



Nissan Micra DIG-S

DIG this

Review | Small cars are bought because they are cheap to buy and run. That doesn't necessarily mean that customers are looking for a dull car. That is why the Nissan Micra looks perky and sympathetic. In addition to this, the new "DIG-S" engine promises to make the car frugal yet fun to drive.

The test car is available in any colour, as long as it is white. By doing so Nissan wants to emphasize that the "DIG-S" technology is especially clean.

It also makes it easy to see what changes have been made to the bodywork to improve fuel economy. The "Micra 1.2 DIG-S" has been fitted with a closed grille, a rear spoiler and wind deflectors in front of the rear tyres. Just like any other Micra, the shape of the headlights and the front bumper make it seem like the car is smiling.



"Unlike other green cars, this Micra is eager to please"

Cabin

The design of the cabin reflects the round shapes of the exterior. The buttons of the climate control are even grouped in a circle around a display. The Micra has so many compartments and storage spaces that it feels like a small MPV!

The space in the front and rear is fine, especially for a car of this size. The front seats are adjustable in height, but to a very limited extent. Tall drivers hit the roof with their head and then try to lower the seat

some more, but to no avail.



The test car is a luxurious "Tekna" version which, thanks to a combination of brown and black materials, looks chic. Although the materials used look good, they are in fact cheap plastic. Look but don't touch please.

Considering the price of the car, the equipment levels are fine. This doesn't just comprise luxury items like satnav and an audio system with USB connector, but also lots of safety features. An item especially worth mentioning is the "parking slot measurement-system" (PSM). While driving at speeds of up to 25 km/h (15 mph) the computer seeks parking spots at either side of the car and determines whether the Micra will fit.



Handling

The Micra is sold in 160 countries around the world.

To appeal to specific tastes, the car is altered for individual markets. This worked out very well for the European market. On bad road surfaces the Micra offers sufficient levels of comfort. At the same time the car doesn't tilt so much that cornering at high speeds is impossible.

The steering does require some getting used to; at first the Micra doesn't react to the steering wheel at all. Small movements have no effect. After that the car reacts quite suddenly, because steering becomes very direct. Some drivers experience this as disturbing, others like the fact that involuntary movements of the steering wheel don't result in sudden lane changes.

Particularly in the city, the Micra easily "cuts through" traffic. In heavy traffic the wing mirrors are a bit small, but Nissan deliberately opted for tiny mirrors to improve aerodynamics. The Micra feels at home on the highway just as well. At high speeds noise levels are modest, so long journeys aren't a problem.



DIG-S: theory

For now, the Micra is available with a choice of two engines. Both have a displacement of 1.2 litres and have three cylinders. The "DIG-S" (Direct Injection Gasoline Supercharged) uses a "supercharger" to develop a higher output than regular 1.2 litre engines. Other technologies in the "DIG-S" package improve efficiency, in order to save fuel.



For example, the cylinder heads have a special coating which causes less friction. Thinner oil has been used to, again, decrease resistance. Together with many small improvements, the "DIG-S" has 23% less friction than the regular Micra engine.

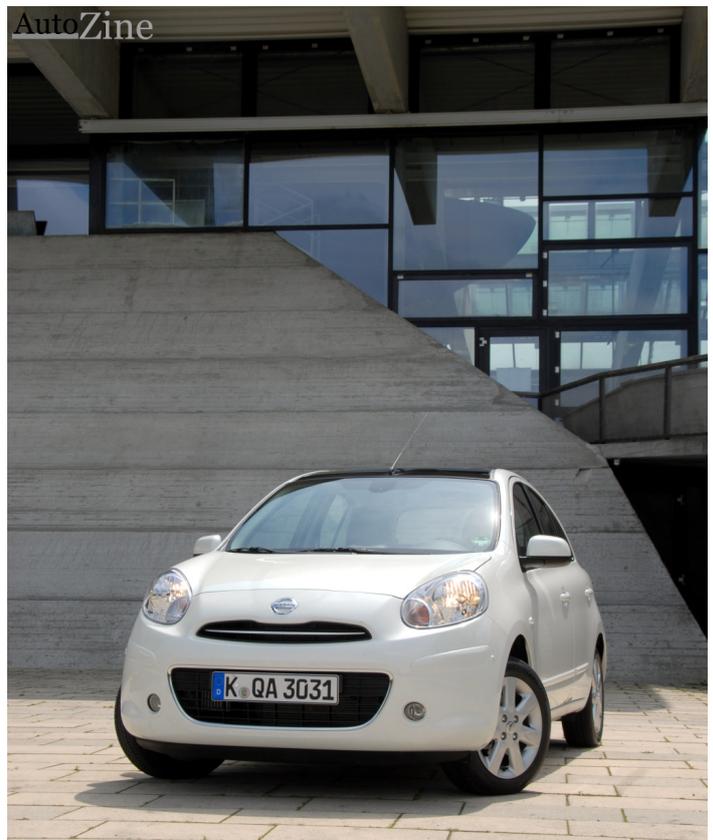
While driving, the battery is the main power source, not the alternator. In that way the engine again has less parts to move, so it uses less fuel. It's only when the accelerator is released that the alternator is activated and the battery is charged. When power levels reach a set minimum level, then the alternator is also active while driving (to make sure the car can always be started).



Of course, the Micra features a stop/start mechanism. This works so quickly that it is never disturbing to the driver. An interesting detail is the trip computer, which shows the amount of CO2 saved while the engine is stopped. When started again, the same display is used to show the actual and average fuel mileage. For some strange reason a shift indicator is lacking.

DIG-S: practice

A well-known complaint about three-cylinder engine is that it doesn't run as smoothly as a four-cylinder. Nissan effectively fixed this problem by mounting a counter weight on the camshaft. As soon as the engine is ignited (pressing a button suffices, the driver can keep the key in his/her pocket) the engine runs smoothly. It's only at high engine speeds that the typical three-cylinder sound can be heard.



The "DIG-S" engine isn't just more fuel efficient, it is also more powerful than the less advanced one. This is obvious from the start, because its 98 PS / 142 Nm is available at just about every engine speed. Unlike other green cars, this Micra is eager to please!

A small car like this almost seems to dare the driver to play and that is why the first test drive took 5.8 litres per 100 km (78 mpg).



Nissan promises the car can do 4.1 litres per 100 km (110 mpg). So, after the fun and play, the speed was reduced to test the Micra's green credentials. On a route with city traffic, back roads and highways, the combined fuel consumption was a mere 4.7 litres per 100 km (97 mpg). That is much less than the basic Micra and even more frugal than many other compact cars.

Conclusion

The marketing department of Nissan put in quite a lot of effort. The Micra is supposed to revolutionise the small car. Thanks to the "DIG-S" engine performance should be excellent while fuel consumption is supposed to be minimal.

An extensive test drive proves that said revolution won't happen for a while. However, Nissan did manage to optimise existing technology further than any other brand. This is why the Micra DIG-S does indeed perform above average, while consuming less fuel than usual.

On top of that, the Micra simply is a fun car. In the right colour the car doesn't look cheap or square, but cheeky and playful. The cabin design is just as original while offering more than enough space for four. Handling is good as well, so that the driving fun Nissan promised is certainly there. ■



Specifications

Nissan Micra DIG-S 1.2 DIG-S Tekna

Size and weight



Length x width x height	383 x 167 x 152 cm
Wheelbase	245 cm
Kerb weight	960 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	unknown
Fuel capacity	41 l
Luggage space	226/511 l
Tyre size	175/60R15

Engine and performance



Capacity	1198 cc
Cylinders / valves	3/4
Max power	98 PS @ 5600 rpm
Max torque	142 Nm @ 4400 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	11.3 secs
Top speed	183 km/h
Average mileage	4.3 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	5.2 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	3.7 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	99 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 14,115
Price base model	Â£ 9,640