

NISSAN QASHQAI

2.0 dCi 150

What Diesel Car?
BEST SUV
2007



The briefing document on the Qashqai that Nissan issued when it first introduced this WDC SUV of the Year winner at its pan-European launch, ran to no less than 34 pages. That's an awful lot of trees, so we guess they must think it's a rather special vehicle. And it is. Is it an SUV or a hatchback? It rather easily falls into either category. Nissan has opted for the current buzzword: 'Crossover'. Whatever, the Qashqai is good enough to have won the 'Best Sports Utility Vehicle' (SUV) category in the What Diesel Car? 2007 awards. In simple terms, it combines the manifold attributes of a medium-sized SUV with, well, the manifold attributes of a medium-sized hatchback. It's the first European vehicle to be built on the Nissan/Renault Alliance 'C' Platform, with a wheelbase of 2631mm. This, says Nissan, provides the best possible interior space within an overall compact body, whilst ensuring "strong

ride and handling dynamics". There's certainly plenty of room all round – the Qashqai easily passes our rear leg-room test (that's a 5'11" passenger behind a 5'11" driver) – and ride quality is excellent. This isn't the kind of vehicle one chucks about, but handling is eminently secure and predictable. The interior is smartly turned-out, with quality materials much in evidence, and the controls are well-positioned. There's also plenty of storage space, including a cooled glovebox that will accommodate 15 cans, plus large door bins, under-seat storage, and room for eight CDs in the centre console box. Cup holders front and rear? But of course. Of more importance is the boot. There's ample room there, too, particularly with the rear seats folded. In common with other recent new Nissans, the Qashqai has a fair few innovative features, either as standard or options. A good example is the air

conditioning. As well as cooling the cabin more quickly than conventional systems, it does it more quietly and more comfortably by way of 'mild flow' vents on top of the dashboard. Then there's the standard Bluetooth connectivity with total integration. Incoming caller ID is displayed on the audio read-out and the system has a 40-number internal phonebook. Audio systems differ according to the model, but include a single disc CD/radio, and an in-dash six-disc CD changer that also plays MP3 discs. Audio controls are where they should be: on the steering wheel. (All the fuss about hand-held mobile phones being dangerously distracting, yet most cars still have a plethora of fiddly buttons on the dashboard.) Oh, and the optional DVD-based SatNav provides coverage of 26 European countries, as part of a £1,350 package that includes a colour rear parking camera. The Qashqai comes as either two-wheel-drive or what

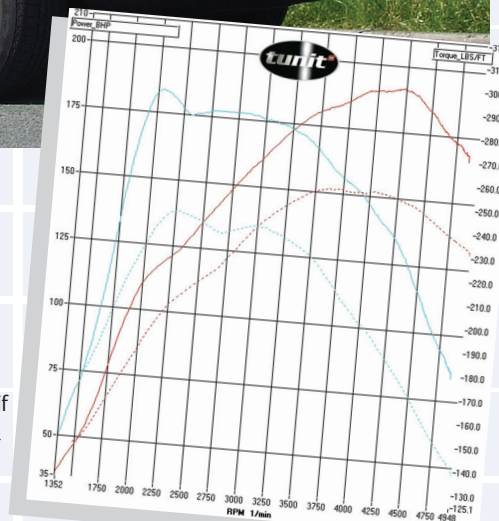


A great car, now with added grunt!

"...in that important mid-range – from around 2,000rpm to 3,250rpm – the improvement is a good 40lb ft."

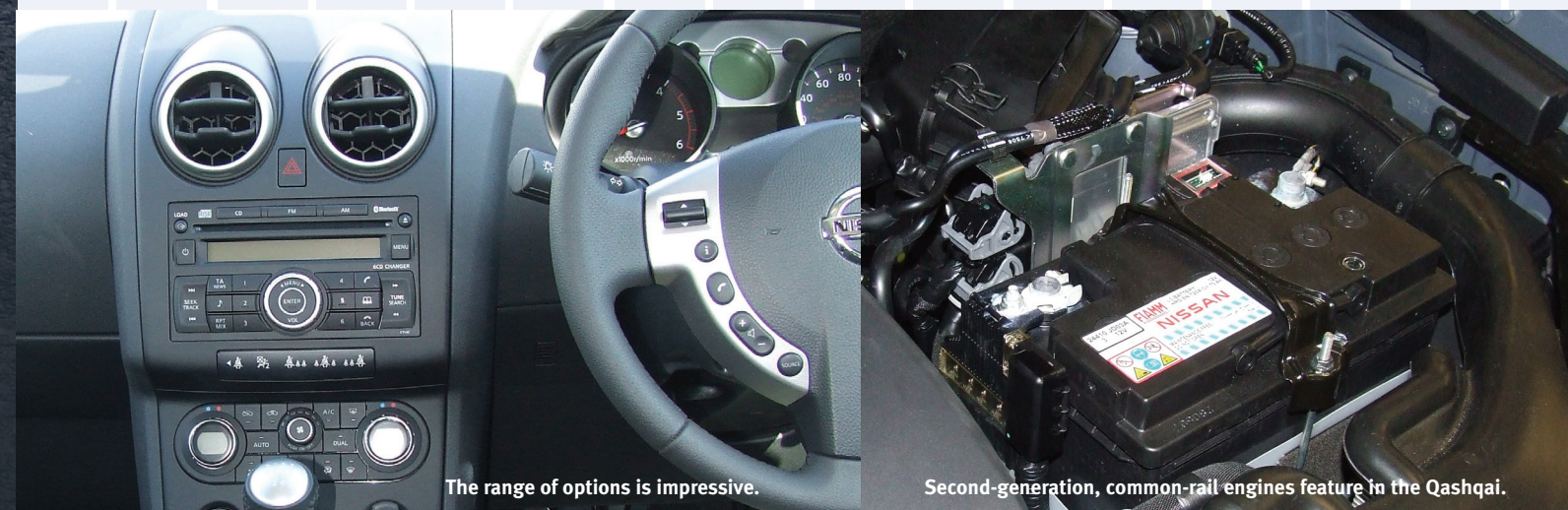
Nissan terms All-Mode 4x4, which Nissan will account for some 25 per cent of UK sales. The latter incorporates some of the most sophisticated technology around, enabling the driver to choose from three driving modes: permanent front-wheel drive, for optimum economy; permanent four-wheel drive, split 50:50; or Auto, in which the smart system constantly monitors road conditions and the way the vehicle is being driven, and then automatically and instantly chooses the correct mode. We won't bore you with how. There's a choice of four engines: 1.6-litre petrol (115PS) mated to a 5-speed manual box; 2-litre petrol (140PS) with either 6-speed manual or CVT with manual override; plus two second-generation common-rail diesel engines. The 1.5 dCi features the most powerful version of Renault's K9K 16-valve, 106PS/177lb ft torque unit while the 2-litre is a brand new engine, fitted with a Bosch piezoelectric-controlled injection system to develop 150PS and 236lb ft of torque. Two-wheel-drive versions of the latter have the 6-speed manual box, whilst the 4x4 offers the alternative of a 6-speed automatic.

First impressions of the Qashqai were very favourable – even if we do keep mis-typing the name! It looks good, drives well, and is clearly diligently screwed together. Like the (splendid) 350Z and the Note, it marks another quantum leap forward for Nissan. And that was before the 2.0 dCi arrived. So, when Tunit called and told us they'd borrowed one to work on, we were keen to see if renewed acquaintance would confirm our initial opinion. It did. The Qashqai really is a cracking vehicle – made even better by the larger and more potent engine. Nissan claims 148bhp at 4,000rpm and 236lb ft of torque at 2,000rpm. Give or take a couple, the Tunit dynamometer proved both figures to be accurate. But why would one want to tune a vehicle that's going to spend its life on family duty? The answer, of course, isn't performance, as such, it's to increase pulling power across as broad a rev. range as possible. Caravans, motorways and hills spring to mind. Tunit fitted, and back on the dynamometer. As expected, both bhp and torque had increased significantly, the former by just over 29 per cent to 191.7bhp, though at 4,241rpm. Torque was up by just over 23 percent to a whopping 290.4lb ft, peaking at 2,045rpm. More importantly, as you can see from the graph, there was vastly more torque available right the way through from 1,500 revs. Indeed, in that important mid-range – from around 2,000rpm to 3,250rpm – the



SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS WERE MADE BY THE ADDITION OF TUNIT, PERHAPS BEST OF ALL, A WORTHWHILE INCREASE IN TORQUE ACROSS THE RANGE, STARTING AROUND 1,500RPM. OUT ON THE ROAD, THIS EXTRA GRUNT WAS NOTICEABLE, PARTICULARLY IN THE MID-RANGE.

improvement is a good 40lb ft. Out on the road, this extra grunt was definitely noticeable. Corners could be taken in third gear, not second, and the Qashqai felt much more responsive all round in the higher gears. Before we began the tests, the on-board computer was giving a reading of 35mpg dead. We re-set it and after some 20 miles running with the Tunit fitted, it was showing 47.2mpg. Clearly, given the short distance, this couldn't be an accurate figure. But if previous experience is anything to go by, we would expect it to settle down in the low 40s. So some fuel savings could be expected, long term, too...



The range of options is impressive.

Second-generation, common-rail engines feature in the Qashqai.