



driver-oriented center console can be also be controlled by the knob behind the shifter. It's quiet inside, too. At a steady 70 mph we measured 66 decibels, and a full-throttle whack only produces 74 dBA. Indeed, it's quieter than the Mercedes-Benz S550, the epitome of luxury.

Nissan clearly worked on turning down the volume on its mainstay V-6. To combat the big six's former predilection to buzz like the coffee grinder at Starbucks, there is a new oil pan to stiffen the bottom of the block. A Bose noise-cancelling audio system and acoustically laminated windshield glass and front windows work to mute other errant sounds that might reach the cabin.

According to Nissan, 61 percent of the V-6's parts are redesigned. Among them are the valves and the intake manifold. From those new parts comes a boost of 10 horsepower for a total of 300. We're a bit surprised at the lack of direct injection, but the V-6 doesn't need it to return 22 mpg city and 30 highway in the EPA cycle. We achieved only 18 mpg, but that included a demanding strafe over the San Gabriel Mountains.

The revised engine isn't just quiet and efficient, it's also able to move the relatively light 3545-pound SR from zero to 60 mph in 5.9 seconds. But again, speed alone does not a sports sedan make. Accelerate at normal traffic pace and the transmission provides a smooth stream of calm progress. With a strong 261 pound-feet of torque there is enough grunt at low rpm that the CVT doesn't have to rev the engine mercilessly.

Nissan has programmed the transmission to act like a conventional automatic, shifting through preset ratios when the accelerator is held beyond three-eighths of its travel. But despite the programming, a more efficient



▲ YOU SORT OF HAVE TO ADMIRE THE NISSAN STYLING DEPARTMENT'S WILLINGNESS TO GET ALL THE WAY WEIRD HERE, BOTH INSIDE AND OUT.

chain, and lower-viscosity oil, every big hit of the throttle results in a delay of power delivery as the engine feels like it has to churn up the transmission's butter before providing acceleration. Even CVTs that pretend to have gears aren't sporty.

We actually preferred the slightly softer Platinum trim level to this SR. Without the latter's sporting pretensions, the Maxima comes across as sophisticated, luxurious, and refined. On 18-inch wheels and the non-SR chassis, the Maxima is still taut for its class, but the ride remains relaxed. So while the adjective sport may not apply here, the adjective luxury definitely does. Asking the Maxima to be a sports sedan is like asking Caitlyn Jenner to get back into her decathlon shorts. It just ain't gonna happen.