



WHEELS

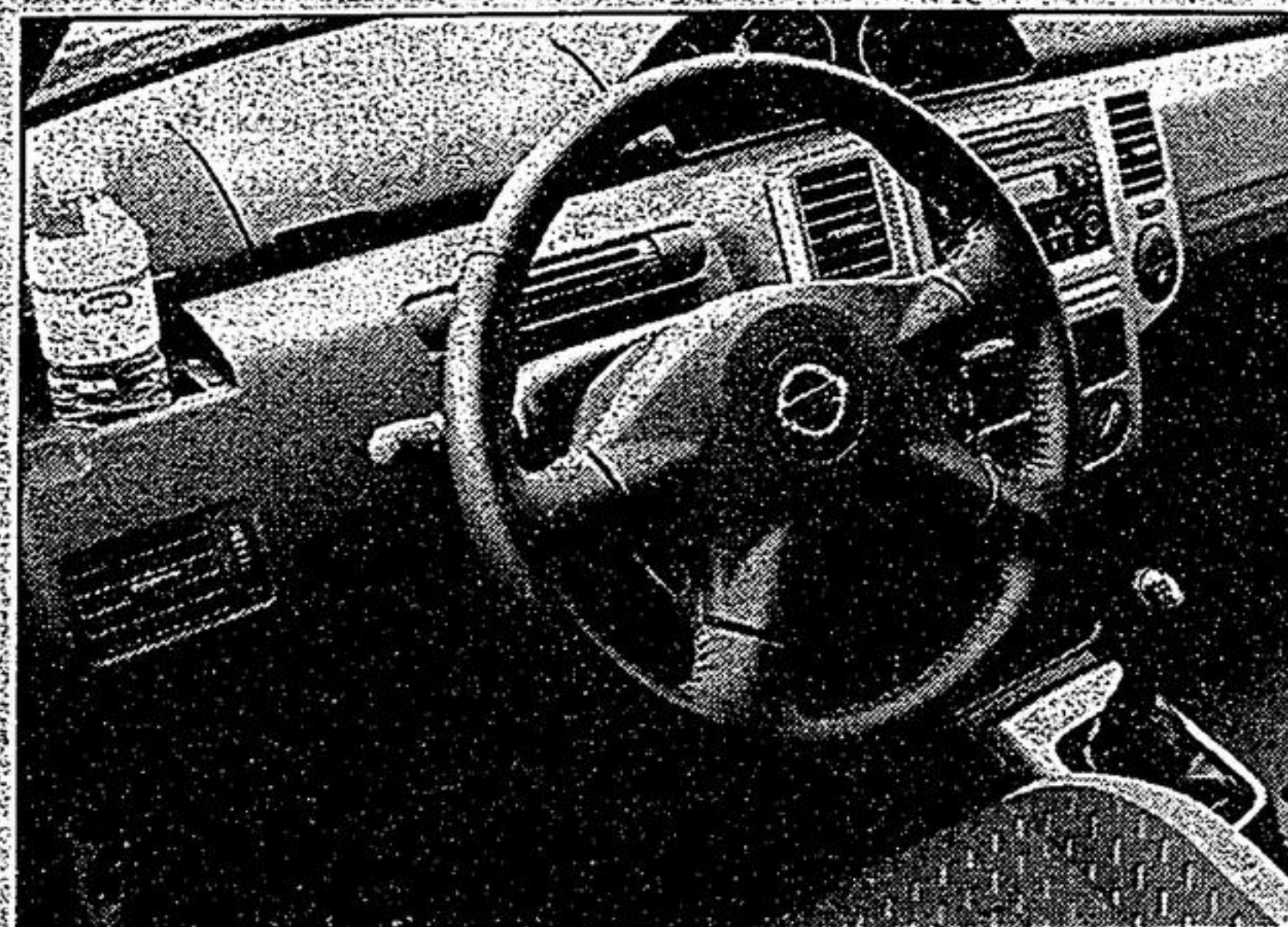
An advertising section of The Economist & Sun

Thursday, April 1, 2004



(LEFT)-Canadians love small SUVs and that's why Nissan is bringing in the X-Trail, a model not offered in the U.S. It brings to five, the number of SUVs offered by Nissan in this country not to mention the three from its luxury brand, Infiniti.

(RIGHT)-The dashboard treatment is busy due in large part to the need to mount the gauge binnacle centrally to allow for sale in markets in left- or right-hand drive countries.



Nissan's X-Trail joins the small SUV market

By JIM ROBINSON
Road Worthy

Canadians, like our American neighbours, can't seem to get enough of their sport utility vehicles.

But unlike our American neighbours, we tend to go for small SUVs eschewing the big, gaudy gas-guzzlers Americans hold so dear to their hearts and minds.

Now I'd like to think it's because we shy away from showiness, but it's probably got more to do with discretionary income that anything else. But the fact remains that 44 per cent of Canadian SUV sales in 2003 were in the "small" category, significantly higher than the 26 per cent in the U.S.

With the introduction of the Toyota RAV4 in 1996 and the Honda CR-V, a year later, Canadian small SUV sales jumped from about 13,000 in 1995 to 40,000 by the end of 1997. Last year, that grew to 123,000. No doubt about it, Canadians love their small SUVs.

Nissan, not wanting to miss this trend has just introduced the 2005 X-Trail, a small SUV sold widely in other markets and loosely based on the Primera sedan chassis. It brings to five, the number of SUVs sold by Nissan in this country and this does not take into account the three more offered by its luxury brand Infiniti. Interestingly, X-Trail will not be offered in the U.S. where big is still big business.

X-Trail is available in five models: XE in front-wheel-drive (FWD) and all-wheel-drive (AWD); SE in FWD and AWD and LE in AWD. A four-speed automatic is standard on all FWD models while a five-speed manual is standard on all AWD (automatic optional) models except the topline LE which only comes in automatic.

There is one engine, the 165 hp, and 170 ft/lb of torque 2.5-litre twin cam inline four-cylinder as used in the Altima sedan. All X-Trail models come with four-wheel disc brakes, ABS and electronic parking power distribution and Brake Assist. The only wheels offered as 16-inch being steel on the base X-Trail and alloy higher up the trim level ladder.

The AWD system offers the driver three traction choices. In "2WD" it is a front-driver. In the "Auto" mode, it's a slip and grip system that routes torque back and forth as needed. For off-roading or tackling deep snow or mud, turn the instrument panel mounted function switch to "Lock" and it splits traction 50:50.

For FWD buyers, there's a "Snow-Mode" switch that, when engaged, retards engine power to help maximize traction under slippery conditions.

Cargo area is a X-Trail strong suit with 29.2 cu. ft. (827 litres) with the rear seats up and 72.8 cu. ft. (2,061 litres) with the seats flat. That translates into 8.7 cu. ft. more than Mazda Tribute, 5.4 cu. ft. more than RAV4 and 3.8 cu. ft. more than Jeep Liberty. The nice

thing about the cargo area is it's got a plastic floor that can be removed and can be hosed out if need be. There are also 11 tie downs and a huge cargo net that reminded me of the kind of net fishermen cast into the sea, such is its size.

Speaking of big, the optional Pana Roof is the size of a bomb bay door on a B-52. It's 3.3 times larger than CR-V and 2.2 times larger than RAV4.

In X-Trail, Nissan has tapped into the cabin heating/cooling system in a novel way. Both the centre console storage area with closing doors and cup/bottle holders at each corner of the dashboard have vents that allow them to be heated or cooled as required. The aforementioned cup holders come with slots to hold the caps from bottle water so they don't go rolling around on the floor.

The dash features a centre-mounted binnacle for the main gauges, this being necessary so the truck can be sold in left- and right-hand drive markets.

While X-Trail doesn't seem that tall, you can step in as opposed to sitting down as you would in a sedan. Head clearance, a failing in small SUVs, is not an issue nor is the 311 degrees of all-round visibility. The seats are supportive and are pedestal style so back seat passengers have more legroom. Claustrophobic the X-Trail is not.

Driving a SE AWD with the five-speed found clutch take up light and measured, however the engine liked a good job of revs at

launch to get away cleanly. There was a slight sensation coming through to the steering wheel which my co-driver rightly traced to tire nibble coming from an aggressive tread pattern and asphalt with a high gravel content on a highway cutting across Vancouver Island.

Brakes were good considering the X-Trail is not exactly a lightweight, although it is classified as a small SUV. Upon entering one or two winding highway corners at perhaps too high a rate of knots, there was a sensation of the outside rear lightening up as the rate of roll increase - a bit like trailing throttle oversteer.

I think it was due to the centre of gravity being higher along with a tallish body. It was proof once again that a SUV should be driven like one, like a sports car.

There are all kinds of reasons why a SUV doesn't make sense in our part of the world where the roads are good. But after the winter we've gone through, there's no argument that AWD is a plus no matter how you cut it.

It could explain, in part, the fascination more and more Canadians are having for SUVs, small ones in particular.

As Nissan has shown with 350Z sports car, the Infiniti G35 and the Murano crossover SUV, they are in tune with the times.

And in terms of Canadians and their SUVs, times they certainly are a changing.

VOTED #1 NEW CAR DEALER IN MARKHAM*

DISTINCTIVE ELEGANCE!

BRAND NEW
T-BIRD



\$42,988*

2 only

2003 LINCOLN
LS V8



\$46,988*

1 only

2003 LINCOLN
AVIATOR



\$52,988*

2 only

2003 LINCOLN
NAVIGATOR



\$62,988*

2 only

THE CLASSIC TOURING ROADSTER
* Comes with Removable Hard Top * Colour Accent Package * 3.9L V8, Black Convertible Top with Cover

* Premium Sport Model * Power Moonroof * Heated/Cooled Front Seat * Sport Tuned Suspension * Select Shift Transmission * Advance Trac * 3.9L 4V DOHC V8 * Plus more.

* Power Moonroof * Trailer towing pkg. * 17 Spoke Chrome Wheels * Tire Pressure Monitoring System * DVD Rear Entertainment System * 4.6L DOHC V8 * Plus more.

* Power Moonroof * Power Deployable Running Boards * Tire Pressure Sensors * Power Lift Gate * 18" Chrome Wheels * Power Fold 3rd Row Seats * Plus more.

Craig Riley's
Markville Ford Lincoln SVT

21 MAIN STREET, UNIONVILLE
(KENNEDY ROAD, 1 BLOCK NORTH OF HWY. 407)



All cash prices are plus freight, taxes, licence and fees. All factory to dealer credits and rebates applied, and are not combinable with any subsidized lease or finance rate.
* Markham Economist & Sun Readers Choice Awards.

905-474-1350 905-474-1350

www.markvilleford.com

www.markvilleford.com

www.markvilleford.com