

A size below, a notch above

BY JOE SAGE

Nissan has a very complete car lineup, with sedans from Maxima, the biggest, through Altima and Sentra, down to Versa, the smallest. For EV fans, there's the long-established Leaf. Also over the years, there has been a Versa Hatchback, then Versa Note five-door. The Versa Note departed after 2019, leaving this Versa sedan for 2020.

Versa is classified as a subcompact. You would be forgiven for not guessing that from inside. Nor really from outside. Traditionally, you buy a starter car because it's affordable and gets the job done. This one, however, is bigger than what you pay for, more handsome than you pay for, and has more features than what you pay for, so to speak.

Versa follows Maxima and Altima in receiving Nissan's Emotional Geometry—longer, lower, wider, more aggressive. The 17-inch wheels on our top-trim SR are a big factor in its particularly strong stance. (At one point, we noticed a "twin" that had parked next to us turned out to be a nominally larger Sentra, but just a couple of years older.)

To preserve its spot in the pecking order, Versa's inclusions are kept simple in some cases—such as seat and climate controls or cable handbrake—but we quickly found this to be a big part of its

charm. Power seats offer a little more control, but for something you only set once, the one-calorie workout of perfecting your position is no biggie (multi-driver households may disagree). Being able to reach over and grab a knob, eyes-off, for instant gratification of airflow is arguably a benefit. And a visible, tangible handbrake leaves no uncertainty.

At the same time, the Nissan Safety Shield 360 suite of driver assist tech is available on all.

Seats are of a material that's so similar to leather in style and form that we had to double-check the spec, even while sitting in them. Even on lesser details, quality is all a notch above.

Whether base model or top trim like our sample, the new Versa is a nice car for the money. Some features or design details provide more than you'd expect, while others may remind you that there are more models above it, which is as it should be.

The Versa's power feels like more than its 1.6L and 122 hp might suggest, largely due to its 2729-lb weight, as well as expertly engineered balance.

Our sample has pushed above \$20,000, more than Sentra's starting price of \$19,090, but that's a base Sentra. Versa S starts at just \$14,730 and largely delivers all the same fundamentals that made us enjoy our week with the new Versa SR.

One more wild card: the base Versa S is available with a 5-speed manual transmission.

As long as your expectations are reasonable for

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	1.6L transverse-4 16v DOHC, alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	122 hp / 114 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	D-step Xtronic CVT
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
SUSPENSION	F: indep strut, twin tube shocks, 21mm stblzr bar; R: torsion beam, twin tube shocks
STEERING	elec power assist
BRAKES	F: 10.02x0.87 vented disc; R: 8.0 drum
WHEELS	17x6.5J alum-alloy
TIRES	205/50R17 AS
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	177.0 / 103.1 in
TURNING CIRCLE	34.8 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	6.8 in
APPROACH / DEPARTURE	17.3 / 20.1°
HEADROOM (F/R)	39.5 / 36.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	44.5 / 31.0 in
CARGO CAPACITY	15.0 cu.ft
WEIGHT	2729 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	regular unl / 10.8 gal
MPG	32/40/35 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$18,240
CONVENIENCE PKG: heated front seats, intelligent cruise control	300
ELECTRONICS PKG: illuminated kick plates, frameless auto-dim mirror w universal remote, map pocket light	855
LIGHTING PKG: external ground lighting, internal ambient lighting	690
CENTER ARMREST W STORAGE	300
CARPETED FLOOR MATS, TRUNK MAT	210
DESTINATION CHARGE	895
TOTAL	\$21,490

an affordable subcompact, the new Nissan Versa will definitely exceed those expectations. It can also meet or exceed the expectations of many buyers looking at bigger, pricier categories. ■

