

Holding the higher ground

by Joe Sage

Murano has always been one step ahead of the curve with its styling and indeed its very essence, as one of the first to define a new category, the crossover, at the dawn of the new millennium. It remains ahead of the curve, leading the brand toward a style with more creases, folds and angles, now adapted to the new Maxima. Lights both fore and aft evoke the sporty Z-car.

This five-seater's ergonomics are tops, as are its controls and user interfaces, typical of our experience with Nissan.

Our sample is a 2015 model, delivered late in the year, but for 2016 it continues unchanged. SL is the third trim up, of four. Front-drive models range from a base S model at \$29,560 to the top Platinum at \$39,000. For AWD, add \$1600 to any.

Murano's 260 horses pull about two tons unladen—3847 pounds for our SL FWD model, 4017 for an AWD Platinum. One thing that contributes to decent fuel mileage (28 MPG highway) for its weight is its continuously variable transmission (CVT). Others have dabbled with CVTs, but when Nissan makes commitments, it sees them through (as also with EVs, for example). They now have CVTs standard through most of their lineup, and Murano was the first (in contemporary times). The CVT avoids shift points, for seamless acceleration, operation at program-perfect efficiency and

reduced friction. XTRONIC lets you choose a numbered shift point equivalent for specific control if you like.

We did notice the fuel gauge had dropped a quarter-tank after just two quick errands. The readout said 13.8 MPG. We kept an eye on this, and the needle's pace did slow, so maybe it's just the gauge. We also played with the manumatic a little. Yet the system then read 13.6 MPG. Maybe it's that instrument. Maybe it's us. We were, of course, not at all attempting to hypermile.

We seem to be ambivalent about the Murano's styling—it looked elegant to us one moment, clunky another. Either way it's daring, and that's generally good. The original Murano had seemed startling at first, but we went on to like it, and it set a direction many others followed.

Nissan pioneered the top view camera. Others are starting to mimic that, but Nissan's remains the best. Next up, it will be incorporating a view of moving objects. As pioneers in CVT, surround cameras, user interfaces and styling, Nissan sets trends and holds the high ground. This newest Murano defines its own curve to stay ahead of. ■



SPECIFICATIONS AS TESTED (2015)

ENGINE / DRIVETRAIN	3.5L V6 / FWD
HORSEPOWER/TORQUE	260 hp / 240 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	XTRONIC CVT (contin. variable)
TOW CAPACITY	1500 lb
MPG	(FWD) 21/28/24 hwy/city/comb
CARGO VOLUME	bhnd 2nd/1st row: 32.1/67.0 cu.ft.
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	192.8 in / 111.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.7 ft
BASE PRICE	\$36,950
DESTINATION CHARGE	885
TOTAL	\$37,835

Bright metal window surrounds that finish in midair in the rear, along with blackout D-pillars, give the Murano a floating roof impression.

