

Freshly grilled

BY JOE SAGE

The current Nissan Versa, revealed in 2019 for 2020, was a comprehensive change from its prior generation (a notably small and affordable subcompact sedan and even smaller hatchback). Sitting below Sentra, Altima and Maxima makes it a subcompact by default, but we've also seen it referred to as compact or its size avoided altogether. From outside or as you hop in, subcompact would never cross your mind. It looks very mainstream, almost midsize, and its interior is quite generous.

At its launch in 2019, Nissan was able to boast being alone in having a sedan, crossover and truck all starting below \$20,000. Now, a new truck lineup is well over that, and the Kicks crossover is over by just a few hundred bucks. But even in challenging economic times, Versa survives the \$20k mark.

The 2023 Nissan Versa lineup starts at \$15,730 and runs up to our SR at just a few hundred dollars under \$20,000. That Versa S base price is with a manual transmission (automatic is \$17,400), and for clutch fans, that's a rarity and a win-win.

The pre-production Versa SR we're driving includes features that give it a claim for having most standard safety tech in its class for 2023. Our SR grade is tops by price, though only by \$700. Specs suggest it is basically an alternative to the almost-

same-price SV—sportier, with bigger wheels and sport cloth instead of premium cloth upholstery.

Versa is not tremendously powerful—122 horsepower from a 1.6-liter four-cylinder—but it's also not heavy, at just 2729. Put those together, and it moves along quickly, while also rated at 40 MPG highway, showing that purchase price savings are just the beginning. The only time we really noticed its lack of horses was when someone cut off three lanes of traffic, we all had to slow down, and then had to catch back up to highway speeds. Handling is very solid, with no noticeable torque steer.

What caught our eye even more is its rework of the grille and front sheet metal. Nissan has been stuck in a one-theme-for-all styling phase, with what they call the V-Motion grille forced into the face of almost all vehicles (finally even the GT-R). Perhaps the new Z car broke that trend, or maybe they've been itching to change for awhile but hesitated to do it abruptly. We love it and might expect to see Nissan's sales climb as that spell is broken.

Basically, this is a state-of-the-art vehicle with only a little less fluff (e.g. no power seats), a huge win-win for many buyers, the benefit of how hard Nissan has worked to keep it under \$20 grand.

Give the Versa 20 more horsepower and it would be astonishing, but that's where the rest of the model line kicks in. The compact Sentra's 2.0-liter engine has 149 hp, and it starts at \$19,950 and, trim to trim, runs about \$2500-3000 higher

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....	Aguascalientes, Mmexico
ENGINE	.....	1.6L 4-cyl 16v dual-inject CVTCS
HP/TORQUE	.....	122 hp / 114 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....	10.4:1
TRANS / DRIVETRAIN	.....	D-step Xtronic CVT / FWD
SUSPENSION	.....	F: indep strut, twin tube shocks, 21.0mm stblzr bar; R: torsion beam, twin tube shocks
STEERING	.....	elec pwr-assist
BRAKES	.....	F: 10.02 x 0.87 vented disc; R: 8.0 drum
WHEELS / TIRES	.....	17x6.5 alum alloy / 205/50R17 a/s
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....	177.0 / 103.1 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....	34.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....	39.5 / 36.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....	44.5 / 31.0 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....	15.0 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIB	.....	2729 lb / 60/40%
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....	reg unl / 10.8 gal
MPG	.....	32/40/35 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....	\$19,720
PAINT: Scarlet Ember Tintcoat	.....	395
FLOOR MATS	.....	170
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....	1025

TOTAL.....\$21,310

2023 NISSAN VERSA LINEUP

S	.....	5-spd M/T	\$15,730
	.....	CVT	17,400
SV	.....	CVT	19,020
SR	.....	CVT	19,720

than Versa. This game can then push you toward Altima, then Maxima at more than double the price. If you want economical value, keep your eye on the ball. As current Nissan Versa advertising says, "compromise not included." We agree. ■

