

Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

2008 Nissan Altima 2.5 S Coupe

The True Coupe

BY KATHLEEN CARR

The newest extension of Nissan's best-selling Altima lineup is the sporty new Coupe. The coupe is geared for twenty to thirty-something professionals without a family who want a car with above-average performance rather than a mileage-conscious appliance.

The Altima Coupe sets itself apart from the segment by being more than just an Altima Sedan minus two doors. A cool coupe adds a certain amount of luster and mystique to a traditional sedan lineup. With that in mind, the Nissan designers designed the new model from the get-go as a coupe instead of merely a two-door version of the existing Altima sedan.

Nissan designers chopped more than seven inches from the overall length and dropped the roofline by more than two inches. It gives the Altima coupe an aggressive and sporting stance, with broad rear shoulders.

But there were consequences. You have to duck to get into the front seats, and the rear seats are similar to wearing jeans two-sizes-too-small; not something for long endurance. However, people who buy coupes rarely transport back-seat passengers, and the front seats have plenty of space and comfort once you fold yourself inside. The rear seatbacks fold down for additional cargo, which is a good thing because the trunk has only about seven

cubic feet of space.

The new Coupe is part of the fourth-generation Altima design, which utilizes Nissan's all-new, highly acclaimed "D" platform with increased body rigidity and a redesigned suspension. This new platform was developed with the objective of making Altima one of the best performing large front-wheel drive vehicles available with global appeal.

The Altima S comes with a 2.5-liter, 175-horsepower 4-cylinder for the mileage minded (23 m.p.g. city/31 m.p.g.). The SE comes with a 3.5-liter, 270-h.p. V-6 for those who spend more time in the passing lane; enthusiasts likely will be smitten. Unlike its four-cylinder sibling, however, the 3.5 SE requires premium fuel. The four-banger is certainly adequate for most people, with decent acceleration and easy highway cruising.

Both engines have a 6-speed manual or a continuously variable automatic with infinite gear ratios. Nissan expects about six out of 10 buyers will choose a four-cylinder model, mostly with the automatic CVT.

All Altimas have standard side-impact airbags for the front seats, side curtain airbags and active head restraints for the front seats. Antilock brakes are not offered on the base 2.5 model but are optional on the 2.5 S and standard on V-6-powered Altimas. Nissan's electronic stability system is optional for V-6 Altimas.



Specifications: 2.5-Liter, 16-Valve 4-Cylinder 175-hp@180 lb-ft. torque Engine; Xtronic (CVT) automatic transmission; 23-City 31-Highway MPG; \$23,080. MSRP

Comfort and convenience features include: tilt/telescope steering wheel, cruise control, cloth upholstery, front bucket seats, center console, split folding rear seat, power windows, power door locks, remote keyless entry, keyless access and starting, tachometer, variable-intermittent

wipers, rear defogger.

Most car buyers don't have the luxury of purchasing a different car for all the types of driving they do. While a sports car for a favorite road, a luxury sedan for a night out. That would be nice if you had the means -most shoppers don't. That's

why it makes sense to look for a car that best combines all your needs and wants, however conflicting they may be. Nissan's Altima Coupe plays to this type of buyer, and it's rather successful at balancing the performance and comfort needs of enthusiast drivers.

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