

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

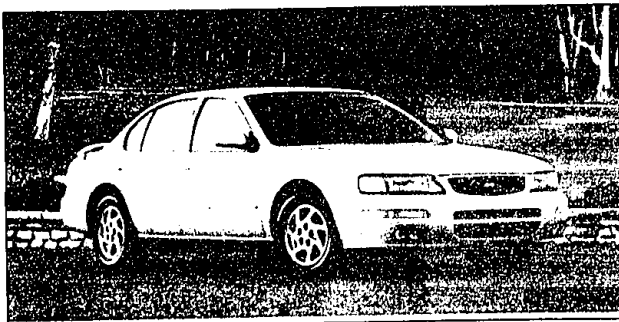
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CAR REPORT

Maxima becomes benchmark for mid-size luxury sedans

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures



ROAD TEST
By
Anne
Fracassa

The 1996 Nissan Maxima has become one of the best mid-size luxury sedans around.

Last year's Motor Trend Import Car of the Year uses a lot of damping in the engine compartment and in other places to deliver such a quiet ride you don't even hear the engine running with the windows rolled up tight.

The ride and handling on the Maxima rivals the first Infiniti. The relatively new multi-link beam suspension package provides wonderful ride comfort due to minimum cumber change during cornering, and softer bushings, springs and shocks.

The best refinement on the 1996 Maxima, which is in its fourth generation since its introduction in 1981, is a new four-way power passenger seat. Oh, and the front-seat cupholder in the center console is bigger, too, this year. There are

three cupholders in the car altogether.

The 3.0-liter DOHC V-6 powerplant kicks out 190 horsepower and roars from 0-60 in 6.8 seconds.

The Maxima's redesign last year included placing the alternator, air-conditioning compressor and power steering pump in strategic areas to reduce the overall size of the engine. Now the engine is smooth, it's quiet — what more do you want?

The front of the Maxima is smooth, with round corners, and the rear deck sits high for an aggressive look.

On the interior, there's comfort all around. The instrument panel is exactly like an Infiniti's — soft white backlit numbers on an all-black rear. The needles are also bright white, making instrumentation pleasing. It's also analog all around. The switches and controls are placed strategically and placement of the stereo and climate controls are easy to reach and easier to operate than Maximas made before 1994.

This four-door is spacious in the interior and the doors open wide for easy access. The trunk area is larger than most four-doors; bet you can fit six bags of clubs back there.

The Maxima's mileage rating is excellent. The 5-speed offers up 22 mpg in the city, 27 on the highway; with the 4-speed automatic you'll

get 21 in the city and 28 on the highway.

On the safety side, there are dual air bags up front, three-point belts for all outboard passengers, child safety door locks, an energy-absorbing steering column and front and rear crumple zones. The Maxima, which comes in GXE (entry level), SE (performance) and GLE (loaded) trim levels, also meets 1997 federal side-impact standards. ABS is available as an option.

With the new Maxima, Nissan hopes to conquer mostly Honda Accord, Toyota Camry, BMW 5-series and Ford Taurus and current Altima owners who want to move up, as well as current Maxima owners.

Nissan isn't bragging or lying when it tells prospects why they should buy the Maxima. Earl Hesterberg, general manager of Nissan, simply tells the truth: "It's become the benchmark in its

class." Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures.

1996 Nissan Maxima
Vehicle class: Mid-size luxury sedan.
Power: 3.0-liter all-aluminum DOHC V-6.
Mileage: 21 city / 28 highway.
Where built: Japan.
As tested: Around \$21,000.

If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI 1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox...Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com. Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures.

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