

Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

2009 Murano Steps Up

BY KATHLEEN CARR

When it first launched, the Murano grabbed attention with cutting-edge styling. Nissan wouldn't make any drastic changes when sketching the update for 2009. There are a few key differentiators.

Most noticeable is the new face, set off by dramatic new headlights that continue the horizontal line of the updated grille instead of arching upward into the fenders. Along the sides are wide fender flares that drop last year's curves in favor of a knife-edge surface. Things wrap up with a clean new tail design that bears a resemblance to that of the all-new and smaller Nissan Rogue crossover.

In an effort to move the Murano upscale, the 2009 model gets an interior more along the lines of what buyers might expect behind an Infiniti badge. In general, the new cabin offers a more streamlined flow with fewer varying surfaces and textures to break things up. The gauge cluster is now integrated into the dash, the center instrument stack resembles those found in recent Infinitis, and the materials take a jump forward in terms of quality.

The updated Murano rides on an all-new chassis and employs the familiar 3.5-liter V-6, now boasting 265 horsepower and 248

lb.-ft. of torque. An Xtronic CVT, tweaked for quicker shifts and smoother power delivery, directs the engine's output to the front or all four wheels. Standard on LE and optional on S and SL models, the Murano's all-wheel-drive system features a new yaw rate sensor for improved handling and traction and can distribute up to 50 percent of the engine's power to the rear wheels. These improvements are above and beyond the redesigned, lightweight aluminum suspension system and speed-sensitive steering setup that's been reworked for better road feel.

The advanced all-wheel-drive system is designed for safety as well as handling, as are standard stability and traction control systems. Antilock disc brakes are supported by electronic brake force distribution and brake assist technology. Front-side and side-curtain airbags are included with every Murano purchase, crucial safety features that work in conjunction with front active head restraints and a rollover sensor to keep occupants protected in the event of an accident. A tire pressure monitor is also standard.

The latest Murano features the same 3.5-liter V-6 engine as its predecessor, though there's an additional 25 horsepower for the



Specifications: 3.5-Liter V-6, 265-hp @ 248 lb-ft. torque, DOHC engine; CVT Automatic transmission, AWD; 18-City 23-Highway MPG; \$29,225. MSRP

driver to enjoy. Manipulating that power is easier thanks to an up-graded CVT that offers more go and less show. Unlike many CVTs, this unit delivers power quickly and doesn't spend inordinate amounts of time hanging at redline. Even so, we longed for more deliberate response when the throttle was pinned to the floor, and would welcome a sport or manual-shift mode.

In keeping with its more upscale aspirations, the 2009 Murano offers a quiet, subdued ride that lets the good stuff in and keeps the bad stuff out. The steering wheel translates the road surface to the driver's hands and offers a modicum of response at

high speeds. Brakes are always effective, to the point of sometimes feeling over-sensitive, and the suspension does an admirable job of maintaining a controlled ride.

Though it's a bit stiff over big bumps, the Murano is no sport crossover, as evidenced by the body will roll and the front end plow when it's pushed too aggressively into even moderate corners. Nissan engineers were obviously zeroing in on comfort and control versus athleticism, and viewed in that light, the Murano delivers.

All controls within the Murano's cabin are logically-placed and easy to use, though

the primary audio and climate control knobs are small. Despite this minor annoyance, we had no problems operating these

systems, including separate heated seat buttons and secondary steering wheel-mounted radio controls. The optional iPod integration with the navigation system is as simple as they come, and the center instrument control center can be understood quickly.

If there's one thing that will seal the deal for prospective buyers, it'll be the 2009 Murano's redesigned interior—from its layout to its improved materials, occupants will feel and see refinement. They'll also find comfortable seating, a variety of attractive features, and an exterior package which has been updated just enough to be fresh. A deal breaker might be the lack of third row seating and limited rear cargo area.

The 2009 Nissan Murano has stepped up to the challenge of the demanding consumer.

Blazer Great Dies

continued from Front

evening in Gleneden Beach near Lincoln City. A member of the Trail Blazers from 1986-93, the 7-footer - affectionately known to Trail Blazers fans simply as "Duck" - also played for San Antonio, Washington, Milwaukee and the Los Angeles Clippers during his 11-year NBA career.

"Today is an extremely sad day for the Trail Blazers family," Trail Blazers President Larry Miller said. "Kevin will be remembered by fans as one of the most popular and recognizable players to ever wear the Blazers uniform, but to people who knew him, he'll be remembered as one of the warmest and biggest-hearted."

Duckworth remained in the Portland area after his playing career ended, where he was an avid fisherman & outdoorsman, and a skilled carpenter.

He was on the Oregon Coast representing the Trail Blazers as a Heritage Ambassador on the team's 19-city Statewide Summer Tour. The cause of his death is unknown, and will be determined by a Lincoln County Medical Examiner. A Depoe Bay Fire Department spokesperson said he appeared to have gone into cardiac arrest.



Portland Trail Blazer center Kevin Duckworth slams home two points in a Dec. 23, 1990 contest. (AP photo)

A second-round draft pick of the San Antonio Spurs out of Eastern Illinois University in 1986, Duckworth was only 14 games into his NBA career when he was acquired by the Trail Blazers from San Antonio in exchange for Walter Berry.

One season later, the 7-foot center was thrust into the spotlight because of injuries to Steve Johnson and Sam Bowie. Duckworth responded by averaging 15.8 points and 7.4 rebounds per game, establishing himself as a pivot presence instrumental in Portland's emergence as one of the NBA's dominant teams.

Duckworth remains the 10th leading scorer and rebounder in Trail Blazers history, compiling averages of 13.6 points and 6.3 rebounds in 527 games. During his tenure, Trail Blazers teams compiled a record of 356-193 (.648).

"This is a devastating loss," said Traci Rose, Trail Blazers vice president of community relations. "To this day, Duck is adored throughout this state and remains a brother to his teammates and to Trail Blazers staff. We will forever miss our beloved 00."

Information on memorial services will be announced as it becomes available. Duckworth is survived by his mother and sister.

Ask Deanna!



Real People, Real Advice

An advice column known for reality based subjects!

Dear Deanna!

I had a date with my boyfriend but he never showed up. The funny thing is I couldn't reach my girlfriend either. There's a rumor they're messing around but other than her number being on his pager and the disappearing act. I have no proof. She said they're friends but he says she likes him. What's going on? --Kerri; Omaha, Neb.

Dear Kerri:

Helen Keller could see this one coming. There's something fishy going on. Other than an emergency your friend's number shouldn't be on your man's pager. Don't play games. Go ahead and ask both of them about it. You should know them well enough to tell if they're lying. They have two different stories going so expect two different lies. Life is too sweet for drama so eliminate them both and keep it moving.

Dear Deanna!

My boyfriend is pressuring me to co-sign for a car loan because his credit is messed up. I don't feel secure doing this because our relationship "isn't all that" if you know what I mean. He hasn't put a ring on my finger and he doesn't pay his bills on time. I love him but not enough for bad credit. -- Donna; Great Falls, S.C.

Dear Donna:

Don't sign anything for him except a greeting card. If you get this car for him and end up behind the eight ball—stuck with the payments, you'll be ruined. No more credit, hard to open a checking account and what happens if you want a new car? The best thing you can do is steer him to a credit counselor because if he's forcing you, then I smell a rat and you should too.

Dear Deanna!

Two of my friends have been making me suspicious about my husband because he comes home

late from work. They have been filling up my head with stuff and have successfully led me to think he's having an affair. I followed him in a different car, pushed redial on the telephone and checked his pockets for phone numbers. His behavior hasn't changed but my friends keep trying to convince me he's messing around. I can't find anything. Am I losing it? --Paranoid; Bronx, N.Y.

Dear Paranoid,

Grow up and stop doing childish things like playing Inspector Gadget. If your spouse doesn't display signs of infidelity don't look

for any. If your man comes home late, and he says he was working--trust him. You are borrowing trouble and setting your marriage up for a downfall by listening to your friends. When your girlfriends start trying to cause drama, stop them dead in their tracks. If they keep at it, tell them to get lost so you can keep your marriage happy and healthy.

Ask Deanna is written by Deanna M. Write Ask Deanna! Email: askdeanna1@yahoo.com or 264 S. LaCienega Blvd. Suite 1283 Beverly Hills, CA 90211. Website: www.askdeanna.com

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