

Shifting Gears

[Battle of the Asian Bantams: Hyundai Veloster and Nissan Juke](#)

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Let's say you're a car manufacturer looking to carve a niche from the crowded market for 20-somethings.

There are, of course, a host of well-made compact and sub-compact sedans and hatchbacks for under \$25,000. But you don't want to produce just another pretty metal face in a big motorized crowd. So you get a bit more selective and tell the folks with the crayons to draw something that would appeal to young men on the go, guys who want something different and fast, but still economical and suited for urban areas.

Nissan came out the box with a powerful little compact SUV called the Juke, which has the character of a Bantam rooster, but the critics at *Car and Driver* thought it most resembled an alligator emerging from the water. It wasn't long before Hyundai answered with something equally formidable and reptilian, a compact SUV intended to evoke images of the fierce, prehistoric Velociraptor, and named, appropriately, Veloster.

Oh No They Didn't!

There was nothing subtle about Nissan's launch of the Juke. A fire engine red compact with an angry face roared through streets and drifted arrogantly in and around cars in a parking lot while the announcer said, smugly: "That's right. We put a turbo in a four cylinder compact." (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RdALFkwvHg>)

And in a car that small, a turbo makes quite an impact. The Juke is an arrogant, independent, smugly stylish little car that draws attention whether it's parked or zipping past all the big cars on the road. Its looks are not traditional, which accounts for the alligator label, though a bullfrog in a hurry is probably more apt. The front is wide and high, and the car slopes and thins towards the rear. The bulging headlights fit right in with the amphibian motif. But this is not a sluggish, ungainly, wobbling little critter.

But the Jukes are definitely eye catching, whether parked or on the highway. So just what do they offer for \$27,000?



Under that wide, bulging front hood is a four-cylinder, inter-cooled turbocharged aluminum engine producing 188 horsepower and 177 pound-feet of torque. For comparison purposes, the turbo charged engine of the Mini Cooper S cranks out 181 horsepower. The Juke's turbocharger lets the small car take off from 0 – 60 miles per hour in 7.3 seconds, and tops out at 137 miles per hour. Those aren't serious racing speeds, and the Juke won't catch a Mini Cooper, which is nearly as small. But the Mini Cooper, a smaller cousin of BMW, costs thousands of dollars more and has a bigger engine. The Juke's turbo power plant will let the relatively light car run rings around most of the small roadsters and pretty much every compact on the road.

It has front wheel drive and a manual transmission which slides easily between its six gears. On the road, it actually handles more like a go-kart version of its heavier, more expensive, IPL sport sedan.

For those who prefer cars which are, essentially, leather seats on top of an engine, Nissan has a racing version of this sport compact called the Juke-R. In this case, the alligator dumps the turbocharged engine in favor of a 545 horsepower motor which the company says has a designed top speed of 160 miles per hour (<http://bit.ly/QBoKWT>) though it has been clocked at over 200 MPH.



Inside, there are strengths and weaknesses to the Juke. That amphibian look, with a broad front and a sharply sloping roofline means that there is a loss of space in the rear passenger area. The seats can fold flat in a 60/40 split to provide ample space for luggage for a week-long getaway for two. But putting four adults in the car would be rough on the rear two. One doesn't feel claustrophobic in the Juke – that wide windshield and long, powered sunroof provide the illusion of more space than the car actually has.

Nissan didn't scrimp on comfort, however. There is ample use of leather, from the adjustable steering wheel to the thickly padded doors and arm rests to the heated but manually operated seats. On the entertainment side, the Juke has a Rockford Fosgate sound system with an eight-inch sub-woofer and six speakers – more than enough to deafen anyone in the car. The Juke offers satellite radio, as well as iPod, MP 3 and USB connections, Bluetooth and a CD player. There is an easy to use navigation system, though the five-inch color screen is a bit small.

But screen size is a minor item for a car that is pretty unique except for its lone competitor, another bantam-weight from Asia.

A Little Korean Dinosaur

There is no love lost between the Koreans and Japanese. So it was not surprising that a year after the introduction of the Juke, Hyundai responded at the same \$27,000 price with a compact speedster whose name, Veloster, evokes another reptile. But instead of a toothy amphibian, the muse for Hyundai's designers was the meat eating, Velociraptor, which was known for running down its red-blooded prey.



And to live up to its billing, the Koreans gave the Veloster a turbocharged engine cranking out 201 horsepower and 195 pound-feet of torque. That is just 13 horsepower more than the Juke's power plant, but at 2,800 pounds, the Veloster is 300 pounds lighter than its Japanese competition. Between the two, the Veloster is faster on the takeoff, but its top speed is 130 miles per hour. As a result the Juke, which tops out at 137, will eventually dust it.

Outside, the Veloster looks every bit as aggressive as its designers intended. There is a wide, black grill which pretty much consumes the face. It has a high front tapering towards the rear, a design cue that is reminiscent of the Kia Soul, but much meaner. The design has something of the stealth fighter mode with sharp and exaggerated angles rather than soft, wavy lines like those found on the popular Hyundai Sonata. The company will not use big-bellied, hip-hop hamsters to advertise the Veloster.

This speedster is essentially a hatchback, with a double sunroof leading right into the glass rear and effectively presenting an all glass ceiling. The expanse of glass on the sides of the car is not symmetrical. The driver's side door is longer, and has a longer window than the opposite passenger door. But the second row window behind the driver is a small, immobile triangle while the rear window on the passenger side is larger and actually opens.

On the comfort side, the Veloster offers a 450-watt, Dimension Premium audio with 8 speakers to make it easy to become deaf. It also has iPod, USB and MP 3 ports, a CD player and Bluetooth for the phone or audio. It has a seven-inch color screen, however, for its navigation system and backup camera, and augments the standard 12-volt power outlet for cell phone chargers with a 115-volt, three-pronged outlet to plug in computers or game consoles.



Hyundai also has Blue Link, which is Hyundai's version of General Motors' successful OnStar satellite communications system. At the push of the Blue Link button located on the rear view mirror, a live person will answer who can provide directions or contact road aid or emergency assistance. Like OnStar, if the Veloster is in an accident and the airbags deploy, Blue Link will automatically locate the car and notify the nearest emergency services.

For parents, Blue Link also offers something called "Geo Fence." If your child is out with the car and it goes past pre-set boundaries the car will call home and tell you. The Fence works for wives, too.

The Veloster and Juke make for an interesting pair of compact sport competitors. A decade ago, the Mini Cooper burst on the scene as a co-star in the action movie "The Italian Job." It has had the compact turbo niche pretty much to itself since then and hasn't really changed.

The Veloster and Juke will give the Mini Cooper and all the other little speedsters – and each other – quite a spirited run.



2013 Hyundai Veloster Turbo

MSRP: **\$27,520**

EPA Mileage: **26 MPG City** **38 MPG Highway**

Performance / Safety:

Top Speed: **130 MPH**

0 – 60 MPH **6.9 Seconds**

1.6-Liter, 4-cylinder, DOHC, twin-scroll turbocharger, aluminum engine producing 201 horsepower and 195 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed manual transmission; independent MacPherson strut front suspension; V-torsion beam rear suspension; 18-inch alloy wheels; 11.8-inch ventilated front disc brakes; 10.3-inch solid rear disc brakes; power rack and pinion steering; electronic stability and traction control; projection headlights; fog lights; backup warning signal and rear view camera; front, side impact, and side curtain airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/Sirius satellite radio; Bluetooth; iPod, MP3, and USB ports; Hyundai BlueLink; 450-watt, Dimension Premium audio with 8 speakers; 7-inch touch screen; navigation system; leather wrapped, tilt & telescope steering wheel with fingertip cruise, audio, and phone controls; leather, power operated seats; heated front seats; 12-volt and 115-volt power outlets; panoramic sunroof; 60/40 fold flat rear seats.



2012 Nissan Juke

MSRP: **\$27,180**

EPA Mileage: **25 MPG City** **30 MPG Highway**

As Tested Mileage: **36 MPG Highway**

Performance / Safety:

Top Speed: **137 MPH**

0 – 60 MPH **7.3 Seconds**

1.6-Liter, 4-cylinder, direct injection, DOHC, intercooled turbocharged aluminum engine producing 188 horsepower and 177 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed manual transmission; all wheel drive; 11.7-inch, vented disc front brakes; 11.5-inch solid disc rear brakes; independent strut front suspension; rear multi-link stabilizer bar suspension; traction and stability control; speed sensitive power steering; 17-inch gunmetal wheels; automatic Halogen headlights; fog lights; front seat mounted side-impact air bags; roof-mounted curtain airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/XM satellite radio; Bluetooth; CD player; MP3, iPod, and USB ports; Rockford Fosgate sound system with 8-inch subwoofer; navigation system with 5-inch color touch screen; backup camera; leather wrapped, tilt & telescoping steering wheel with fingertip audio, cruise, and Bluetooth; powered sunroof; 12-volt power outlet; leather, manually operated seats; heated front seats; 60/40 fold flat rear seats.