

Meandering in the Ultimate Crossover

By Roger Witherspoon

If Nissan didn't invent the crossover category of SUVs when it unveiled the 2003 Murano, it certainly defined what has become one of the most popular segments in the auto industry.

Underneath, the Murano had the chassis of the company's successful Maxima sedan. But the Murano was something new – a compact SUV which handled like the car it was, but had the roominess and utility of an SUV. Its styling also set a trend. It was bold and appealing, with rolling side lines that gently brought the side panel and roof together at the rear. And under the hood was a 240 horsepower V-6 engine which, if you chose, could propel the SUV comfortably into triple digits with none of the fear of a rollover that attends most SUVs when the speedometer goes much past 70.

It was such a trend setter that more than 20 auto makers – including Lexus, Kia, Ford, BMW, Acura, and Mazda – copied its basic design, crowding the field with cousins, if not out right clones.

But 2003 was a long time ago, and the marketplace continually demands something new. So what was Nissan going to do to update a winner? The decision from the guys wielding Nissan's crayons was to keep their successful basic formula, but to upgrade virtually everything about the 2009 Murano.

Starting from the front, Nissan's designers decided to modify the wide, open, grinning grill in the Murano and turn it into something of a teenager's smirk – a change which gives the car a bit of an attitude, but not nearly as much as the aggressive stance of a Dodge Magnum.

Under the hood, the new Murano still has a V-6 engine, but it now produces 265 horsepower. The boost of 25 horsepower, coupled with the continuously variable transmission, makes the Murano even more responsive, whether one is weaving in and out of highway traffic, or cruising along the winding roads in the North Georgia mountains, just shy of Tennessee. That's horse country, and the one lane roads seem to weave in and around the different pastures. But the Murano's wide stance, coupled with its traction and stability controls, results in a ride that is as smooth on meandering mountain roads as it is on wide, straight federal highways.

Inside the Murano, Nissan decided to upgrade both the technology and comfort. If the car seems more spacious than before, that's partly because the Murano now has two sunroofs providing both front and rear passengers an open view of the sky. The powered front sunroom can open fully, while the rear one can tilt to increase air flow.

The seats are wide, soft, and leather, and the front set can be heated. There is an easy to use, touch screen navigation system which works as well in the mountains as it does in better marked urban regions. There is a Bluetooth connectivity system which is easy to pair with virtually any cell phone. The trim is provided by a generous amount of real maple wood, providing the type of ambiance one might expect in a Lexus.

Nissan has significantly upgraded the entertainment capabilities of the Murano. In addition to AM/FM and XM satellite radio, the Murano has a 9.3 gigabyte hard drive Music Box which can copy tunes from the single disc, in-dash CD player, or tunes downloaded through a flash cube, USB port, or any of a thousand tunes or so from your iPod. The Music Box provides the capability to store and organize all of your music, with

the sound emanating from a nine-speaker Bose system. The entertainment system and the phone can be conveniently controlled from the leather wrapped steering wheel.

With the 2009 Murano, Nissan has taken the best features of its segment leading crossover, and made it even better. It is likely to continue setting the standard for crossovers for quite some time.

2009 Nissan Murano SL AWD

MSRP:		\$37,745
EPA Mileage:	18 MPG City	23 MPG Highway

Performance/ Safety:

3.5-Liter DOHC V-6 engine producing 265 horsepower and 248 pound-feet of torque; continuously variable transmission; vehicle dynamic control; traction control; all wheel drive; 4-wheel powered vented disc brakes; 4-wheel independent suspension; 4-wheel anti-lock brakes; front & rear stabilizer bars; 18-inch alloy wheels; halogen headlights; fog lights; dual stage, seat mounted driver & front passenger side impact air bags; roof mounted curtain side-impact airbags for front & rear; rollover sensor.

Interior/ Comfort:

AM/FM/ XM satellite radio; Bose audio system with 9 speakers, 9.3 GB Music Box hard drive, 6-disc CD player and compact flash slot; navigation system; leather seats; heated front seats; front and rear sunroofs; 60/40 fold flat rear seats with power lift; tilt & telescope steering wheel with fingertip audio and cruise controls; Bluetooth communications.