

2009 NISSAN MAXIMA



The all-new, sixth-generation Maxima shares its redesigned platform with the Altima. Nearly everything has been changed or modified to some degree. While the Maxima loses a few centimetres in wheelbase (4.9) and overall length (9.7), it gains 3.8 cm in overall width and 3.5 and 3 cm, respectively, in front and rear track. Weight remains essentially the same. The Maxima is offered in one model only and can be fitted with one of four available option packages.

Interior and trunk

Access to the front is easy, though you have to be aware of the grime that collects on the wide doorsills. The new front seats are very comfortable, with good side support and, for the driver, lumbar adjustment and extendable thigh support. The driving position is very good thanks to a tilt and telescopic steering column, among other things.

In the back, the small door openings and sharp roof rake make access difficult. The seat has room only for two and is not very comfortable because of a low cushion. Headroom and legroom leave much to be desired; a tall person will find their head brushing against the ceiling. Foot room under the front seats is at a premium. Choosing an option package sees the 60/40 split-fold seatback replaced by a small trunk pass-through. With the pass-through comes a reinforcement panel that increases torsional rigidity by 17% compared to the split-fold seat version.

The trunk is slightly roomier than before. It is a bit irregular in form and has a small opening. Its outside hinges won't damage any of the small objects that can be placed inside.

Convenience and safety features

The cabin is well finished and the quality of materials, and noise suppression, is good. Storage spaces are good, and there is a spacious centre console.

Gauges and most controls are well laid out. However, the driver has to take his or her eyes off the road to find and use the seat heater and steering wheel heater controls. The seat heaters are slow, but the heating system is efficient. Several controls are not illuminated at night, including the driver's seat-memory-system control.

The washer nozzles are placed under the edge of the hood and can easily be blocked by snow. The windshield is recessed from the front roof pillars, especially at its base, allowing snow to build up and prevent the wipers from reaching their full scope, which can force the wiper motor.

Safety features include active front head restraints; dual front, side and side curtain airbags; four-wheel disc brakes with ABS; skid control; and good headlights. Visibility is very good except on a three-quarter-rear angle, mainly because of the rear head restraints combined with the C-pillars. It's also hard to judge distances when backing up. There are only two head restraints in the back, and they do not adjust high enough for tall people.

In U.S. government tests, the Maxima obtained five out of five stars for front-occupant protection in a frontal collision and for all-occupant protection in a side impact. It earned five stars for rollover resistance. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety awarded the Maxima a Good rating, its highest, for driver protection in a frontal offset collision, and a Marginal rating, its second lowest, for all-occupant protection in a rear collision.

Engine and transmission

The 3.5-litre V6 has been reworked to increase power and improve fuel economy. It now outputs 290 hp, up from 255, and 261 lb-ft of torque, a 9 lb-ft gain. All these horses ensure instant and very energetic acceleration and pickup, so much so that you must constantly watch out for torque steer in sharp acceleration, especially on rough surfaces. Driving essentially the same route but in colder temperatures, fuel consumption was down 0.6 L/100 km, compared to what we obtained with a 2007 Maxima.

The Xtronic continuously variable automatic transmission functions impeccably though it sometimes runs the engine a bit too slowly, resulting in vibrations and a growl at around 1,500 rpm. The sport mode is fun but not really useful, since in normal mode, the transmission reacts instantaneously.

On the road

Nissan's engineers took advantage of a 15% increase in body rigidity and a 100% increase in front strut anchorage mounts rigidity to retune the suspension. The result is a very smooth ride thanks to a highly judicious mix of firmness and compliance. Rough passages are absorbed confidently and elegantly; there is never a harsh reaction. Road holding is equally good, with some understeer when the vehicle is pushed to the limit. The Maxima drives with a solid feel.

The power steering is very well weighted, stable, precise and relatively quick. It transmits little in the way of road feel. Braking is powerful, with good fade resistance.

Inspection

In an inspection at a CAA-Quebec technical inspection centre, we saw that the Maxima is sturdily built underneath and that not all areas are rustproofed. Debris can get through a large opening under the front bumper and damage the air-conditioner condenser and power-steering cooler. The front ball joint is integrated into the suspension A-arm, meaning it can be more expensive to replace than just a ball joint, as in most vehicles. The overhead camshafts are chain driven.

Conclusion

The new Maxima is a bit more upscale and offers more handling balance than before. The suspension and the front seats couldn't be more comfortable. It's too bad the same can't be said for the rear seats. Thanks to the improvements to the powertrain, the Maxima is even more pleasant to drive and more fuel efficient.

PROS: lively engine, efficient transmission, comfortable front seating, standard equipment, handling, quality construction

CONS: rear comfort and access, small trunk opening, tight rear space, washer nozzles under hood edge, three-quarter-rear visibility, opening under front bumper

2009 NISSAN MAXIMA

Engine: 24-valve, 3.5-litre V6

Horsepower: 290 hp at 6,400 rpm

Torque: 261 lb-ft at 4,400 rpm

Transmission: continuously variable transmission (CVT)

Suspension: fully independent

Brakes: disc/disc

Wheelbase: 277.6 cm

Length: 484.1 cm

Width: 185.9 cm

Height: 146.8 cm

Weight: 1,627 kg

Tires: P245/45R18; P245/40R19

Maximum towing capacity: 454 kg

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

Fuel consumption:

Natural Resources Canada rating:

City: 10.8 L/100 km (26 mpg)

Test result: 10.5 L/100 km (27 mpg)

Highway: 7.7 L/100 km (37 mpg)

Test temperature: - 19°C to - 7°C

CO₂ emissions: 4,512 kg/20,000 km

Fuel tank capacity: 76 litres

Fuel requirement: premium grade gasoline

Acceleration:

0–100 km/h: 6.6 seconds

60–100 km/h: 4 seconds

Competition: Acura TL, Hyundai Azera, Kia Amanti, Lincoln MKZ, Toyota Avalon, Saab 9-5, Volkswagen Passat, Volvo S60

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: \$777
- Front brake disc: \$109
- Brake pads: \$107
- Muffler: \$338
- Front fender: \$357

Price according to trim level: \$38,700

Main options:

- Sport Package: \$2,050
- Premium Package: \$3,150
- Technology Package: \$4,500 (requires Sport Package)
- Navigation Package: \$5,250 (requires Premium Package)

Price as tested: \$41,850

Freight and preparation: \$1,425

Dealers: Quebec: 53 Canada: 146

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