



The History of the Crossover: From Concept to Category Leader

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Back in 2002, a 25 strong project team from across Nissan's product planning, engineering, design and business development departments ventured to Nissan's technical centre in Japan for a twelve-month project to develop the next generation Nissan Almera. Originally planned to carry a slightly bigger footprint versus the previous generation, it would compete against the likes of the SEAT Altea and Golf Plus.

Some nine months into the process, on 13 December 2002, the project team came to the decision that the new model was not viable and also did not exhibit the innovation that Nissan wanted to display, or that customers had come to expect from the leading automaker.

Peter Brown, Vehicle Evaluation Manager at Nissan's European Technical Centre (NTCE), comments: *"I remember it well. We'd crunched the numbers, and the new Almera just wasn't going to be as competitive as we'd hoped. It didn't reflect Nissan's core values of innovation and excitement, or the direction that the business was taking with exciting products like 370Z, X-Trail 4x4 and the third generation Micra.*

"Instead, my colleague Hirohide Tagawa suggested a sort of mini Murano, which he believed would break down some of the barriers to SUV ownership, which had garnered popularity in preceding years."

Back in 2002, SUV ownership was rising in popularity; and remains the only segment that has continued to experience steady growth in Europe - doubling from 316,000 units in 2002 to 714,000 units in 2009^[1], after the launch of the first generation Qashqai - the first Crossover ever brought to market. By this time, the total European SUV market stood at 1.26 million units.

Despite this, there were still considerable barriers to ownership for many traditional passenger car buyers. *"The customer clinics we had completed with SUV buyers and potential purchasers had highlighted a number of downsides to the traditional SUV, which made it tricky for hatchback buyers to convert - namely, fuel efficiency, poor interior quality, cabin noise, too large for around-town manoeuvrability and general everyday usability."*

"We managed to persuade the business that we could break down some of these barriers by taking some of the best bits of a family hatchback and adding the elements of SUVs that are most attractive to customers. And so, the idea of the first 'Crossover', as we know it today, was born."

What followed was a period of testing and benchmarking, so that the team could assess the viability of creating a vehicle not dissimilar to the X-Trail, but with passenger car comfort and running costs all contained within a family hatchback footprint.

As a model originally intended for the European market alone, engineers at Nissan's European Technical Centre(NTCE) in Cranfield, UK, were commissioned to develop a framework for what would eventually become the first generation Nissan Qashqai.

"This was only the second time that NTCE had been commissioned by Japan to lead the development of a model from scratch from our technical facility in the UK, and we were excited at the prospect of creating something that had never been seen before.

"The idea itself was very simple - take a traditional SUV model and make it cheaper, more agile and compact. Thus the 'Trois₃ Fusion' approach was born. Great styling, cabin space and driver comfort with the higher driving position carried over from the SUV segment."

With no precedent to follow, and no direct competitor vehicle to benchmark, Nissan set about developing a simple but effective set of algorithms to help in developing the dimensions and performance indicators for this new breed of Crossover - that would be born as the Qashqai.

"By retaining the higher seating position, larger wheels and ground clearance of an SUV, but re-engineering the cabin so the passenger would feel they were sitting inside the car like a hatchback and not on it, we felt we could develop a car that would appeal to both hatchback and SUV owners."

A high armrest position, high sides and hatchback-inspired centre console configuration gave Nissan the driver-orientated interior required to appeal to hatchback customers, and driving appeal for Nissan's innovative new model.

Qashqai development continued throughout 2003 and 2004. NTCE was working with a 1.5dCi Renault Scenic mule to test the driver configuration and technologies, whilst product planning crunched early customer clinic data from family hatchback and SUV prospects. Work that would usually have taken some 18 months to complete was finalised in just nine months.



The new Qashqai was unveiled as a concept car at the Geneva Motor Show in 2004, and was met with mixed reviews. The automotive media were reluctant to accept there was a market for Nissan's new challenger model - and they weren't alone.

"Many of the media had the same reservations that we'd met from within the business - did a Crossover really present the best of both worlds, or simply fall short of the mark for both hatchback and SUV drivers?"

"We were creating something really different from what had gone before in the marketplace, and that was always going to be a risk."

At a behind-the-scenes winter test event in January 2006 in Finland, inside the Arctic Circle, media were able to experience the new concept for the first time, recognising its unique positioning. However, they were quick to pick up on the relatively low 4WD mix within the range, which was considered one of the differences from the competition.

"We'd decided only 40% of the sales mix would have 4WD - considering SUVs like X-Trail and RAV4 were 100% 4x4, it was a considerable risk to downscale production of 4WD by more than half.

"What we were seeing from SUV drivers was that few actually used the 4WD capability, and very few ever took the car off-road. To make the car more affordable, and improve fuel efficiency, we wanted to introduce the 1.5 diesel and 1.6 litre petrol engines to Qashqai in addition to the 2.0 litre engines we were using on X-Trail."

The new Nissan Qashqai was unveiled globally at the 2006 Paris Motor Show, and went on sale in February 2007. Despite early reticence, it has become the most successful model in Nissan's 80 year history. By the end of 2007, Nissan had already sold close to 100,000 Qashqais in Europe, and now eight years on, more than 2.6 million have been sold worldwide.

In 2010, Nissan took the lead again with the launch of the Nissan Juke, its compact Crossover, bringing another entirely new sector into the mainstream market. Juke has gone on to sell over 650,000 units in Europe alone (over one million globally), and carved a market for small Crossovers which now account for 700,000 new car sales each year across Europe^[2]. The new generation X-Trail, launched in 2014, completes the range - appealing to larger traditional SUV buyers.



"To say that the development of the Qashqai was one of the most satisfying things I've ever done would be an understatement. It involved more concerted effort from NTCE than any other car and I've felt a tremendous sense of pride and ownership on this project and the development of the Qashqai over the last eight years.

"It's been a fantastic experience to see the car through two complete model cycles, and see sales of the vehicle go from strength to strength."

Last year, Nissan Crossover sales exceeded 400,000 in Europe^[3] delivering a combined market share of 12.7%. In 2014 alone, more than 240,000 customers chose the pioneering Nissan Qashqai for its style, efficiency and advanced technologies. Nissan now offers a greater range of Crossovers with a broader mix of engines, than any other manufacturer.

[1] Data source: [JATO Dynamics](#)

[2] Data source: [JATO Dynamics](#)

[3] Data Source: [Nissan Europe](#)

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Nissan in Europe

Nissan has one of the most comprehensive European presences of any overseas manufacturer, employing more than 17,600 staff across locally-based design, research & development, manufacturing, logistics and sales & marketing operations. Last calendar year Nissan plants in the UK, Spain and Russia produced more than 675,000 vehicles including award-winning crossovers, small cars, SUVs, commercial vehicles and electric vehicles, including the Nissan LEAF, the world's most popular electric vehicle with 96% of customers willing to recommend the car to friends. Nissan now offers a strong line-up of 23 diverse and innovative models in Europe under the Nissan and Datsun brands.

About Nissan Motor Co.

Nissan Motor Co., Ltd., Japan's second-largest automotive company, is headquartered in Yokohama, Japan, and is part of the Renault-Nissan Alliance. Operating with more than 247,500 employees globally, Nissan sold almost 5.32 million vehicles and generated revenue of 11.38 trillion yen (USD 103.6 billion) in fiscal 2014. Nissan delivers a comprehensive range of more than 60 models under the Nissan, Infiniti and Datsun brands. Nissan leads the world in zero-emission mobility, dominated by sales of the LEAF, the first mass-market, pure-electric vehicle and the best-selling EV in history.

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