

# Ahead of its time

From curvy shapes to CVT, the world is catching up with the Murano

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer



Some new concepts look good for a year or two then fade quickly looking old and dated. We think the Nissan Murano is just the opposite – the more we see this midsize crossover, the more we like it. In short, it’s still a head-turner.

We must not be the only ones that feel that way about the Murano because as it enters its fifth year of production it continues to show average sales increases of 15 percent. Last year 81,362 Muranos were sold and that makes it one of the best selling crossovers on the market. It was also one of the first crossovers on. That kind of staying power is impressive for any vehicle.

During its four-year run the Murano has received top honors in the Midsize Multi-Activity Vehicle segment of J.D. Power and Associates’ 2006 Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout (APEAL) study. It also gets good quality marks from Consumer Reports magazine.

For 2007, the innovative Murano gets a couple of minor enhancements after getting several significant upgrades in 2006. This year there is an available Tire

Pressure Monitoring System and driver and passenger seat belt warning lamps for Murano’s safety notification system.

The Murano is available in front- or all-wheel drive and in three trim levels. All Murano models are powered by a 245-hp version of Nissan’s award-winning 3.5-liter DOHC V-6 driving through an impressive Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT). Unlike conventional stepped gear automatics, the Xtronic CVT operates essentially as “one gear” through use of a belt and two pulleys that continuously change diameter to maintain optimal torque ratios and prevent the excess engine RPM right before shifting that wastes fuel.

The Murano rewards drivers with a combination of characteristics combining the desirable features of an SUV, like higher seating position and universal carrying capabilities, with performance and handling capabilities more like a sport sedan. The Murano accelerates smoothly and quietly from 0 to 60 mph in 7.5 seconds. In addition to the smooth shiftless motion of the CVT transmission, it allows the drivers, who prefer to

maintain control, the ability to push the shift level to the right to shift manually through six preset levels. Fuel economy is listed by the EPA at 19 mpg for city driving and 24 mpg on the highway. We averaged 22.3 mpg in combined driving.

The Murano rides on a four-wheel independent sport suspension to maintain better road feel and ride control. Standard equipment includes four-wheel vented disc brakes with anti lock along with electronic brake force distribution and brake assist. Also available is a Dynamic Control Package which adds anti skid control, traction control and tire pressure monitoring system.

Pricing ranges from \$28,400, including destination charge, for the base S model with front wheel drive up to \$32,500 for the SE all-wheel drive. The SE AWD we drove was loaded with options including the DVD mobile entertainment system, SE Touring package, Dynamic Control Package, DVD-based navigation and chrome wheels stretching the total to \$42,445.

It’s easy to see why the Nissan Murano has been so popular. ■

