

ROAD TRIP

Meet the team who builds Canada's lowest-priced car

AGUASCALIENTES, Mexico: As we neared the end of this apparently never-ending winter, last week's trip to Mexico was not unwelcome.

Friends and colleagues were expecting my destination to be one of the usual hot spots: Cancun, Acapulco or Puerto Vallarta.

Nowhere on any top-ten list would you find Aguascalientes.

But this 400-year-old colonial city does have its tourist draws, like its historic downtown area and the San Marcos Fair in April.

And for the auto journalist, there's the added allure of Nissan's manufacturing operations, where you'll now find Canada's lowest priced new car coming off the assembly line.

On route from Jesús Terán Peredo Airport to my hotel, I spotted the two local plants, both adjacent to a modern and well-maintained stretch of the legendary Pan-American Highway known here as Highway 45.

Driving past took a surprising amount of time. The newly built \$2 billion Aguascalientes 2 (A-2) facility covers more than 4.6 square kilometers, and the older A-1, just 8 km down the road, was still impressive at 180 hectares.



Now rolling off the assembly line at Nissan's Aguascalientes-1 facility is the 2015 Micra. In base trim, it will be Canada's lowest-priced new car, starting at \$9,998.

As you'd expect, Nissan is a big deal here, employing roughly 9,000 between the two locations, and 14,761 including the Cuernavaca plant to the south.

All work for the country's largest automaker.

Last year, Nissan Mexicana

produced 707,000 vehicles, topping giants like General Motors, Ford, Volkswagen and Chrysler; and accounted for nearly one of every four vehicles built in Mexico.

NMEX is also responsible for nearly one half of the 1.5 mil-

lion vehicles Nissan manufactures in North America. Roughly one-third of NMEX units are destined for the Mexican market where they compete with 30 automotive brands.

The remainder are exported worldwide to more than 100

countries, one of these being Canada.

NMEX builds many of our Nissans, especially their small cars, with the Micra being the latest to join, or shall I say 're-join' the lineup.

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