

Nissan doesn't forget the Murano-ness in its 2009 CUV

By JIM ROBINSON

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PHOENIX, Ariz.: The Murano, along with the Altima and the Versa, have been crucial in Nissan's return to profitability from the days of teetering on the edge of fiscal collapse at the start of this century.

Launched in 2003, Murano started the turnaround that saw Nissan Canada sales up 18.7 per cent through October of this year.

So in engineering the second generation 2009 Murano, Nissan rejected the "if it ain't broke" philosophy. In fact, the 2009 is a wholesale engineering change even if it looks about the same on the outside.

With a new global chassis shared with the Altima, next generation CVT transmission and greatly enhanced drivetrain, Ian Forsyth, Nissan Canada's Director Corporate and Product Planning, called it more of a "super evolution" that retains the car's "Murano-ness".

At the top of the list was the interior that Forsyth said Nissan conceptually divided into three elements with the first row being the living room, the second row the reception room and the cargo area the hobby room.

I haven't been in a Murano in several years so I can't compare the old and new cabins. However, the materials in the 2009 were of a high caliber with the seats in particular in the topline model I drove finished in a supple but supportive leather.

Several little things that went into the interior design show how much thought was put into it. The most notable is the Multi-Function Cargo Divider that is a tray on the cargo floor that when lifted has three storage slots separated by spinaker shaped nets. These compartments are the perfect size for four bags of groceries or, at this time of year, a jug or two of windshield washer

fluid.

There is one engine and it is the crown jewel within Nissan/Infiniti, the 3.5-litre quad cam V6 that has been one of Ward's Automotive's Ten Best Engines for more than a decade.

It has been honed and enhanced to today where technologies such as carbon-coated valve lifters, tuned intake manifolds and the Twin Nissan Variable Induction Control System combine to produce 265 hp and 248 lb/ft of torque. Fuel economy is improved over the 2007 Murano (with essentially the same engine) at 11.8/8.7/10.4L/100 km city/highway/combined for 2009.

Instead of an automatic or manual transmission, the Murano has a "second generation" Xtronic CVT (Continuously Variable Transmission) with Adaptive Shift Control (ACS) that provides a sporty driving experience and smoothness. It also adapts to the driver's inputs to respond more rapidly to demand.

The concept of a CVT is that constantly expanding and contracting metal belts match engine load and demand for the most efficient operation. That's the theory but most CVTs I've come across might save a bit on fuel over an automatic; but it takes time for the CVT to spool up to catch up with the engine revs under hard acceleration.

The CVT on the Murano is the first I've come across that responds like an automatic. With lots of spunk for passing, what amazed me was seeing the speedo on cruise at 72 mph (the limit in parts of Arizona is 75 mph) with the tach showing 1,600 rpm, or just a few ticks above idle.

Because the frame is 1.5 times stiffer than the first generation, new high rebound springs and shocks are used to give a much better sense of comfort without sacrificing steering response.

The driver information centre covers a myriad

of functions, one of which is an instant readout fuel usage and miles to empty readout. With 106 miles left and my hotel in Scottsdale 82 miles away, I was able to adjust my driving style and made it with 18 miles to empty showing on the monitor.

All 2009 Muranos are equipped with an advanced all-wheel-drive system that adjusts to road conditions in a tenth of a second. There was a front-wheel-drive base version available in 2007 and it still is offered in the U.S. but not here because Canadians are moving to all-wheel-drive in droves.

The 2009 system provides increased

traction in all weather conditions by distributing engine torque, depending on the driver's intended direction and the actual direction of the vehicle. The Vehicle Dynamic Control (VDC) with a Traction Control System (TCS) for all-weather confidence is standard on all Murano models.

It's an advance over standard "slip and grip" AWD in that it uses "yaw moment control" that takes into account steering inputs, wheel angle, side slip and wheel spin to put the right amount of torque to the various wheels to match grip and direction.

• see MURANO on page B10

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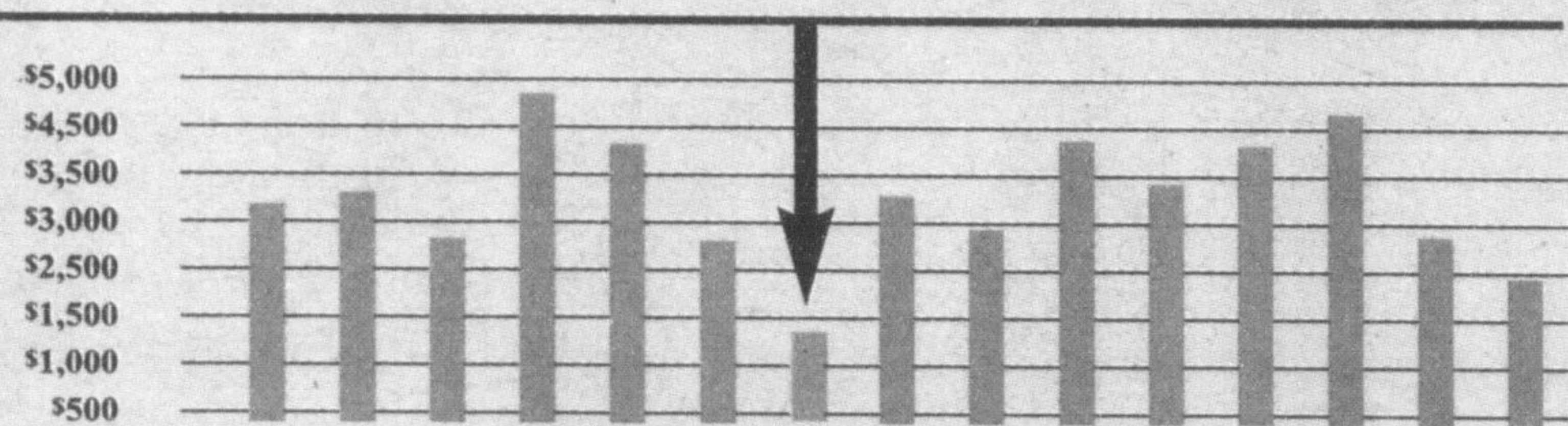
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The 2009 Nissan Murano looks similar on the outside but it has undergone an extensive redesign that includes a new chassis, all-wheel-drive system, suspension and CVT transmission that sharpens steering response and handling especially in adverse conditions.

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