

2011 Nissan Juke

The 2011 Nissan Juke will be smallest so-called crossover vehicle to date, promising both fun and utility in an economical package. Nissan calls the all-new Juke a sport cross, and it should hit dealerships in the United States by the end of September 2010.

The Juke looks something like a sport-utility vehicle, or at least a ruggedly funky wagon, and it will offer up-market features and optional all-wheel drive. Yet the Juke is substantially smaller on the outside than Nissan's compact Rogue crossover, much less the midsize Murano.

Juke occupies less floor space than some subcompact sedans. Measuring 162.4 inches bumper to bumper, the Juke is nearly two feet shorter than the Rogue, and 17 inches shorter than a Honda CR-V. It's nearly identical in size to the forthcoming Mini Cooper Countryman crossover, which will follow the Juke to market by four or five months. The Juke is six inches shorter than the familiar Nissan Versa hatchback, on a shorter wheelbase. Still, the Juke's roof is a bit taller than the Versa's, and it appears that the two vehicles will offer similar interior space.

The Juke is based on the Nissan Qazana concept vehicle, which made the international auto show rounds in 2009. Designers say its styling draws on a number of active lifestyle influences, including motorcycles and rally cars. We're not sure exactly what that means, but the Juke is definitely interesting to look at.

Large, bug-eye headlights sit fairly low in its front end, while the turn signals sit in separate clusters higher and back at the edges of the hood. The roofline has the feel of a classic two-door coupe, and the handles for the rear doors are hidden in the blacked-out area of the rear pillars. Juke will come with 17-inch alloy wheels.

Inside, the Juke is just as interesting. The center console looks like a motorcycle gas tank, finished with high-gloss, two-tone paint. A central display that Nissan calls I-CON changes color and function depending on the mode selected. In climate mode, for example, it shows interior temperature, fan speed and airflow direction. In D mode, for drive, it shows engine functions and driving-related info.

From the utilitarian perspective, the Juke feels a lot like the Versa hatchback. It has seatbelts for five passengers, with a 60/40 split folding rear seat that folds to create a flat load floor. The switch from maximum passenger capacity to maximum cargo space seems to be quick and easy.

The Juke will be powered by an all-new engine with several technological advances. It's a 1.6-liter turbocharged four-cylinder with extra-efficient direct fuel injection, and Nissan promise better than 180 horsepower and 170 pound-feet of torque. Those are impressive output figures for an engine this size. Buyers can choose a six-speed manual transmission or a continuously variable transmission.

Juke's optional all-wheel-drive system is advanced as well, with operational features that have previously been reserved for luxury brands. This torque vectoring AWD varies the delivery of engine power between the front and rear wheels according to traction and driving demands. But it can also move power back and forth between the rear wheels, and that can help turn the vehicle more effectively through a curve. The Juke's AWD system will only be offered with the CVT.

Another technical feature previously seen only on vehicles that cost a lot more: A drive mode selector, with comfort, sport and economy settings. With one switch, the driver can alter throttle response, steering feel and transmission operation for the most comfortable travel, the sportiest response or maximum fuel saving.

The least expensive Juke will come with manual front seats, dual front and rear drink holders, speed-sensitive door locks, a single-CD audio system with steering wheel controls and auxiliary jacks for hand-held devices, and Bluetooth phone connection. All will be equipped with a full complement of crash-protection features: dual-threshold front-impact airbags, seat-mounted driver and front passenger side-impact airbags, roof-mounted curtain airbags for head protection and front-seat active head restraints.

Key upgrades include leather seating, heated front seats, Nissan's RearView Monitor back-up camera and Intelligent Key push-button ignition, satellite radio, a Rockford Fosgate audio upgrade, power moonroof, privacy glass and a navigation system with real-time traffic information.

The 2011 Juke should be available nationally by the late fall 2010. Expect pricing somewhere between Versa and Rogue. With a base price around \$15,000 and an upward range of \$5,000-\$8,000 loaded, Juke will be offered in eight different models, defined by transmission, front- or all-wheel drive and equipment level.

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