

SPORTY CRITTER

WE TRAVEL TO BRITISH COLUMBIA'S SUNSHINE COAST TO DRIVE THE NEW LITTLE NISSAN JUKE CROSSOVER

While Toyota has been targeting a youth market with its idiosyncratic Scion brand for most of a decade, Nissan has marched to its own drummer all along, presenting a mix of powerful and desirable sports machines, such as the 370Z and GT-R, and out-of-the-mainstream urban fare such as the Nissan Cube. The Nissan SUV lineup—Xterra, Pathfinder and Armada—has been fairly conventional, while the sweeping lines of the Murano crossover, and its smaller sibling the Rogue, were born ahead of the curve and retain very contemporary appeal.

New to the lineup is the Nissan Juke. On the one hand, this is simply a third and smaller crossover, trimmer and tighter than the Rogue. On the other hand, it introduces a

whole new perspective to the brand.

We had seen, and published, early promotional photos of the Juke, and we found it kind of an odd duck at first. We weren't alone, apparently, as the first thing Nissan told us was that it will look very different in person, largely due to its diminutive size. And they were right. This is the baby duckling in the lineup. And that does make all the difference. As surely as any vehicle looks great at 1:18 diecast model size, the Juke looks just right in its actual dimensions. Whether you want to cuddle it, or take it out on backwoods wilderness trails, it's ready and waiting.

INNOVATION FOR ALL

Nissan has been on a roll. Its market share now stands at 7.7%, an all-time record, and they are quick to emphasize this represents retail sales, not fleets such as rental cars. They've embarked on a major effort to grow in the Americas, from Chile to Canada. The Juke is new today, but Nissan has eight more new models in the pipeline, to be introduced over the next two years, representing a whopping 85% of their total volume. Others will include the new electric (EV) Nissan Leaf, an all-new Quest minivan, and an unexpected convertible version of the Murano, due to be revealed at the LA Auto Show in November.

And why not? Nissan tells us that "Innova-

tion for All" is part of their DNA. They brought the world its first compact pickup (1960), the first king cab pickup (in the '70s), the 240Z (1969) which at the time was a major departure from sports cars in the MG and Triumph mold, and such technologies as push-button start. More recent innovations include pioneering a Service Rewards Program with online booking. At the time of our program, the new electric Leaf already had 18,000 orders in place, before anyone had driven one. (55% of those orders are in initial launch markets: five states including Arizona, along with California, Oregon and Washington, and Nissan's home state of Tennessee.) And on deck is the NV2500, the first ground-up all-new full-size van in over 50 years, which will be followed by a smaller van and an EV model. (When it comes to alternative power-trains, Nissan is "all in" on electric.)

POSITIONING THE JUKE

So just how innovative is the Nissan Juke? Is it just a smaller crossover with a new approach to styling? Nissan tells us its segment was not that easy to identify. Small crossovers are red hot, now the fourth largest vehicle segment, and projected to have more than tripled from 2005 to 2014. They calculate that their customers want urban versatility as well as sportiness, within a compact footprint, but agile and



The interior has a motorsports feel, with high seating and shifter, sculptural "liquid metallics," and a slick motorcycle-body-inspired center console. Nissan says the headlights define the front end (below). Not the big round units—the headlights are the stylish slivers atop the hood. Boomerang taillights evoke the 370Z.

very adaptable. Thus the segment is described as "sport cross" (reminiscent of the short-lived but innovative Isuzu Vehicross), for a target 18-to-34-year-old male with \$45,000 income.

The Nissan Juke is expected to bring new customers to the brand. Its position in the lineup was illustrated to us as smaller (naturally) than the Rogue and Murano crossovers, but beyond that, farther away from the SUV category than those are, along an axis toward sports cars. It's a smaller crossover, yes, but should appeal a bit more to the GT-R fan and a bit less to the Xterra fan, than the Murano.

As such, Nissan believes it has no direct competitors currently, but rather is likely to be cross-shopped against such vehicles as the Mazda3, MINI, Toyota Matrix and Suzuki SX4.

HITTING THE ROAD AND SEA

We flew to Vancouver, British Columbia, to drive pre-production models, completely outfitted but due for some more fine-tuning before export. Built on Nissan's small B-platform, the Juke has its wheels pushed toward all four corners, giving the vehicle an aggressive look and

handling beyond its size. The styling starts to make sense. The upper portion has the racy confines of a sports car, but the lower portion has the stance of a much bigger cat.

The Juke sports a 1.6-liter turbocharged 16-valve DOHC 4-cylinder engine putting out 188 hp. The vehicle's weight ranges from 2970 to 3221 pounds, depending on transmission and front- or all-wheel-drive variables. Weight distribution favors the front, in the 60/40 range. The FWD version has a choice of 6-speed manual (24/31 mpg city/highway) or CVT automatic (27/32). The AWD model is CVT-only, rated at 25/30 mpg. There are S, SV and SL trim levels, for a total of eight models.

An all-new Human Machine Interface (HMI) connects the driver to climate controls and a choice of three drive modes: Normal, Sport and Eco, which control a combination of throttle, transmission and steering settings.

With sportiness a key attribute, we ran the CVT in Sport mode on the first stretch, and it performed admirably. Our test route took us

KEEP RIGHT >>



BC TRAVEL NOTES

We flew from Phoenix to Vancouver on US Airways, past the Columbia River and Mt St Helens, then right over Tacoma Harbor and downtown Seattle, an air traffic surprise and photographic plus. This was our first time having to bring a passport to our closest cousin country; customs went smoothly.

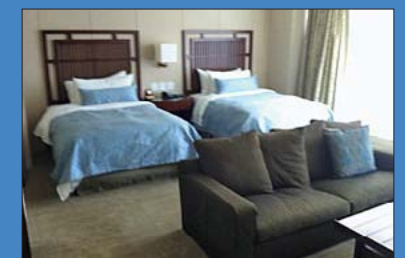


Our shuttle took us to the Chinese-owned Shangri-La Hotel, at 62 stories the tallest building in the Vancouver skyline. Vancouver remains a clean, friendly and inviting city, though the downtown streets were congested enough that we took our driver's advice and walked the last dozen



blocks or so, to make better time.

The staff at Shangri-La will turn themselves inside out to take care of you. We, in turn, remembered to hand over our paperwork with two hands, per manners learned when visiting China. The first Shangri-La Hotel opened in Singapore in 1971; the chain is now headquartered in Hong Kong and has five-star hotels and resorts across Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East.



Shangri-La in Vancouver is the group's first North American property; a second will open in Toronto in 2012. Of the building's 62 stories, the first 15 are the hotel; the balance are condominiums. From lobbies to restaurants to room, the property presents extremely modern yet comfortable Asian-influenced decor and furnishings. Welcome to the 21st century.

Travel Notes (cont'd) >>

BY JOE SAGE





World car: we stay in a Chinese hotel in Canada to drive the Japanese Nissan Juke before its launch into US markets in early October. The vehicle has been a hit, with over 50,000 orders worldwide in the first four months since its launch in Japan. Nissan had expected 1300 sales per month in Japan, but recorded 20,000 in those four months, or more than 15 times their expectation. Hurry down.

from downtown Vancouver to Horseshoe Bay and a ferry to BC's Sunshine Coast (see sidebar). We had run up to the ferry in Sport mode, through city streets, across Lions Gate Bridge, up the westernmost mainland stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway (Highway 1), through the northwest suburbs along the mountains' edge, to the ferry. Here we joined a flock of fellow Jukes, a few Muranos and Rogues, and a host of curious onlookers waiting to load. The Juke was quite a hit.

After the ferry crossing, we shifted over to its Eco mode. As we weren't paying for gas, that was a very quick experiment; we noted an immediate and noticeable drop in performance. Back in Sport mode, we were soon climbing hills and glad we hadn't stayed in Eco, but wait. It's only fair to give it another try, in this even more challenging terrain. Did we dare? We did. And in the words of our copilot, "We're still going! *And* saving fuel!" We were starting to gain altitude now, along with latitude, noting that our ears were popping. We concluded every mode will have its time and place, over the long haul.

The 2011 Nissan Juke comes highly equipped, with 17" alloy wheels, iPod and Bluetooth connectivity, V-rated tires, six air bags, active front headrests, 60/40 split rear bench seat and 35.9 cu.ft. of cargo space when flat. Navigation, intelligent key with push-button start, rear camera and heated leather front seats are among the many options available.

The all-wheel-drive version features an Advanced Torque Vectoring AWD System that splits torque 50/50 between front and rear and can also split torque side-to-side across the rear axle, making this little champ ready for a variety of challenging road and weather conditions. This is the world's first application of such an advanced system in a B-segment vehicle.

What does all this cost? Hold onto your hat, as the Nissan Juke starts at just \$18,920 for a Juke S with CVT automatic and front-wheel drive. The same model in AWD is just \$20,460. Top model is the SL CVT AWD at \$24,550. The manual transmission and AWD are unfortunately mutually exclusive, but an SV 6-speed manual FWD is just \$20,260, and an S CVT AWD is just \$20,460.

If you like the Juke's looks, the total package will knock your socks off. If you're not so sure, we suggest you take another look. ■

BC TRAVEL (CONT'D)

Our drive route took us north out of Vancouver through beautiful Stanley Park, across the Lions Gate Bridge, to the Horseshoe Bay Ferry. This sits below the Sea-to-Sky Highway, which had been massively rebuilt, carving heavily into the wooded slopes along water's edge, to



accommodate the 2010 Winter Olympics at Whistler. The ferry surprised us by arriving on time but departing some 50 minutes late. This impacted our midday break, as we had to turn around and catch the same ferry back, presumably on time.

And what a midday break. After one driv-



er swap along the coast, which was to have included some time with the Murano and Rogue, had the ferry been timely, we arrived at the north end of the Sunshine Coast, at the West Coast Wilderness Lodge. Set in a high wooded point above the water, the site offered spectacular views of the forests, ocean, inlets and peaks beyond, from its 3500-sq.ft. deck. Equally suitable for personal getaways and corporate retreats, the



West Coast Wilderness Lodge is a hub for adventure travel activities, from kayaking and mountain biking, to helicopter or float-plane tours to fishing, hiking and skiing beyond the ordinary.

Dinner was appropriately—for a waterfront city—held at the Blue Water Café + Raw Bar, a casually elegant restaurant in a converted historic brick-and-beam warehouse in Vancouver's Yaletown district, a happenin' evening spot. —JS

