

2009 Nissan Altima 2.5 S



by Michael Cooney

Every time I drive a new 4-door sedan of any make, I think back to the '64 Ford Galaxy we had when I was a kid. It was the car I learned to drive on. And I well remember how it drove and handled.

By contrast, today's sedans are light years ahead in every conceivable way. That shouldn't surprise anyone. Still, this Altima is a perfect example of why we're so much better off now.

Nissan's Altima is pleasing in its exterior styling, with a smoothly curving roofline flowing into the back deck. Its interior is remarkable. Vinyl in soft beige and brown are embossed with a leather-grain look that is convincing. The satin finish on the wood-tone trim pieces are a nice contrast and are tastefully done.

Rear seat legroom is generous, and there are twin vents to direct the AC airflow to the rear passengers. A

folding center armrest with cup holders completes the rear cabin amenities. A spacious trunk should hold a summer vacation's worth of your stuff, and the rear seats fold down in case you wish to carry skis.

With its 2.5L 4-cylinder engine producing 170 horsepower mated to a Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT), acceleration is satisfyingly quick. CVTs also help cars to be slightly more fuel efficient, since they are designed to keep the engine in its most efficient rpm range given speed and load conditions. This CVT's shift lever can be moved into a sport position so you can downshift for hills or corners if you like.

The Altima has a comfortable, quiet ride. Wind noise is well subdued, as is tire noise

on most surfaces. With optional leather and 8-way power driver's seat and standard tilt/tele wheel, you should be able to find an ideal driving position. My only wish was for greater side bolstering in the front seats to hold us better in place when cornering harder.

When it comes to handling, this Altima can be hustled through the canyons at a good rate. Its all-season tires will squeal when pushed hard, but have decent bite. There is a good bit of body roll, yet if you hold the wheel steady the suspension takes a set and gives you a stable ride through the curves.

For most buyers, the Altima will be a competent, comfortable, quiet, economical performer that is a friendly companion for most all driving chores.

The Altima 2.5 S has a base price of \$21,540. This one came to me loaded, with loads of options. Including its destination fee, the total came to \$27,260.

With the CVT transmission, it is EPA-rated at 23-city, 31-highway MPG. That's quite good for a car this size, and I have little doubt it is capable of reaching those numbers.

This is a car to put on your see-and-drive list if you're seeking solid value in a sedan. There are options to suit most every taste, and you'll end up with a nice-driving car that gets good fuel economy for its size. You can visit Nissan.com for details.



Photos by Michael Cooney