

QUIET STORM

THE NEW **NISSAN MAXIMA** IS
FAST ENOUGH, BUT THIS ONE'S
MORE 4DLC THAN 4DSC.

by **Tony Quiroga**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA LYNN WALKER

Our culture is currently grappling with questions of identity, the ability to change ourselves. So what, you may ask, does that have to do with the new Nissan Maxima? This is a sedan that has long claimed (without much credibility) to be a four-door sports car, or 4DSC in Nissanese. As far as automotive identity crises go, this is the one to have. We'd love to get a sports car trapped in a four-door body, but that's easier said than done.

Much of the Maxima's spec sheet reads as if it comes from a family sedan. It has a transversely mounted engine, front-wheel drive, and a continuously variable transmission. These are hardly the physical attributes of a sports sedan, let alone a sports car. And yet, nothing on the spec sheet would matter if the Maxima transcended these parts to deliver a sporting driving experience. It doesn't.

Our test car's SR trim is the Maxima at its most athletic. The 19-inch wheels are an inch larger than on other models, and the springs, anti-roll bars, and shocks are all retuned. Nearly all SR models come with 245/40 Goodyear Eagle F1 Asymmetric All-Season tires developed for this application, but our test car came equipped with like-sized Bridgestone Potenza RE050A summer tires. That is stickier rubber, available only as a dealer-installed accessory. So, cheater tires, sort of.

The SR's ride is more sensitive to the road than the luxurious Platinum trim level we also drove, and those summer tires hold to the skidpad with 0.87 g worth of grip. That's a respectable achievement for a mid-size sedan, but it's not something we'd call sports-car, or even sports-sedan, worthy. Let's put skidpad grip aside; it's just a number, after all. What's really bothering us is that the Maxima isn't much fun.

Great sports sedans are instruments of joy when you give them the whip. Switching the SR's Drive Mode Selector to sport enhances the throttle sensitivity, changes the transmission's shifting strategy, raises steering effort, and then lets in more of the engine note. None of that overcomes the dynamic handicap that is born of having 61.4 percent of the mass carried by the front tires. Lay into the Maxima on a road like California's Angeles Crest Highway and, despite excellent body control, this sedan never comes alive, it just understeers—inescapable, grinding, shuddering understeer. The solution is to slow down. But sports sedans shouldn't ask for a breather.

It turns out, though, that the Maxima is actually a credible luxury car. The front and rear seats are spacious and soothingly comfortable. Touches of fake suede, diamond-patterned stitching, and metallic trim are welcome embellishments. At night, ambient lighting subtly illuminates the instrument-panel trim and doors. The simple and elegant round gauges have a seven-inch multi-colored screen between them to display information and route guidance (navigation is standard on all Maximas). An eight-inch touch screen on the

SPECIFICATIONS

VEHICLE TYPE	FRONT-ENGINE, FRONT-WHEEL-DRIVE, 5-PASSENGER, 4-DOOR SEDAN
PRICE AS TESTED	\$38,945
BASE PRICE	\$38,495
ENGINE TYPE	DOHC 24-VALVE V-6, ALUMINUM BLOCK AND HEADS, PORT FUEL INJECTION
DISPLACEMENT	213 CU IN, 3498 CC
POWER	300 HP @ 6400 RPM
TORQUE	261 LB-FT @ 4400 RPM
TRANSMISSION	CONTINUOUSLY VARIABLE AUTOMATIC WITH MANUAL SHIFTING MODE
DIMENSIONS	
WHEELBASE	109.3 IN
LENGTH	192.8 IN
WIDTH	73.2 IN
HEIGHT	56.5 IN
PASSENGER VOLUME	98 CU FT
CARGO VOLUME	14 CU FT
CURB WEIGHT	3545 LB

C/D TEST RESULTS

ZERO TO 60 MPH	5.9 SEC
ZERO TO 100 MPH	14.1 SEC
ZERO TO 130 MPH	27.3 SEC
ROLLING START, 5-60 MPH	6.0 SEC
1/4-MILE	14.4 SEC @ 101 MPH
TOP SPEED (GOVERNOR LIMITED, C/D EST)	135 MPH
BRAKING, 70-0 MPH	168 FT
ROADHOLDING, 300-FT-DIA SKIDPAD	0.87 G
FUEL ECONOMY	
EPA CITY/HWY	22/30 MPG
C/D OBSERVED	18 MPG

