Nissan confirms faith in Sunderland plant, and X-Trail seven seater Road Test

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Nissan's Sunderland plant.

Nissan commits to the UK, says David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

News announced today, 22nd January 2021, the Japanese car manufacturer has committed to continuing long-term production of some of its models in the UK following the recent post Brexit trade deal with the EU. The Sunderland Plant had recently been operating at less

than half its 500,000 annual capacity and has 6,000 direct employees and supports almost 70,000 jobs in the supply chain. Nissan has said it will utilize spare capacity to build longer range versions of the all-electric Leaf models which will have 62kWh batteries which will now also be built in the UK instead of Japan. The Sunderland Plant, the largest car factory in Britain, also builds Jazz and Qashqai Crossover/SUV models and standard Leaf models for the UK and EU markets – but no longer the X-Trail – the subject of our latest road test.

SEVEN UP IN THIS VERSION OF THE NISSAN X-TRAIL LARGE SUV

By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

The Nissan X-Trail has been a long-lived and much loved member of the Japanese family, sitting above the smaller Qashqai SUV with which it shares many components and technology.

Launched in 2001 as a tough dual purpose 4×4 alternative to the bigger and heavier Patrol 4×4, the X-Trail has gone through three generations and it cannot be too long before it is again revised or replaced, possibly with a platform from the sister company Renault or as a new model for both brands.

Nissan has a lot of faith in its X-Trail series and as if to underline that belief it sent us a May 2019 registered model with 14,500 miles recorded, way more than most press fleet models we sample.

It’s a brave decision and initial impressions were favourable.

For a model which has had a hard life on a press fleet it felt used but not abused. The leather wrapped steering wheel had a delightfully smooth, worn look and all the pedals, the gearchange and steering had a very easy-going feel and light operation and even the stalks for lights and wipers still felt taut.

Secondary switches were silent when pressed and the powered seat switches immediately worked along with the heated cushions front and back, backrests and steering wheel. The seats were of generous size and with only slightly raised edges were very easy to slip into if not particularly good holding you when cornering.

But the test car was showing its age with an old fashioned small infotainment display in the centre of the fascia and a slow responding one at that. The driver’s essential instruments were compact but clear for engine speed and road speed and split by another multi-purpose panel for all manner of car related information.

More controls on the wheel-spokes covered the sound system, phone links and incremental sections for the other displays which could be called up.

I am not a fan of having so much crammed into the infotainment panel display as it detracts from the driving if you need to use it. However, Nissan wisely decided to keep the heating and ventilation controls for temperature, distribution and output below the panel display, so all was not lost to the screen.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Oddments room was very good in front or back and the optional third row of individual seats dropped flat into the load bed floor to gradually increase the nominal 135 litres (4.77 cu.ft) boot space to 445 litres (15.72 cu.ft) when five seats were occupied and onto nearly 2,000 litres (70.63 cu.ft) when used two-up. That really is a useful feature.

A near waist-high load bed was easy to use and could be accessed from the side doors while passengers could also easily climb in or out. Seats' adjustment was excellent and the movement of the column allowed a wide range of driving positions.

Smooth as it was, the engine was not particularly flexible for a diesel, certainly no match to the responsiveness of the latest compression ignition engines from other manufacturers, and it was not particularly quiet when pressed to perform.

The chosen ratios meant it could be stirred along through the six gears but fifth and sixth were really for main road cruising and with a load aboard you'd need to be patient to get anywhere.

This possibly explains our over 40 mpg fuel consumption, whereas a longer set of upper ratios would have pushed this higher while allowing for more flexible gearing in mid-range situations.

It is a big car at nearly 1.9 tonnes and with this 150 hp engine it was not particularly brisk but it did have good road holding even if it was not very agile. The standard 2WD can be selected for economy or you can move to automatic and let the system decide what's best, and you have a dedicated 4WD setting and then a lock setting to ensure you get out of any

trouble you run into off-road. Limited only by its 21 cms (8.27 in) ground clearance, the Nissan X-Trail is a surprisingly good off-roader.

The demands of the electrical system can be huge however and we found it was too much for the test car's battery after a series of short runs and it refused to start on one occasion, necessitating an RAC call-out, which took over two hours to arrive but just a few minutes to boost charge and see us moving again.

Whether or not that was an age-related battery problem we don't know, but it is a very unusual occurrence with any test car, but possibly shows how much power is drained by a stop-start charging system.

The 2.70 m (8.86 ft) wheelbase, soft seats and springing combine to give a very good ride over all surfaces, with modest body roll and pitching and in 2WD or 4WD the road holding was good even if the handling was not taut.

Visibility was clear all round with a low waistline, deep windows, all round cameras and sensors and backed up with big wipers both ends and bright intelligent headlights.

Noise levels were confined mostly to that hard working engine, with some suspension bump-thump and a few other mechanical clicks and groans.

Personally, the interior design looked black, dull, featureless and not as bold as the exterior might lead you to expect but I suppose it's wipe-clean surfaces would be easy to maintain in a family working vehicle.

VERDICT

The Nissan X-Trail does a good job and is equipped for many roles, which it'll do very well, but it is not class leading by any stretch of imagination.

For: Very roomy for passengers, good visibility, easy to drive, fairly smooth, light controls, reasonable economy and good equipment at the price.

Against: Dull interior, noisy inflexible engine, modest performance, high tax costs, heavy handling, slow touch-screen, ungenerous warranty.

MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

Nissan X-Trail 1.7 dCi, Tekna, 7-seat, manual 4WD.

Price: £34,830 including two optional extra seats and silver metallic paint.

Mechanical: 150 hp 4-cylinder, 1,749cc turbodiesel, 340 Nm (251 lb.ft), 6-speed manual with 2WD/4WD.

Performance: 121 mph, 0 – 62 mph 10.7 seconds, Combined MPG on test 41, CO2 154 g/km.

Tax costs: VED Diesel First Year rate road tax £850 then Standard rate £150. BiK company car tax rate 37%.

Insurance Group: 21E.

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4.69 m (15.39 ft), W 1.83 m (6.00 ft), H 1.74 m (5.71 ft), boot/load space 135 to 1,996 litres (4.77 to 70.49 cu.ft), 5 doors/7 seats.