

Built for dads who resist the minivan image

by Mark_Maynard

Import car manufacturer seeks male driver age 25 to 31, married or marriage-minded. Must be into realism and authenticity with a need for security and strong relationships to drive a new crossover vehicle. Starting price, about \$20,000. Available September."

ROGUE NATION - The male-targeted Rogue has sleek but tough exterior styling and sedan-like interior comfort. Options include Intelligent Key ignition and locking, power sliding glass sunroof, xenon headlights and a seven-speaker Bose audio system. CNS Photo. Nissan's market research for its new Rogue crossover went deep into the emotional needs of male buyers in need of a nontraditional, five-passenger family vehicle.

Rogue will be Nissan's second crossover, smaller than the Murano, which targets baby boomer women.

Nissan's Advance Planning and Strategy group conducted focus clinics with professionals or entrepreneurs in their late 20s to early 30s, the era age group also known as Generation X. For many in the clinic of men and couples, the mid-1970s was a tough time for family life. Divorce, single parenting and the phrase "latchkey kid" became common.

Insecurity at youth spawned a need for security and strong relationships as the men in the group enter marriage and fatherhood, said Amy Casey in Nissan's planning group.

Not quite ready to grow up as they grow older and certainly not ready for a minivan, Casey learned that some of these men don't want to be seen as just a dad or just a husband.

"They are the stealth dad," she said. They are youthful and edgy to the world, nurturing and caring at home. And he likes his flat-screen TV, communication devices, quality athletic gear, gadgets and cooking utensils, all of which he embraced before fatherhood.

Nissan researchers rotated 10 couples through two-week test drives of family-type vehicles - the VW Jetta wagon, Toyota Matrix, Dodge Caravan minivan, Honda CR-V and Nissan Xterra. Couples were asked what each vehicle has to offer and if there is opportunity to offer something more or different.

The data went to designers, engineers and product planners. And the concept for Rogue began.

The design was started at Nissan Design America in San Diego more than three years ago. I had recent access to one to preview of the vehicle but not to drive it.

The compact crossover's stance appears solid and stable, capable of being driven off-road, but more likely to the mountains or to the rural bed-and-breakfast. The interior is sedanlike but with necessary SUV cues, such as roof rails, an elevated ride height and command seating for the driver.

It will be sold in S and SL trim levels, in front- or all-wheel drive. Each model uses a 170-horsepower, 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine and Xtronic continuously variable transmission. Steering wheel paddle shifters will be an option. The base model comes with 16-inch steel wheels; 17-inch aluminum-alloy wheels are optional.

Brushed aluminum trim gives a manly accent to an ergonomic interior layout. Plastics, fabric and carpeting have a high-grade appearance and feel. An enormous glove box has plenty of room for a laptop computer. And dual-level center-console storage includes two cup holders and a 12-volt power port.

The smallish back seat area has a low transmission tunnel for improved foot room. The 60/40 folding seat back, when lowered, forms a nearly flat cargo floor. There's storage below the floor and an option for a foldable cargo/grocery holder.

Options include leather-trimmed seats and steering wheel, fold-flat front passenger seat, Intelligent Key (keyless starting and locking), moonroof and a seven-speaker Bose-developed system with MP3 capability and satellite radio.

Safety features include six air bags, including side curtain bags, seat belts with pretensioners and force limiters and active headrests. Electronic driver aids include stability control, traction control and four-wheel, anti-lock disc brakes with electronic brake force distribution.

For young fathers who need a vehicle with room for strollers and baby gear but can't cope with the minivan image, there's hope from your spouse, Nissan says.

"Men seemed to struggle more with the progression toward family and increased responsibility, wanting to retain a sense of youthful masculinity and vitality," Casey said. "Wives supported this, wanting him to continue being the man she fell in love with while simultaneously rising to the challenges of parenthood and family life." SPECS

2008 Nissan Rogue

Body style: compact, five-passenger crossover with front- or all-wheel drive

Engine: 170-horsepower, 2.5-liter DOHC four-cylinder

Transmission: continuously variable automatic

Length/wheelbase: 182.9 inches/105.9 inches

Safety equipment includes: six air bags, stability control, traction control and four-wheel, anti-lock disc brakes with electronic brake force distribution

Base price: \$20,000, estimated

On sale: September

Where assembled: Kyushu, Japan

Built for dads who resist the minivan image by Mark_Maynard