



The 2013 Nissan JUKE color palette includes a range of eight exterior offerings: Sapphire Black, Gun Metallic, Metallic Bronze, Cayenne Red, Graphite Blue and new Atomic Gold, Brilliant Silver and Pearl White.

By Steve Schaefer

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Have you seen a Nissan JUKE in traffic lately? It's the car with the lights along the tops of the bulging front fenders (like its corporate cousin, the all-electric LEAF), tapered tail with lights that look like they came from a late-model Volvo station wagon, and in all likelihood a young, smiling driver behind the wheel. The JUKE is designed for fun — and targeted to a new generation that doesn't crave muscle-car power or the wind in their face like the drivers of those old British sports cars savored.

No, today's youth likes some power and speediness, good handling and, above all, to make some kind of statement. The JUKE has that effect on drivers, and I'd like to think, on anyone who sees it next to other cars.

Luckily, the driving experience is not a letdown. The little 1.6-liter engine delivers a surprisingly robust surge of energy from its 188 horsepower and 177 lb.-ft. of torque. You can thank the inclusion of direct injection and turbocharging. The power gets to the ground through a manual transmission (if you're lucky) and, if you choose it, an advanced torque vectoring all-wheel-drive system. You normally have to spend a small fortune to get this kind of technology.

Now in its third year of production, the JUKE remains much the same, but there's a new accessory package called the Midnight Edition. It's available on all 2013 JUKE S, SV and SL models, and features unique 17-inch Black Wheels, a Sapphire Black rear roof spoiler and Sapphire Black mirror caps.

Not much else new except for three new colors: Atomic Gold, Brilliant Silver and Pearl White.

But what needs to be new, really? The car already stands out, and not being a high-volume vehicle, selling hundreds of thousands a year, it can be given a longer lifespan.



Knowing that whatever impression you make with your car purchase, you'll spend most of your time with the car inside it, Nissan's designers have had big fun putting the inside of the JUKE together. The console has a motorcycle tank feel to it, with metallic paint. The instrument panel, with its jaunty little wing over the instruments, resembles a motorcycle's as well. The dash and doors have an organic, convex, puffed-up feeling. Surfaces are nicely rendered but not swanky luxurious. That would be the wrong way to go here.

The taut handling, good visibility and amusing cockpit made time in the JUKE fun. I especially liked driving my Graphite Blue tester at night, because you can see the glowing lights atop the front corners from behind the wheel.

The JUKE already gets my vote just by offering a six-speed manual transmission — although, oddly, not on the base S model, which comes with the CVT automatic only. I enjoyed changing gears in my tester, a top-level SL front-wheel-drive model. You can also order up all-wheel drive with it if you feel any urge to take your purchase off road.

The Integrated Control (I-CON) system drive mode selector gives you three driving styles. Choose Normal for your regular route, Sport for when you're feeling frisky and want a more intense experience, and Eco for maximum economy. The system adjusts the throttle, transmission and steering for each driving flavor.

The 3,900-lb JUKE is in that middle to upper middle of the mileage range of today's vehicles, with 27 miles per gallon combined per the EPA. The 25 City and 31 Highway could actually be accurate. During my testing I averaged an honest 27.2 mpg. JUKE also carries the PUREDRIVE™ designation. PUREDRIVE is used on models utilizing Nissan's most advanced technologies to promote eco-friendly driving and lower CO² emissions. EPA Green Vehicle numbers are 5 for Air Pollution and 7 for Greenhouse Gas.

With the top-level SL model, you get leather-appointed seats (heated in front), RearView Monitor, Nissan Intelligent Key™ with Push Button Ignition, XM® Satellite Radio, the Rockford Fosgate ecoPUNCH powered audio system, power sliding moonroof and privacy glass. You even get the Nissan Navigation System.

Pricing is reasonable. The base S model starts at just \$20,770, including destination charges. The SL with CVT and all-wheel drive sits at the top, at \$27,430. My SL test car hit \$26,555, thanks to adding in floormats, a center armrest (\$245 seems pricey) and the Sport Package. It adds a roof spoiler and the upgrade to the 17-inch gunmetal-gray alloy wheels and a stainless steel exhaust tip.

Is driving supposed to be fun? In the era of the “sporty” SUV, the JUKE offers a great way to stand out (a little) from the herd but still get all the advantages. As Nissan’s sedans begin to look more alike, it’s good that there’s still a little of the nonconformist in the brand’s specialty vehicles.