided the proportions of the nearly full-sized sedan—it measures 190 inches—were close to perfect.

The interior is also stylishly done with the now familiar Nissan/Infiniti look that is as functional as it is handsome.

And the Maxima did not let us down in its performance, ride, or handling characteristics measured during nearly 300 miles behind the wheel. The Maxima is a very nice rendition of a spacious entry-level luxury family sedan.

But wait, didn't we hear Nissan officials proclaim that the

new Maxima is the reincarnation of the "four-door sports sedan," the label so famously applied to the second-generation Maxima in 1990. In fact, the vehicle's window sticker calls it "The 4-Door Sports Car." They have even gone so far as to trademark that signature description.

We however, disagree with this self-proclaimed categorization.

Frankly, we didn't see much sports sedan in the Maxima even as we were won over by its "sporty" good looks and how well it works as an energetic, comfortable, and fun-to-drive vehicle.

Certainly it handled our favorite twisty rural stretch of asphalt just fine. But when we think of sports sedans as we near the second decade of the 21st Century we think of rear-drive stalwarts such as the BMW 3-Series, the Cadillac CTS, and the Maxima's cousin, the Infiniti G37.

Maybe our standards are set too high, but forget the sports part, even with the \$2,300 Sport Package and its 19-inch wheels. Nevertheless the Maxima still serves up a full helping of pleasure that we would pick over a large group of competitors.

If Nissan wanted the new Maxima to be a true sports sedan, it would have put it on a rear-drive platform and it would have ditched the continuously variable transmission found on most Nissan products and replaced it with the six-speed manual and six-speed automatic used in the 370Z or the

Infiniti G series.

But what Nissan has done with the Maxima, it rides on the same platform as the slightly smaller Altima and the crossover Murano, is just fine with us, and it should appeal to a broad range of people.

Nissan's current CVT is as good as any non-shifting transmissions. It works fine. And the front-driven wheels very capably handle the horsepower and torque of the 3.5-liter V6, which dispenses 290 horsepower and 261 pound-feet of torque.

Torque steer, that bugaboo that accompanies torque-laden front-driven cars, is a minor problem. It's fairly well controlled, but evident under pedal-to-the-metal takeoffs with the wheels pulling to the right.

The workhorse 3.5-liter V6, variants of the award-winning engine are found in numerous Nissan vehicles, delivers stunning times of 6 seconds 0-to-60 and 14.5 seconds at 98 mph in the quarter mile. Interestingly, those times are nearly identical to those produced by the V6 in the new Chevrolet Camaro sporty car; but they don't match up with the three sports cars we noted above.

The downside is middle-of-the-road gas mileage measured at 19 mpg city and 26 mpg highway with premium gas recommended. Nissan says, however, that it's acceptable to use 87 octane, but a slight fall-off in performance may result.

As we noted, the Maxima of-

fers confident handling with accurate steering. And when a dose of performance is demanded, the

clearly visible out the front window. We enjoy seeing some portion of the hood out front, a sight



2009 Nissan Maxima. COURTESY OF NETCARSHOW

Maxima does respond with gusto in all situations. As you extricate yourself from a touchy highway problem, you can't help but think, way to go Maxima.

The sedan offers a pleasant environment for four people. We say four, because the middle rear seat is too uncomfortable to park someone for any distance. The driver's seat is fairly wide and comfortable, very agreeable with the vertically challenged, and the driving position is good. We particularly enjoyed the hood bulge

missing from most vehicles these days.

The cabin materials are of high quality and the controls are intuitive.

The sedan comes with 14.2 cubic feet of trunk space, and importantly to us, will handle two sets of golf clubs.

Standard safety is what you would expect in a car in this price range. It includes antilock brakes, traction and stability control, and a full range of airbags.

The Maxima comes in just two

trim levels, S and SV. The S is decently equipped for a price of \$30,820 including destination charge, but note that such popular options as leather, navigation and satellite radio are not available. The SV starts at \$32,685 adding leather upholstery and a nine-speaker Bose audio system as standard equipment and it can be equipped with everything in the inventory including the Premium and Sport packages.

The \$2,300 Sport package as noted earlier, brings a stiffer sport-tuned suspension and 19-inch wheels among other things. It also brings a stiffer ride without significantly upgrading the car's handling traits.

We would save the cash and purchase the \$3,450 Premium package, which brings a load of extras including dual-panel moonroof, Xenon headlights, heated front seats, power tilt and telescoping steering wheel, climate controlled driver's seat, and premium leather seating. Navigation is another \$1,850 and includes a 9.3 GB hard drive for music storage.

Our SV test car with the Sport, Premium and navigation package came in at \$40,800 including destination charges.

Although the Maxima does not carry a prestigious Infiniti badge, it's a fine rendition of a comfortable sedan that is functional and sporty. But don't let that zero to sixty time fool you, there is a difference between sporty and sports car.



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