

Nissan Qashqai review: the British-built family SUV is top of its class - and good news for our economy too

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Designed, engineered and built in Britain, the new Qashqai is as close to a British car as it gets in modern motor making

[By Andrew English](#), Motoring Correspondent 17 June 2021 • 12:01am



It's a tool, of course; for the family. Like a Dyson, a Kenwood or a Ninja Foodi, [Nissan's Qashqai SUV is a machine that has the purpose of moving people and stuff](#). Less Sport Utility and more Swiss army charabanc bound for the supermarket, school, summer holiday, scouts, or saxophone and swimming lessons... Nissan sells it as such and it has done very well thank you over the last 14 years and two generations.

Yet there's more to buying a machine than just a financial transaction, despite what you might have been told by a strange alliance of car makers, greens and politicians. There's pride of ownership; the Qashqai, which starts at £23,535, costs too much not to feel that. And even a family SUV crossover like this partially symbolises and embodies our fragile freedoms of travel and association so restricted in the last 15 months.

And this is also a British car, or at least the closest you get to it in modern manufacturing. Although it's built in plants around the world, Europe's Qashqais come from Britain, from Nissan's genuinely world-beating plant in Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, where more than three million have been produced.

It's also designed in Britain at Nissan's Paddington design studio built into the circular building designed by Second World War Kindertransport refugee Paul Hamilton as a

maintenance centre for railway engines. And it's also engineered in Britain, at the company's technical centre in Cranfield.

And in the last 14 years, while Nissan bosses, politicians and the EU have played high-stakes poker about continued investment in and commitment to these facilities, the Qashqai's engineers, designers, production and support staff, along with the office cat, have continued to stoically do a good job on a car which people go back to time after time.

Family resemblance

Would you go back to this third-generation model? Probably. It certainly looks the business, resplendent in Ceramic Grey bodywork with gloss black highlighting, vents and grille.

In this top-model £34,175 Tekna + trim, 20-inch wheels and Michelin tyres nicely fill the wheel arches. This is clearly a Qashqai, but equally of the hour. There's a V-shaped grille and a lovely swage line that holds the eye from stem to stern, but it seems altogether tauter and better resolved than the previous generations.

It's built on the Renault Nissan Alliance CMF-C platform packed with high-strength steel, glued around the door pillars with larger box sections than previously to give a 48 per cent improvement in body strength.

Weight-saving aluminium is used for the doors, bumpers and bonnet and the hatchback is made of composite plastic. Although it's roughly the same size as the outgoing model, the new Qashqai has 20mm more in the wheelbase, an additional 35mm in length, 25mm in the height and 32mm in the width.

The extra length means more knee space for rear-seat passengers. The facia has been redesigned with a couple of touchscreens, a digital main instrument binnacle and (depending on specification), a large head-up display unit.

There's just one conventional engine, a 12-volt mild hybrid 1.3-litre turbo petrol with either 136bhp/177lb ft and 154bhp/192lb ft. Transmissions are a six-speed manual or continuously variable transmission (replacing the twin clutch of the previous model), the latter offering a 4x4 option as well as front-drive drivetrains and has a new "stepped" ratio adjustment to reduce the irritating "rubber-band effect" of the engine revs bearing little relation to road speed under hard acceleration.

Next year we will also get Nissan's e-Power self-charging hybrid drivetrain. This combines a 1.5-litre petrol engine acting only as a generator and a 2kWh lithium-ion battery to give a combined 187bhp output. In the smaller Note, it's done hugely well in Japan and Nissan is expecting great things of it in the Qashqai, claiming it offers all the benefits and drive quality of a battery vehicle with none of the range anxiety.

The range is fairly simple, too, with the base model Visia priced from £23,535 and coming with the full gamut of safety equipment including all the camera- and radar-based collision warnings and emergency braking, blind-spot warning, parking sensors and lane-keeping systems (which can be turned off at the push of a button).

Acenta Premium starts at £26,135 and adds 17-inch alloy wheels and lots of convenience features as well as a reversing camera and Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. N-Connecta, at £28,305, will take almost half of all sales and moves the car on to 18in alloys with yet more kit. Tekna starts at £30,845 with 19in alloys and Tekna + adds 20in alloys, swaps the other models' twist-beam rear suspension for a multi-link independent set-up, a Bose stereo and electric seats.

Familiarity first inside

There's an immediate feeling of familiarity and space thanks to the way the dashboard slants away from the passenger door, which invites you to step inside, and the large sunroof which bathes you with light – on a fine day, at least.

You sit comfortably but not actually very high, despite a lofty driving position being supposedly one of the SUV's attractions. A little higher than a small hatchback, it's true, but far from being on terms with van drivers. There's a lot of storage space including decent-sized door pockets and a centre bin with USB and USB C sockets. The rear seats are spacious with more-than adequate head and leg room for three adults.

The centre touchscreen is fairly simple to operate and mercifully there are separate controls for radio volume and zooming in and out of the satnav, along with a bank of heating and ventilation controls under the screen, so you can keep your eyes on the road. Nice, easy to use and sensible; as Peter Brown, the deputy director of passenger car vehicle evaluation at Nissan's Technical Centre says: "Keeping the climate control separate from the touchscreen was a key requirement."

He explains the fanatical attention to detail that's gone into what appears to be a quite simple layout, which includes moving the heated seat controls from the back of the centre console to the heater control panel where they are more easily found.

Nowhere will you find these efforts more admirable than in the 504-litre boot, which is not only easier to load with more flat space between the wheel arches, but also has the two-plank false floor which is ludicrously simple and effective. These wipe-clean planks hide a space large enough to store the luggage cover.

The rear seats fold 60/40 per cent on to their bases to give a completely flat load bed with 1,447 litres of space. This is exactly what buyers expect, yet so few car makers are able to achieve it. A space-saver spare wheel is available as an option, but on the Tekna + the Bose bass speaker fills that space.

On the road

The engine starts and idles quietly and never intrudes thanks to new sound deadening in the front bulkhead and door panels, along with thicker windows in the rear doors, among other measures.

With a high-boost turbo and high gearing, you need to use the gear lever to get the best of this engine, especially with a full load, but it's a nice gearchange and the ratios are well considered.

The on-paper performance of a top speed of 128mph with 0-62mph in 9.5sec rather flatters to deceive; this is no performance car, but there's enough spark to get you out of

trouble and past dawdlers. It's not spectacularly economical, with a Combined figure of 43.5mpg, but my A- and B-road figure of 37.2mpg indicates you'll probably achieve Nissan's claims on a long journey.



There will be some who bemoan the lack of choice in the drivetrain options, which is effectively one engine, but Nissan counters by saying it has 85 per cent of the market covered with this choice; when the ePower model arrives, that will extend to 94 per cent.

Dynamically, what the 20in wheels and tyres and multi-link rear suspension do for the handling they take away from the ride quality. It's still pretty good, but the largest-diameter tyres are loquacious, booming and rumbling on rough road surfaces and crashing through sharp-edged bumps and holes.

Perhaps that's one of the drawbacks of the remarkable refinement and low noise levels inside, which is that the tyres are intruding into a very quiet space, but they are really noticeable. I'd like to try this car on 18 or 19in wheels, which I think will be the choice of the market.

The ride quality isn't a disaster, though. It doesn't toss your head from side to side, but there is certainly a slight shimmy over regular bumps. Yet the suspension is quite soft. You can feel the dampers dialling out the undulations and absorbing the shocks, and it leans slightly into a turn and then moves quite gracefully over the long bumps on the country roads of my test drive.

The steering is over-assisted in the standard mode and unconvincingly firmed up in Sport, but it's accurate enough. The brakes are strong, but I would have preferred a bit more bite at the top of the pedal's travel, though to be fair the test car had only covered 447 miles when I was handed the keys so it's early days for these brakes.

Conclusion

Nissan's painstaking approach to product development is an example to the rest of the industry and brings back the words of Henry Royce, albeit in a modern and much less rarefied age: "Take the best that exists, and make it better."

For this third-generation Qashqai is a better all-round vehicle than its predecessor and at least in the top five of this very well-populated class. Criticisms are mainly around the specification of this top model, which should ride better and go a bit faster, and although another engine option would be welcome we await the ePower version with interest.

The family SUV that does the job Credit: David Shepherd

So all is right with the world, the family favourite Qashqai is back and seems quite likely to continue to dominate the sector, which is good news for its owners – and for the British economy.

The facts

The 2021 Nissan Qashqai Tekna and the specifications you should know:

Tested: 1,332cc four-cylinder turbo petrol with 12-volt mild hybrid system, six-speed manual gearbox (optional CVT auto), front-wheel drive

Price/on sale: range from £23,535 (£34,175 as tested)/now, first deliveries in mid-summer

Power/torque: 154bhp @ 5,500rpm/192lb ft @ 1,800rpm

Top speed: 128mph

Acceleration: 0-62mph in 9.5sec

Fuel economy: 43.5mpg (WLTP), 37.2mpg on test

Co2 emissions: 146g/km

VED: £220 first year, then £155

Verdict: At the top of the range, the Tekna + offers decent amounts of equipment and independent rear suspension, but the large-diameter wheels don't ride particularly well and it's arguable whether a family SUV needs the additional grip their lower profile tyres provide.

Despite that, the new Qashqai has a workmanlike, tough-as-boots quality, with software systems that are well thought through and simple to operate; the model has a track record for longevity and reliability, too.

Oh, and it's built in Britain.

The rivals

Volkswagen Tiguan 1.5TSI 130PS six speed, from £24,915

Volkswagen Tiguan 1.5TSI 130PS Credit: Ingo Barenschee

VW's family holdall is pretty much [the go-to SUV in the sector](#). Nicely put together, the 1.5TSI is gutsy and economical and the cabin has a quality and comfort that sets the class standard. New touchscreen technology has its critics, though.

Ford Kuga ST-Line X Edition 2.0 Ecoblue 150PS, from £32,865

Ford Kuga ST-Line X Edition 2.0 Ecoblue 150PS

Also known as the [Ford Escape](#), this likeable family SUV comes in a wide variety of engines and transmissions including a plug-in hybrid which offers pretty good fuel savings if you plug it in. Nicely balanced chassis and lots of equipment.

Mazda CX-5 Sport, from £30,645

Mazda CX-5 Sport

One from off the beaten track, but CX-5 is a big, spacious five-seat family SUV at decent prices with a pretty good reliability record. The Sport edition gives 19-inch wheels and black leather heated and powered seats. The 2.0-litre SkyActiv petrol engine is economical, but a bit gutless.