



# MORE ROOM, MORE MPG'S

## 2013 NISSAN SENTRA

MSRP: \$15,990 (BASE S) · AS TESTED: \$22,580 (SR)

**F**ast fact: one out of every three cars sold in the U.S. is a compact. That translates to over 2,000,000 cars a year. It's a big number, and it's why the roll-out of a new model in this segment is a big deal for an automaker.

Sentra is Nissan's compact. The long tenured nameplate has been on sale here since 1982.

Recently, the 2013 edition rolled out, and we were on hand to drive it.

Fuel economy has always been a key factor for compact car buyers. But, it's arguably a bigger deal to us now, when gas prices are about \$3.90/gallon, than it was when the first Sentra appeared 30 years ago. Consider (and try not to weep as you consider) that the average price of a gallon of gas then was \$1.31. So, it's no surprise that the lead for the new seventh generation Sentra is a number — 34. That's the car's class leading, EPA combined fuel economy estimate. The mpg breakdown is 30 city/39 highway. This amounts to a 13 percent improvement over the outgoing model. Those wishing to do those mileage figures one better can do exactly that. The FE+ package (\$400, on S or SV) combines a rear spoiler, underbody aero covering and lower rolling resistance tires, to net 40 mpg's on the highway.

Over half of Sentra's 2013 mileage gain (57 percent) is credited to powertrain efficiencies. The fuel frugality starts with a new, Nissan engine. The 1.8-liter, DOHC four-cylinder posts 130 horsepower (@6,000 rpm), and 128 lb. ft. of torque (@3,600 rpm). That's 10 h.p. less than last year's Sentra. But, I doubt that you'll feel a difference, particularly in light of the mileage boost. The 1.8 is linked to a second generation, Continuously Variable Transmission. It's smaller (10 percent) and lighter (13 percent) than the unit it replaces, and Nissan engineered a 30 percent reduction in friction. A six-speed manual is also offered, but only on the base, S level (27/36).



Sentra's engine is loud at wide open throttle, but otherwise quiet. There's enough torque to roll away from a stop smartly, and sufficient power to make a two-lane pass with a little planning, and with no anxiety. Expanding on EPA's estimates, a Sentra FE has a theoretical range of 515 miles between fill-ups. Three driving modes — Normal, Eco or Sport — can be selected via dash mounted button. The selections remap throttle and transmission response and (in the case of Eco) also reduce the A/C. The newest Nissan rolls on the company's V platform, which also underpins the Versa. The 3,800 lb. compact feels agile and is easy to fit into small openings in traffic, or tight parking spots.

Prices start at \$15,990 + \$790 delivery charge. Sentra is offered in four trim levels (S, SV, SR, SL).

My test car was an SR, wearing a model-exclusive shade of Metallic Blue, and an as-tested sticker of \$22,580. SR jazzes up the Sentra's looks, with 17-inch, five-alloy rims, 205/50VR tires, sport front grille and front/rear fascias, lower body side sill extensions, rear spoiler, chrome exhaust tips, fog lamps and silver interior trim.

Sentra's new interior is nicely finished and roomy — particularly in back, where its numbers for leg room top prime competitors like Civic, Corolla, Cruze, Elantra and Focus. Sentra will hold six-footers front and back — impressive for a compact. Trunk space is an also-spacious, 15.1 cubic feet. That's two cu. ft. larger than the outgoing model, and size-wise, second only to the Chevy Cruze, in its segment. The rear seatbacks fold forward for trunk pass-throughs, though the folded height of the seatback makes for an uneven load floor.

Swinging back up front, Sentra's cabin has an

upscale look and feel. Soft touch spots are all around (the door mounted armrests are downright squishy). The cover for the center console doubles as the inside arm rest, however, the top doesn't slide, and one size won't fit all elbows. Controls are happily straight forward. HVAC is adjusted by a simple, button and dial array. Driver visibility is good throughout.

Buyers choose from four, main option packages. The Driver package, (\$1,000, available on SV and SR, std. on SL), Leather package (\$1,030, SL), Premium Package (\$1,200, SV, SR, SL) and the Navigation Package (\$650, SV, SR, SL). Regarding the latter, the nav system's 5.8-inch touch screen display isn't large, but it's mounted close enough to the driver so that visibility is fine. The screen is, however, mounted almost flush with the dash, so it's subject to occasional washout in bright sunlight. Also included with the nav package is NissanConnect, and with it, a messaging feature that allows drivers to hear their texts read to them and respond, without taking their hands off the steering wheel. The standard sound system (AM/FM/CD w/four speakers) can be upgraded to a six speaker setup with 4.3-inch touch screen, or an eight-speaker Bose Premium system. SiriusXM satellite radio, traffic and weather, Bluetooth hands-free phone system and streaming audio are available as well.

Cars in popular segments (like compacts) tend to have a short shelf life in consumer's consciousness. Their freshness date expires as soon as the next new model arrives on the scene. The emergence of the new Sentra allows Nissan to enjoy top marks for combined mileage and bask in the overall, 'what's new' buzz in the compact segment — at least until the next salvo from the competition. Regardless of what's next, with those m.p.g.'s, a roomy, comfortable cabin and a clean looking package, Sentra's an easy choice for your compact sedan shortlist.

