

Nissan X-Trail

Featured model: 2.0 Sport



THERE'S NOT MUCH THAT anyone can teach Nissan about the 4x4 business, but while its earlier Terrano II demonstrated sound off-road credentials, it failed to take the burgeoning "lifestyle" sector by storm. More charismatic rivals, like the Freelander and RAV4, cracked the system and made good. Now Nissan is giving it another go, this time with X-Trail.

Like most sport utility vehicles (SUVs), this one's more at home on grass and gravel, where it acquires itself admirably, thanks to electronic four-wheel drive that makes for on-road security, as well.

Nissan chose its Skyline GT-R 3-in-1 system to do the honours. At the press of a button it shifts from front-wheel drive to automatic (as and when) four-wheel drive, while a third button selects 4WD permanently. Clever – and effective, too.

We would like the engine better if it were more eager at lower revs. Below 3500 there's nothing much doing, though to be fair, the test car was a very low-mileage model. Thereafter, it feels much more spirited (and sounds not unpleasantly vocal) in its performance. It cruises quietly, with tyre noise prominent only on coarse surfaces.

With its bias towards mainly on-road use, the X-Trail has a comfortable ride and ideally weighted steering that's free from any play at the wheel. It also handles with car-like response, with nose drift and roll building up the harder you corner.

The seats and fascia feature unusual trim materials and off-beat styling. The centrally mounted dials are different, too,

but work well there, angled towards the driver, enabling the wheel to be placed at any height. Cushion height is adjustable, as well, but sitting too high will make clutch operation uncomfortable for some. Despite thickish roof pillars, all-round vision is very good, aided by big electric mirrors and, in our case, optional rear proximity sensors for easy parking.

With ample room in all directions, a wide centre armrest and a five-notch reclining backrest, back seat passengers are treated to almost limo-like comfort. Pity the door armrests are so hard, though.

The back seats don't slide, CR-V-style, but there's loads of luggage space beyond the lift-up tailgate. There are cubbies to each side and, commendably, the spare wheel lives under the floor, which has a hard resin coating. This also extends to the backs of the 60/40 split-folding back seats. It may be washable, but it's not as quiet, scratch-free and elegant as carpet.

VERDICT

While the ageing but able Terrano II soldiers on in mud-plugging mode, the X-Trail admirably fulfils a complementary role as an able soft-roader. Although we would have appreciated more torque, low-down pull from the engine, all credit to the X-Trail for its car-like driving qualities, quiet cruising and overall refinement. That fascia? Well, you decide. All in all it's a practical and appealing contender for top SUV honours.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1998cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 138bhp at 6000rpm, 142 lb ft at 4000rpm; chain-driven double overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive with electronically selectable or automatic 4WD; 21.3mph/1000rpm in 5th, 17.4 in 4th

suspension front: independent MacPherson coil spring/damper struts, anti-roll bar. Rear: coil spring/damper struts, multi-links, anti-roll bar

steering hydraulic power assistance; 3.1 turns lock-to-lock; 11.2m diameter turning circle between kerbs (16.7m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with electronic anti-lock (ABS), brake force distribution (EBD) and brake assist controls

wheels/tyres 6½in alloy with 215/65R16S tyres (Dunlop ST20 Groundtrak on test car); full-size (steel) spare

LIKES ...

plastic, dent-resistant front wings
drinks can coolers in fascia
radio, cassette and single CD player
generous interior lighting

and GRIPES

raising cushion reduces thigh support
rear wiper sweep not suited to RHD
reflections in windscreen
door-mounted speakers easily kicked

THE X-TRAIL RANGE

size and type upper-medium (mid-priced) 5-door sport utility vehicle

trim levels S, Sport, SE+

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/2.0 litre/138bhp; diesel: 4/2.2/112

drive front-wheel drive, with selectable/automatic 4WD. 2.0 petrol: 5-speed manual (4-speed automatic optional); 2.2 diesel: 6-speed manual

OVERTAKING ABILITY				☆☆○○○	
<i>Smooth engine is languorous below 3500 – needs a couple of downshifts from top to wake it up. (Good job gearshift has a light if clunky action.) Makes amends by ambling amiably and cruising quietly</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	③ rd gear	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	
20-40mph	3.5	7.7	10.7	14.9	
30-50mph	4.4	7.6	10.7	14.4	
40-60mph	6.0	7.4	11.6	15.1	
50-70mph	7.7	8.0	12.1	18.9	
30-70mph	12.1	15.6	22.8	33.3	
max speed in each gear (*using 5850rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤
speed (mph)	28	50	76	102	107

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★☆☆○				
<i>Good legroom all round. Lots of luggage space, too – improved by removing rear cushions before seat folding. Ski-flap, drinks coolers, power points. Resin-coated load deck is removable for washing</i>				
<i>in centimetres (5-door SUV)</i>		inside	(† with sunroof)	
outside		front	- legroom	88-107
length	451		- headroom	94-98†
width - inc mirrors	202	rear	- typical leg/	105/
- mirrors folded	177		kneeroom	72
height (no roof bars)	175		- headroom	94
load sill height	0/75		- hiproom	131
(inside/outside)		load space (all seats in use)		
steering		(litres/cu ft)		390/13.8
turns lock-to-lock	3.1	load length		88-173/185*
turning circle (metres)	11.2	full length to fascia		270
easy to park/garage?		load width		98-149
with parking sensors	★★★☆☆○	load height (to shelf/		39/
* with rear cushions removed		to top of aperture)		82

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★☆☆○	
<i>Central instrument cluster works well. Big, fussless dials clearly marked and can't be obscured by wheel. Switches work precisely, but heater controls/info screen too low; audio controls small and fiddly</i>	
	

HOW THE X-TRAIL 2.0 COMPARES	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mp1h 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/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
NISSAN X-TRAIL 2.0	4/1998/138	3280	12.1	33.3/22.8	28	27/14	107	105/72	3.1/11.2	451
Honda CR-V 2.0*	4/1973/126	3440	11.2	29.4/17.5	27	29½/16	107	110/74	3.2/11.1	452
Land Rover Freelander 2.0 Td4†	4/1951/112	2880	14.7	22.3/16.9	38	26½/30	104	107/75	3.2/11.8	439
Renault Scenic RX4 2.0	4/1998/140	3260	12.8	28.9/20.3	28½	NA	106	102/76	3.5/10.6	444
Toyota RAV4 2.0 5-door	4/1998/147	3350	9.5	24.2/16.6	29	26½/18	110	98/73	3.0/11.1	426
* 2001 model † diesel						* all with ABS				
Other rivals include: Ford Maverick, Hyundai Santa Fe, Jeep Cherokee, Mazda Tribute, Vauxhall Frontera										

SAFETY		★★★★○	
Good brakes with ABS, EBD and brake assist, plus a decent set of safety features: front/side airbags, rear centre three-point seatbelt and five head restraints. Remote, two-stage anti-hijack locking			
braking		dry road stopping distance	
pedal feel		from 50mph (with brake assist/ABS)	
★★★★★○			
in emergency			
★★★★○			
handbrake			
★★★★○			
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EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
X-Trail not yet tested

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★☆☆○	
<i>No slack in X-Trail's nicely weighted, car-like steering results in reassuringly precise control. Tidy handling and generally adept road manners. Rolly understeer occurs only when cornering hard</i>	
	

COMFORT ★★☆☆○	
<i>Comfortable ride and low wind noise impress, but high-from-floor front seats (with lever backrest controls) won't suit all. Reclining back seats relaxing. Climate-controlled cabin boasts an extra-long "skyroof"</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ★★☆☆○	
<i>You don't buy an urban off-roader for fuel economy. This one's par for the course, mpg-wise; the 2.2 turbo-diesel should give an 8-10mpg improvement. Reasonably sized tank, easy filler. Highest tax band</i>	
AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)
worst (hard/urban) 17	urban 23.5
best (gentle/rural) 36	extra urban 36.7
overall mpg on test 28	combined 30.4
realistic tank capacity 53 litres	CO ₂ emissions 221g/km
typical range 325 miles	car tax band D