Infiniti QX30 First Impressions, plus Motor Industry Update

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Keeping Calm and Carrying On… The UK Car Manufacturing Industry.

British built Infiniti QX30 first drive.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Good news from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) is that despite the uncertainty of the Brexit vote to leave the EU, the UK's car production for global markets achieved a 14 year high in August and a 12% increase year to date. 1,132,727 new cars have rolled off UK production lines so far this year with 877,523 vehicles having been built for overseas customers.

According to official SMMT figures UK engine production is healthy as well, rising by almost 20% in August following the summer holiday shutdown period. So far this year engine production has increased by 6.7% to reach 1.7 million units.

The automotive industry is a vital part of the UK economy, accounting for more than £71.6 billion turnover and £18.9 billion value added. With some 169,000 people employed directly in manufacturing and 814,000 across the wider automotive industry, it accounts for 12.0% of total UK export of goods and invests £2.5 billion each year in automotive R&D. More than 30 manufacturers build in excess of 70 models of vehicles in the UK supported by more than 2,000 component providers.

As for the UK market the new 66 registration plate month is expected to see new car sales match those of a record September last year with around 462,000 registrations. Demand is being driven by a raft of new model introductions and a range of competitive finance deals on offer.

To keep the sales momentum strong the SMMT has recently held two regional test days, one in the North and one in the South of England, where manufacturers provided their latest new models for motoring media to test.

Infiniti QX30

One such new model range on show was the British built Infiniti Q30 and its stablemate the QX30 Crossover, both mid-sized premium quality five door hatchbacks, some with 4WD. What is significant about these new models is that they are both built for global sales at the parent company's UK production facility at Sunderland which this year is celebrating 30th anniversary of building vehicles. Nissan recently announced a further £22m investment to open a second production line to meet customer demand for models such as the Qashqai, Juke Leaf, Note and now the Infiniti Q30/QX30.



The Sunderland facility is the UK's largest car plant, supporting nearly 40,000 jobs and manufacturing one in three of all new cars made in Britain.

The Q30 and QX30 premium but niche brand models are targeted to double Infiniti's sales but in the UK, but we are only talking about limited numbers as last year they only sold just over 1,900 new cars. However since the arrival of the Q30 and now the QX30 AWD (all wheel drive) models, their UK sales for the first eight months of this year are up by 185% to 2,244 units and all have been built in Britain.

To meet the demands of the all important business user-chooser customers and to a lesser extent retail buyers, the Q30 is offered with a wide range of petrol and diesel engine, manual and automatic transmissions, numerous spec levels and some have AWD. Prices for these start at £20,550 and rise to almost £32,000.

But the QX30 just arriving in UK dealerships is even more of a niche product with one engine option – a 2.2 litre, 170 hp turbodiesel engine with a seven-speed dual clutch auto transmission and AWD. There are however only two spec levels, Premium at £29,490 and Premium Tech at £33,370

The Q30/QX30 Infiniti models are products of the Renault-Nissan Alliance and include its latest partner Daimler. The new models use the latest Mercedes A-Class/GLA platform and most of the engines are from Mercedes as well.

The new QX30 is initially available with a 2.2 litre turbodiesel unit but a 2.0 litre 211 hp turbo petrol engine will follow in due course. All models have AWD and adopt a taller suspension and Crossover styling changes.

Inside it is the same premium brand story from larger Infiniti models scaled down to the new compact hatchback model range. In the front interior are a wrap-around padded cockpit design and a standard 7-inch touchscreen sits in the middle of the high-level fascia panel. Generally the quality of the Nappa leather seat facings and wood trim inserts in the door panels and centre console looks good, but the switchgear, which mostly is Mercedes-

sourced, is scattered around the car's front interior.



Although classed as a C-segment hatchback it looks longer than the competition with a length of 4,425 mm (14.52 ft). The extended wheelbase of 2,700 mm (8.86 ft) gives better than average, in this class, front seat legroom, but in the rear the legroom is cramped and the sloping roof restricts headroom for six-footers. The 40/60 split folding rear seat backs extend the roomy boot which offers 430 litres (15.18 cu.ft) with the rear seats in position. Rear and rear quarter visibility is not great but on my test car the front and rear parking sensors and rear view camera helped.

I am not going to list the spec items, suffice to say they are very comprehensive and in tune with the business user-chooser market in the UK as well as its largest market in the US where it is normal for cars to have every gadget possible fitted as standard.

In reality the QX30 interior looks and feels a bit ‘old school’ – a bit retro, none of the clutter-free minimalist clinical look of say a modern day Audi, BMW or Volvo. That said the interior ambience is warm, luxurious and welcoming but that depends on your age.

Driving too is a little old school, not quite as precise as the premium European brands

but it has a compliant and comfortable ride. The QX30, despite its elevated height, appeared sure-footed and the on-demand 4WD system gave that extra security for cornering grip. I would have preferred a bit more feedback from the steering which felt a bit dead around town but weighted up more on open roads. Not so good was the road noise intrusion transmitted through the suspension from the 18-inch wheels. Thumps from potholes and motorway suspension joints were unwelcome visitors to the car’s interior.

The 2.2 litre, four-cylinder turbodiesel unit provides a healthy 170 hp but more important is the 350 Nm (258 lb.ft) of torque which is available from just 1,400 rpm. This result in immediate acceleration response from low speeds, and it remains unflustered in slow speed and stop-start traffic condition. The quick acting seven-speed auto gearbox made light work of driving at any speed.

As for performance top speed is 134 mph, zero to 62 mph takes 8.5 seconds, the Combined Cycle fuel economy is officially 57.6 mpg and on my short test drive around the busy Hampshire roads it was 44.1 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 128 g/km, VED road tax is £0 for the First Year rate and then £110 thereafter. Company car drivers, the most likely users, will pay 25% Benefit-in-Kind tax.

VERDICT

Whether it’s high road, side road, in-town road or off-road driving the Infiniti QX30 AWD is an interesting alternative in its market sector where clinical efficiency and bland interior design has become the norm. What the QX30 offers is character and exclusivity due to its relatively small expected sales numbers in the UK.

For: British-built, bold distinctive exterior styling, well-equipped, punchy strong engine, slick auto gearbox, good real-life fuel economy, 4×4 traction.

Against: Road noise intrusion, limited rear passenger leg and head room, a minority seller in a competitive premium brand market sector, a small number of UK dealer and service centres.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Infiniti QX30 Premium Tech, Crossover, 2.2D auto with AWD. Price: £33,370.

Engine/transmission: 2.2 litre, four cylinder, 170 hp turbodiesel, 350 Nm (258 lb.ft) of torque from just 1,400 rpm, seven speed twin clutch automatic and AWD.

Performance:

0-62mph 8.5 seconds.

Top speed: 134 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 57.6 mpg (44.1 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 128 g/km, VED road tax £0/£110, BIK company car tax 25%. Insurance Group: 22A.

Warranty: Three years/62,000-miles.

Dimension/capacities: L 4,425mm (14.52 ft), W 1,805 mm (5.92 ft), H 1,475 mm (4.84 ft), boot 430 litres (15.18 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,800 kg (3,968 lb), five doors, four/five seats.