

# Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

## 2008 Nissan Xterra OR-V6 4X4

*Prove Nothing. Accomplish Everything.*

BY KATHLEEN CARR

Nissan's truck-based Xterra is geared toward the young and/or active buyer — or those who want to appear that way. The midsize Nissan Xterra is a tough guy SUV, with a rugged design and solid off-road abilities. It leaves the more comfortable car-based SUVs for "softies." The game plan for the Xterra never has been to make it softer to grab more buyers. It's no car-based SUV or crossover vehicle, but a genuine truck for rough use and rugged off-road driving.

The Xterra has a decent amount of standard equipment, despite its go-anywhere nature. Even the base trim level has air conditioning, a tilt wheel, an AM/FM/CD player, a rear wiper and a full-size spare tire. There's also anti-lock brakes and an anti-skid system.

The Xterra OR included such items as: a leather-wrapped steering wheel with audio controls, an upscale audio system and tubular side steps. Additional options also included side-curtain airbags, satellite radio and a tow kit. Forget frills such as leather upholstery or a sunroof because Nissan feels that

such items would be out of place for the Xterra.

Nissan's 4.0-liter V-6 develops 261 horsepower and 281 pounds-foot of torque. The engine teams with either a crisp-shifting five-speed automatic transmission or a six-speed manual. Available part-time four-wheel drive includes: Automatic, 4-High and 4-Low modes. The Xterra has a double-wishbone front suspension and a rigid axle in back.

But there's no stinting on performance: The Xterra has a sophisticated engine with plenty of torque. The engine sounds gruff during hard acceleration but propels the Xterra to 60 mph in 7.3 seconds and allows quick merging, safe highway passing and easy high-speed cruising.

The quick steering is rather heavy, and a wide turning circle doesn't help close-quarters maneuverability. Handling is good if the Xterra isn't driven too hard, and the brakes provide short stops. Although improved, the ride is predictably truck-like despite the longer wheelbase and gets choppy over some roads.

Standard all-disc antilock brakes have electronic brake-force distribution and brake assist. Seat-mounted side-impact airbags and side curtain airbags are optional. An electronic stability system is also optional.

The Xterra hasn't been crash-tested by our preferred source but has earned four out of five stars in the government's frontal crash test. It carries a three-star rollover rating, which is as poor as you'll find among SUVs.

But there's good room for four tall adults in the utility-oriented interior. Gauges can be quickly read, and controls are easy to reach and use. The rear seats elevated to give rear occupants a better view of surroundings.

Nissan knows all about the impact of daring styling. The Xterra's styling is an evolution of the original's, introduced in 2000, and is defined by its standard tubular roof rack and stepped roofline. The roof rack features a latchable box for gear. Between the large hood and the integrated front bumper is a grille with angled bars that's similar to other SUVs



Specifications: 4.0-Liter 261-hp @ 281 lb-ft. torque V6 Engine; 5-Speed Automatic Transmission; 14-City 20-Highway MPG; \$30,590. MSRP

in Nissan's lineup. Running boards are optional.

All 4WD models have mudguards, and the highest, SE, trim level adds bodyside moldings. Wheel sizes are limited to 16 or 17 inches in diameter. New paint colors for 2008 include Red Alert and Sandstone.

Extreme active lifestyle people single out the Xterra because it's

sort of a sports locker on wheels, with such items as cubbies, nets and a roof-mounted storage compartment for wet, dirty clothes. Rear side bumper steps allow easier access to that compartment. There also are such outdoor-oriented features as 10 cargo area utility hooks and an adjustable channel system in the cargo floor that makes it easier to secure bike racks and other ac-

cessories or gear. Straight out of the box, the Nissan Xterra will be the Weekend Athlete's best bud.

The Xterra is an honest vehicle because it doesn't pretend to be something it's not. That's comforting when its driver confronts challenging conditions; while demanding more to meet an active lifestyle.

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