

## 2009 NISSAN CUBE SL



Introduced in Japan in 1998, the cube is into its third generation, and it is this one that is landing on our shores. A small vehicle with a unique shape, it is built on a 253-cm wheelbase. It reaches nearly four metres in length (398 cm) and is nearly as high (165 cm) as it is large (169.5 cm). Except in height, it is similar in size to the Versa. Nissan identifies as competition the Kia Soul, Honda Fit and Toyota Matrix. It is offered in S and SL trim lines.

### **Cabin and cargo area**

The cube's moderate stance makes for easy access. The front seats are very comfortable despite the absence of lumbar adjustment. The driving position is very good, but only the driver gets an armrest. Legroom is suitably adequate, and headroom is more than generous.

The rear bench provides comfortable seating for two adults. Legroom is good with the bench pushed all the way back. Though the seatback is split 60/40 with both sides reclining to several different angles, the seat slides fore and aft as a single unit. The seatbacks fold flat, forming a raised surface that is 12.5 cm higher than the vehicle floor.

Cargo capacity is very limited when the bench is moved back and the seatback is up, with just 52.5 cm between the seat and the rear hatch. The latter swings open right to left, so that it is easy to load the vehicle when parked along a sidewalk. Sliding the seat forward frees up 68 cm more length; folding the seatbacks opens up 136 cm behind the front seats when they are adjusted for a tall person. The cargo area is 98 cm wide and 111.5 cm high. The floor is 26.5 cm lower than the doorsill. Cargo space is rather modest and, compared to the Honda Fit, not nearly as practical.

## **Convenience and safety features**

The cabin is very well finished in materials of adequate quality. Soundproofing is acceptable for this type of vehicle, but wind noise can be quite noticeable. There are few storage compartments but lots of cup and bottle holders.

Controls and gauges are well laid out. Only the driver's window control is lighted at night. Air conditioning is efficient.

Nissan did not stint on standard equipment, which includes features such as air conditioning, heated power outside mirrors, remote locking, power windows, cruise control and a tilt steering column—and that's just on the base-model 1.8 S. The SL version adds intelligent key, automatic temperature control, and more. Over 40 accessories are available to people who want to personalize their cube, including an interior accent lighting package to illuminate different areas of the cabin, with a choice of 20 different colour shades.

Safety equipment includes six airbags (two front, two side and two curtain), two front active head restraints, four-wheel disc brakes with ABS and brake assist, stability control, and good headlights. The two rear head restraints are too low for tall people. Though visibility is very good, the rear head restraints and D-pillars combine to form blind zones on a three-quarter-rear angle. There is also a reflection off the edge of the hood in the front side windows.

In U.S. government crash tests, the cube obtained four stars out of five for driver and front-passenger protection in a frontal collision and for rear-passenger protection in a side crash. It rated five stars for front-occupant protection in a side crash, and it earned four stars for rollover resistance.

## **Engine and transmission**

Powering the front wheels is a version of the 1.8-litre 4-cylinder used in the Versa that is sufficiently improved for Nissan to declare it its best four-cylinder. It develops 122 horsepower and 127 pound-feet of torque. Acceleration is respectable, though the vehicle is a bit slow off the mark. Pickup is relatively lively and almost instantaneous, thanks to the CVT.

The new generation of the continuously variable transmission, called Xtronic CVT, functions very smoothly at all times, with no noticeable vibration or hesitation. This is a very efficient, well-adapted transmission.

## **On the road**

The suspension is a classic front McPherson strut-rear torsion bar setup, with front and rear stabiliser bars. The ride is very smooth on all types of pavement, thanks to a savvy mix of firmness and suppleness. There are several more imposing vehicles out there that do not offer the same quality of ride. Road holding is adequate, and although lean is pronounced, the vehicle remains quite stable in turns.

The electric assist steering system is speed proportional. It is well tuned, stable, precise and relatively quick, and it transmits a bit of road feel. The small turning circle provides good manoeuvrability. Braking is powerful, with good fade resistance.

## **Inspection**

In an inspection at a CAA-Quebec technical inspection centre, we saw that the cube is built on a relatively sturdy platform. Rust proofing is unevenly applied, and strangely enough, some joints are sealed on one side only. The front suspension arms look a bit flimsy. The fuel filler pipe and the spare tire under the floor are exposed to road grime. Debris can get through big openings under the front bumper and damage the air-conditioner condenser.

## **Conclusion**

The cube is an urban vehicle that will prove attractive for its comfortable front seats, fairly high driving position, ride and drive train performance, and manoeuvrability. Plus, it does well on the highway. It is unfortunate that the rear-seat design loses points for functionality and that some elements underneath the vehicle were neglected.

**PROS:** front-seat comfort, smooth ride, manoeuvrability, well-adapted CVT transmission, visibility, pleasant steering

**CONS:** reflections in front windows, rear bench slides in a single unit, rear head restraints need work, openings under front bumper, several controls not lighted, elements neglected underneath the vehicle

## **2009 NISSAN CUBE**

**Engine:** 16-valve, 1.8-litre 4-cylinder

**Horsepower:** 122 hp at 5,200 rpm

**Torque:** 127 lb-ft at 4,800 rpm

**Transmission:** 6-speed manual; continuously variable transmission

**Suspension:** independent/semi-independent

**Brakes:** disc/drum

**Wheelbase:** 253 cm

**Length:** 398 cm

**Width:** 169.5 cm

**Height:** 165 cm

**Weight:** 1,268 to 1,289 kg

**Tires:** P195/60R15; P195/55R16

**Maximum towing capacity:** forbidden

**Airbags:** dual front, plus two side and two curtain airbags

### **Fuel consumption with CVT:**

Natural Resources Canada rating:

City: 7.3 L/100 km (38.5 mpg)

Highway: 6.5 L/100 km (43.5 mpg)

Test result: 8 L/100 km (35 mpg)

Test temperature: 12°C to 29°C

**CO<sub>2</sub> emissions:** 3,331 kg/20,000 km

**Fuel tank capacity:** 50 litres

**Fuel requirement:** regular grade gasoline

**Acceleration:**

0–100 km/h: 10.1 seconds

60–100 km/h: 7.8 seconds

**Competition:** Chevrolet Aveo5, Honda Fit, Kia Soul, Pontiac G3 Wave5 and Vibe, Suzuki SX4 hatchback, Toyota Matrix and Yaris hatchback

**Warranty:**

- Full basic coverage: 3 years/60,000 km
- Powertrain: 5 years/100,000 km
- Surface corrosion: 3 years/60,000 km
- Perforation damage: 5 years/unlimited km
- Emissions control system: 3 years/60,000 km (full coverage); 8 years/130,000 km (catalytic converter, electronic control module, onboard diagnostic system).

**Factory replacement parts:**

- Rear bumper: \$609
- Front brake disc: \$106
- Brake pads: \$100
- Muffler: \$353
- Front fender: \$262

**Price according to trim level:**

- 1.8 S: \$16,998
- 1.8 SL: \$20,698

**Main options:**

- Technology package: \$800 (SL)
- Xtronic CVT: \$1,300 (S)

**Price as tested:** \$20,698

**Freight and preparation:** \$1,500

**Dealers:** Quebec: 53                  Canada: 146

© August 2009. All rights reserved, CAA-Quebec