

Rogue Is Nissan's Best-Selling SUV

Ann M. Job, For The Associated Press

Americans still love riding high above the ground in their vehicles but have been opting for smaller sport utility vehicles to save on gasoline costs.

No wonder, then, that sales of the Nissan Rogue were up 25.1 percent last year from the calendar year before — to 124,543 — and they're up another 12.4 percent so far this year from the year-ago period.

The pleasantly styled, five-passenger, 2012 Rogue crossover SUV has federal government fuel economy ratings of 23 miles per gallon in the city and 28 mpg on highways, which means it's eighth best in gasoline mileage among non-hybrid, 2012 SUV nameplates.

The top-selling SUV at Nissan, the Rogue also is nicely sized, maneuverable and has a driver's seat that provides plenty of height adjustment for small stature drivers.

The Rogue is a recommended buy of Consumer Reports with above-average reliability.

It's also the first non-luxury vehicle in the United States to offer an optional "around-the-vehicle" four-camera system that shows, with the touch of a button, a view of the spacing and adjacent objects all around the vehicle, as if a single camera were perched high above, looking down.

The system is part of a pricey, \$3,900 SL package, though.

Also new for 2012 and considerably lower in price is a Special Edition package that adds a rearview monitor, which is an indispensable aide when the driver is backing up the 5.4-foot-tall Rogue.

This package, including fog lights, satellite radio capability, privacy glass, aluminum alloy wheels and steering wheel-mounted controls, adds \$1,200 to the base starting manufacturer's suggested retail price of \$22,895, resulting in a total \$24,095 for a Special Edition, front-wheel drive Rogue.

All Rogues have the same, 170-horsepower, 2.5-liter, four-cylinder engine mated to a continuously variable transmission (CVT) that a driver operates like an automatic. All-wheel drive is available, and the lowest starting retail price for a Rogue with AWD is \$24,195.

Competitors in the compact SUV segment include the Ford Escape, which has been extensively revamped for 2013 and has a starting MSRP, including destination charge, of \$23,295 with 168-horsepower, 2.5-liter, four cylinder, automatic transmission and front-wheel drive. The 2012 Honda CR-V has a starting retail price

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of \$23,325 with 185-horsepower four cylinder, five-speed automatic and front-wheel drive.

The test Rogue was a front-wheel drive SV with the SL package added and a window sticker of more than \$29,000.

The optional, perforated leather seat material with red accents was a luxury-looking touch, and the nicely cushioned front seats provided comfort. But seat cushions in back were short in length, and the non-textured ceiling material inside that looked to be just a bit above the "mouse fur" appearance found in some car trunks didn't impress.

The dashboard — mostly black plastic with a singular silver strip under the radio preset buttons — was OK but not ritzy.

To be sure, the Rogue SV with SL package had other equipment of note, such as 18-inch wheels, power glass sunroof, navigation system and the 360-degree camera system.

But the 5-inch navigation screen seemed small compared with factory-installed nav screens in other vehicles. As an example, the 2013 Dodge Dart is offered with an 8.4-inch screen.

The Rogue's 360-degree camera system seems like a novelty item. The system mainly helped show how close the vehicle was to the curb and to the car in back during parallel parking maneuvers.

At 5 feet 4, I could extend my legs in the second row without making front-seat riders move up their seats, and the Rogue's maximum 57.9 cubic feet of cargo space, while less than the Escape's 68.1 cubic feet, is adequate and useful. I appreciated that I could set the driver's seat up so high, I could see virtually all of the hood.

The Rogue moved through traffic well and impressed with its nimble character as it wound around multi-level parking garages with ease, slipped into parking spaces easily and felt "right sized" overall.

The test Rogue weighed some 3,325 pounds, so it seemed light on its feet. Passengers felt some weight shift as the Rogue went around corners and curves, and the tall ride height, while providing good views out, can make the Rogue feel a bit tippy.

But the test vehicle didn't become unbalanced, and traction control and electronic stability control readily activated during aggressive driving on mountain roads. Other standard safety equipment includes electronic brakeforce distribution and antilock brakes as well as six air bags.

The 2012 Rogue earned four out of five stars in frontal crash protection and five out of five for side crash protection in federal government crash tests.

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Passengers heard the Rogue's four-cylinder engine even at idle. And while there's decent response to power demands, the acceleration isn't quick and sporty, and the CVT, while maximizing fuel economy, appeared to keep the engine droning loudly during acceleration.

Low-end "oomph" or torque peaks at 175 foot-pounds at 4,400 rpm, which is more than the 163 foot-pounds at 4,400 rpm of the Honda CR-V and the 170 foot-pounds at 4,500 rpm of the Ford Escape with base engine.

Some carmakers, such as Ford, have moved away from CVTs and, instead, are adding more gears to the automatic transmissions to improve fuel economy.

As it was, the test Rogue averaged 22.1 mpg in travel that was 65 percent in the city. This didn't match the government fuel economy ratings, and it translated into a range of 351 miles on a single 15.9-gallon tank of regular gasoline.

The 2012 Rogue was the subject of one U.S. safety recall earlier this year, as some tire pressure monitors were found to be inactive. All vehicles were still at dealerships and were fixed promptly.

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