[**Denver Barry LTD**](http://denverbarry.net/)

2009 Nissan Maxima Vehicle Overview

Introduction

We can already hear the complaints: "I am not paying $36,000 for a Nissan sedan." We understand. For that kind of money, you could be driving an Infiniti, a BMW or even a Mercedes. They must be smokin' something interesting at Nissan's Tennessee headquarters, right? Well, they're not as nutty as you may think, as the all-new 2009 Nissan Maxima is a high-quality entry-level luxury sedan that is well worth the fair amount of cash Nissan's charging for it. In fact, when fully loaded, it undercuts similarly equipped luxury-badged sedans by thousands, while in some cases being dynamically superior.

While wrapped in sharp, unique styling, the '09 Maxima was put together using the best bits and pieces found in the Nissan and Infiniti warehouses. The basic front-wheel-drive architecture comes from the sporty Altima midsize sedan; however, its length was reduced and width increased to improve handling. Nissan's ubiquitous 3.5-liter V6 shows up yet again, in this case with an ample 290 horsepower on tap. The Altima's excellent continuously variable transmission (CVT) is the lone transmission choice, but in the Maxima's SV trim, it comes with metal paddle shifters that control artificial transmission "gear" ratios. The low-friction, high-feel power steering is similar to the Altima too, but once again, it was upgraded to provide a more driver-focused feel.

Powertrains and Performance

The standard engine in the Chevy Silverado 2500 is a 6.0-liter gasoline-fueled V8 making 353 horsepower and 373 pound-feet of torque. A six-speed automatic transmission is standard. Optional is a 6.6-liter turbodiesel Duramax V8 that boasts 365 hp and 660 lb-ft of torque. It gets a different six-speed automatic and is the go-to choice if you require a burly tow vehicle (it also gets better fuel economy). Properly equipped, the 2500HD can haul up to 3,458 pounds and tow up to 13,000 pounds.

Rear-wheel drive is standard across the board, with four-wheel drive optional. Although the Work Truck 4WD gets a traditional floor-mounted transfer case, the two other trim levels available on the Silverado 4WD get Autotrac, a knob-controlled electric transfer case that features an automatic setting that engages 4WD when wheel slippage is detected.

[**Denver Barry Contact**](http://denvercbarry.com/) **:**But the differences on the new A4 aren't just cosmetic. The front axle and the engine have been slightly repositioned, which improves the Audi's traditionally front-heavy 60/40 weight distribution to about 55/45. In addition, an optional adjustable suspension creates multiple ride/handling balances that range from cushy to sporty. Packaged with this adjustable suspension is an adjustment system for steering feel and throttle response, which has three different set modes and a personalized mode where you can mix and match settings (for instance, soft suspension and tight steering). It sounds complicated, but like Burger King, the A4 allows drivers to have it their way.

All of this adds up to being the best A4 yet. Of course, the 2009 A4 faces stiff competition from all-stars in the mid-$30,000s to high-$40,000s, such as the more engaging BMW 3 Series, the affordably priced Infiniti G35 and the solidly built Mercedes-Benz C-Class. Since the convertible A4 didn't get the latest updates, we'd definitely hold out on the soft top. But for those in search of a sharp-looking compact luxury sedan or wagon with all-wheel drive, the latest technology features and a range of handling characteristics, the 2009 Audi A4 is an excellent choice.

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Powertrains and Performance

Underneath the Viper's louvered hood is an imposing 8.4-liter V10 engine that thunders out 600 horsepower and 560 pound-feet of torque. It's enough to propel the sleek snake from zero to 60 mph in 3.7 seconds. The quarter-mile is a memory in a mere 11.8 seconds. Top speed is a claimed 200 mph. All of this merriment is funneled to the rear wheels through a six-speed manual gearbox, which is the only transmission available.

Fuel economy -- though obviously an afterthought for exotic sports cars -- registers an EPA-rated city/highway of 13/22 mpg and 16 mpg in combined driving.

Safety

The best safety equipment for the 2009 Dodge Viper isn't included with the car. It's a driver with great skill, preferably with a racing pedigree. What is included, however, is antilock brakes with huge 14-inch rotors that can stop the Viper from 60 mph in an eye-bulging 104 feet. Conspicuously absent are side airbags, traction control and stability control -- making the skills of the aforementioned driver even more critical.

Driving Impressions

With an even 8 inches of ground clearance -- up 0.2 inch from the previous model -- the 2009 Pilot should make quick work of light-duty off-road tasks when equipped with all-wheel drive. But most Pilot owners are about as likely to leave the pavement as the Pilot is to receive an official "trail rating." Around town, the 3.5-liter V6's relative lack of low-end torque makes it feel rather flat-footed off the line. Passing power isn't much better, as Honda's VTEC technology uncharacteristically fails to bring the V6 to life at higher rpm. And although the feel of the brake pedal instills confidence, the Pilot turned in an unacceptable braking performance at our test track, requiring almost 150 feet to stop from 60 mph. That's nearly 20 feet longer than some competing crossovers.

Dynamically, the 2009 Honda Pilot feels every bit as big as it looks. There's bountiful body roll, and brake dive is significant even at low speeds. The reasonably precise steering is extraordinarily slow but nicely weighted, and the soft suspension affords a comfortable ride over rough roads and on the highway. The latter traits should endear the Pilot to family-minded buyers.

[**Denver Barry Trucks**](http://denverclarksonbarry.com/) **:** Driving Impressions

The 2009 Volvo XC90 3.2 model provides barely adequate acceleration, and it doesn't sound particularly pleasant, either. The V8 model's performance and refinement are vastly superior, and its fuel economy is only marginally worse. Both XC90 models ride comfortably in standard form, but don't expect them to tackle corners with enthusiasm like the Acura MDX or BMW X5. The R-Design models are better suited to energetic driving, what with their sport-tuned suspensions and steering systems.

2008 Volkswagen Tiguan Vehicle Overview

*Denver Barry Contact* Driving Impressions

Although the current-generation Dodge Durango handled well for its class at its debut a few years ago, newer and more refined competitors have put the Durango in a less forgiving light. Numb steering and a rough, unsophisticated ride confirm the vehicle's truck-based heritage. Four-wheel-drive versions are quite capable off-road, offering plenty of wheel travel and responsive manners. The base V6 barely gets out of its own way, however, so we recommend one of the optional V8s for most buyers. When equipped with the powerful 5.7-liter V8, the 2009 Durango is one of the quickest SUVs available for the money.

Driving the new 2009 Durango HEV hybrid is a bit odd: It still feels trucky, but the Hemi roar has been replaced by a Prius-like whir at low speeds. Plentiful power is always on tap, with the electric motor providing endless torque. If you drive prudently, the Durango can remain in electric mode at low city speeds, thus maximizing fuel economy.

**Denver Barry Company** Powertrains and Performance

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