

Nissan Almera

Featured model: 1.5SE 5-door



NISSAN HAS FOR A LONG TIME been building cars that are worthy and reliable enough, but lack 'image' and are rather ordinary to drive. Dull but dependable old-timers like the Bluebird and Sunny simply won't cut it these days.

And now that the Sunderland-based maker is part of Renault's growing portfolio. Nissan is working flat out to shake off its cars' homespun image.

Substantially revised Micra and Primera models got 'the treatment' recently. Now it's the turn of an all-new, sportier-looking Almera to replace its five-year-old predecessor in the vital Focus/Astra segment.

There's no saloon version this time, but the three- and five-door, 'surf-tailed' hatchbacks offer 1.5 or 1.8-litre petrol power in place of the previous model's 1.4, 1.6 and two-litre units, plus a new 2.2-litre, direct injection turbo-diesel.

Reflecting the more sporting designations gained by the Primera last year, the new Almera follows suit, with low-series versions dubbed E or S, incremented by Sport, Sport+, SE and SE+ variants as you work up the range.

Right away, you can tell that Nissan's product planners have been listening to their customers, or perhaps their new Renault bosses! This latest Almera positively drips with everyday conveniences and 'nice idea' touches.

Lidded, rubber-lined cubbies and secret hidey holes abound throughout the cabin, while the stowage nets on either side of the load area, the 'curry hook' and the broly and briefcase straps will get more than just occasional use.

Not only practical, the Almera also has a well-sorted, fine-tuneable driving position, crisp clear displays and easy controls, which give its driver an easy time at the wheel.

Performance isn't its strong suit, though. The 1.5 never feels as lively as its output suggests. It needs stirring along using the slick gearshift to deliver respectable pace, yet such overworking becomes increasingly audible if you do so.

Similarly, the ride proves disappointing. Apart from some tyre noise, it cruises in a subdued manner on motorways, but it flops and flounces too much over poor surfaces, eclipsed by the likes of the Astra, Golf and in particular, the Focus.

The cabin is comfortable and reasonably spacious, though the back seat is no roomier than before, despite the new Almera being a shade longer overall.

Safety is improved, though, with additions like a three-point centre rear seatbelt (hung Scenic-style from the roof), and Isofix child-seat mountings on all models, as well as side airbags and 'active' front head restraints on dearer versions.

VERDICT

All the Almera ever really needed was a little more driver appeal. This all-new version looks more appealing, is well-equipped and shows a lot of thought spent on practicality and making it easy to live with. Sadly, though, dynamic flair and involvement for the keener driver remain in short supply.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	☆☆○○○
Space/practicality	☆☆☆☆○
Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆○
Safety	☆☆☆☆○
Handling/steering	☆☆○○○
Comfort	☆☆☆☆○
Fuel economy	☆☆☆☆○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1497cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 90bhp at 5600rpm, 94 lb ft at 2800rpm; chain-driven DOHC, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 22.1mph/1000rpm in 5th, 18.5 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, coil springs. Rear: multi-link beam, coil springs

steering hydraulic power assistance; 2.9 turns lock-to-lock; 11.0m diameter turning circle between kerbs (15.6m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with ABS, EBD and 'Brake Assist' (standard on Sport, Sport+, SE and SE+)

wheels/tyres 6in steel with 185/65R15 tyres (alloy option with 195/60R15 88H tyres on test car); full-size steel spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

steering wheel-mounted radio controls
dual height-adjusters on driver's seat
easy controls with clear dials
lots of handy cubbies, straps and nets

rear wiper has only intermittent setting
fixed cushion for split-folding back seats
back seat 'cosy' and rear vision restricted
more showroom than open-road appeal

THE ALMERA RANGE

body lower-medium, 3- and 5-door hatchback

trim levels E, S, Sport, Sport+, SE, SE+
engines petrol: 1.5/90bhp, 1.8/113bhp. diesel: 2.2/110bhp direct injection turbo-diesel

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (4-speed auto available with 1.8 E, S, SE and SE+)

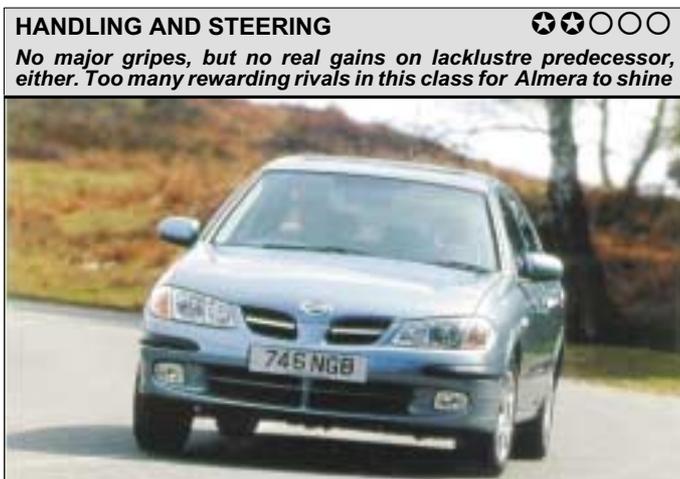
OVERTAKING ABILITY ☆☆☆☆					
<i>Feels less lively than output suggests but cruises nicely. Forget 4th and 5th gears for overtaking, but at least a slick gearshift helps</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	③ rd gear	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	
20-40mph	3.7	7.8	11.5	15.4	
30-50mph	4.7	7.5	11.3	15.4	
40-60mph	5.6	7.8	11.5	16.1	
50-70mph	7.6	8.4	13.0	17.7	
30-70mph	12.3	15.9	24.3	33.1	
max speed in each gear (*using 6200rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤
speed (mph)	31	58	86	106	104

SAFETY ☆☆☆☆	
<i>Old model's crash test results poor, but Almera now offers four airbags, Isofix child-seat points, safer head restraints and a 3-point centre rear seatbelt on many models. ABS on most too</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance
pedal feel ☆☆☆☆	from 50mph (with standard ABS)
in emergency ☆☆☆☆	pedal load distance
handbrake ☆☆☆☆	9½ kg 27½ best stop
	10 kg 30 m
	+4kg ie14 kg 28½ m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
New Almera not yet tested

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ☆☆☆☆	
<i>Affable and well equipped, but sets no new standards for class. Bags of handy storage spaces, straps for broly and briefcase</i>	
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>	inside († without sunroof)
outside	front - legroom 85-107
length 418	- headroom 97-101†
width - inc mirrors 191	rear - typical leg/ 96
- mirrors folded 171	kneeroom 69
height 145	- headroom 96
load sill height	- hiproom 125
(inside/outside) 15/66	load space (all seats in use)
steering	(litres/cu ft) 360/12.8
turns lock-to-lock 2.9	load length 68-153
turning circle (metres) 11.0	full length to fascia no
easy to park/garage?	load width 97-105
☆☆☆☆	load height (to shelf) 52
	(to top of aperture) 77

SECURITY FEATURES	
central locking ✓	alarm ✓
remote control ✓	immobiliser ✓
auto window closure ✗	luggage security ☆☆☆☆
deadlocks ✓	✓ standard 0 factory option ✗ not available



COMFORT ☆☆☆☆
<i>Comfortable and not too cosy for space, but mediocre ride mars passenger well-being. Cruises quietly, though, with plenty of creature comforts and neat little touches around the cabin</i>



FUEL ECONOMY ☆☆☆☆	
<i>Competitive if not class-leading economy with 50-plus mpg available on demand. Above par 450 miles between fill-ups, too</i>	
AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)
worst (hard/urban) 27½	urban 32.8
best (gentl/rural) 52	extra urban 51.4
overall mpg on test 39	combined 42.8
realistic tank capacity 53 litres	CO ₂ emissions 158g/km
typical range 450 miles	car tax band B

HOW THE ALMERA COMPARES*	engine cap/power (cyl/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes† - best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	overall length (cm)
NISSAN ALMERA 1.5	4/1497/90	3165	12.3	33.1/24.3	39	27½/9½	107	96/69	2.9/11.0	418
Ford Focus 1.6	4/1596/100	3150	10.8	29.1/20.1	40½	26½/15	107	100/71	2.9/10.6	415
Mazda 323 1.5	4/1498/88	3500	12.0	29.1/21.4	38	24½/18	109	99/74	2.7/11.2	420
Seat Leon 1.4	4/1390/75	3495	15.0	30.8/22.7	40	25½/24	109	98/72	3.1/10.4	418
Toyota Corolla 1.4 VVTi	4/1398/95	3535	10.8	28.5/20.6	40½	26½/16	106	93/68	3.3/10.3	429
Vauxhall Astra 1.6	4/1598/100	3440	11.2	23.6/16.3	41½	26/21	108	99/75	3.1/10.4	411
* all five-door hatchbacks						† all with ABS			(p) all with PAS	