

A car for the underwater photographer

By Alexander Mustard

During 2006 I was approached by Nissan who were planning to design and build a concept car for the Tokyo Motor show in late October 2007. This was to be no ordinary car designed for mass market appeal. No this was a niche product aimed specifically at my needs as an underwater photographer. I did point out that a boat would be more traditional, but Nissan knew there would be multiple benefits for both its designers and future cars by exploring such an unusual design direction. The vehicle is called the Nissan NV200 and this is a short article about some of its features.

Shiro Nakamura, senior vice president and chief creative officer at Nissan Motor Co. takes up the story, “Nissan prides itself on designing its cars to fulfil the needs and requirements of its customers. For NV200 we have taken that guiding principle quite literally and created a vehicle for one specific customer. But it is a totally adaptable and flexible concept that could have applications in a number of areas of the market”

A typical small van is little more than an empty box on wheels: functional, certainly, but seldom innovative or smart. From the outside,

NV200 is the epitome of a modern van. But it's the details that set it apart. At the heart of NV200 is a patented sliding cargo pod which is divided into a number of separate areas into which different pieces of diving and photographic equipment can be stored.

Stephane Schwarz, design director of NDE continue “We wanted to create a flexible toolbox for professionals. NV200 is practical and functional but aesthetically pleasing at the same time.” The pod is latched inside the shell of the load area when the van is being driven. But upon arrival at its destination, it slides out rearwards to allow easy access to the storage zones. The pod is deployed manually with the aid of hydraulic rams, and sits securely on integrated ‘drop-down’ legs when fully extended.

The pod contains wet and dry storage areas for diving equipment. Lockable roller blinds protect the contents, while valuable camera equipment can be accessed either from within NV200 or from outside the pod. As the pod is withdrawn from the van, the area left behind is transformed into a mobile office and IT dock. A computer table drops down from the side of the van to reveal two



Text and photos courtesy of Nissan.



LCD screens upon which images can be edited. The front passenger seat swivels backwards on a single curved rail to face the table. A shockproof briefcase made from rugged ribbed plastic houses a laptop. When not in use, it docks into a side of the van beneath the worktable. The pod also houses a small refrigerator, drop down sink unit and first aid kit.

NV200's tanks hold enough water to supply a shower, fitted on the outside of the pod, to allow divers and equipment to be washed after use. Power for the computer, shower, 'fridge and other electrical fixtures comes from a small generator housed within the van. This, in turn, is charged by solar panels situated on the roof of the pod. When the pod is deployed, the solar panels are directly exposed to daylight. But even when the pod is pushed back into the van, the panels line up beneath the skylight. In this way, power can be generated in daylight hours whether the vehicle is stationary or not.

A two-man tent - accessed from outside NV200 - is housed at the base of the B-pillar behind the driver's door, while fillers for fuel and water are housed within the opposite B-pillar. The driver and passenger doors open conventionally, while access to the workspace is via a single sliding door on the passenger side.

Most the materials, textures



and colours used throughout NV200 reflect the materials, textures and colours used in the diving world. The exterior has a scratch resistant matt satin finish in a steel grey colour to emphasise the 'toolbox' nature of the project. Interior materials are either hardened lightweight plastics or rubberised fabrics finished in a dark grey with acid yellow highlights. Perhaps the only area not directly influenced by the ocean, is the wooden floor of NV200. This is finished in a hardwearing wood, bringing a touch of warmth to an otherwise working environment.

Sadly, Nissan aren't about to make the NV200 commercially available. But I was fascinated to see how a talented group of designers were inspired by our world and the problems we all face when we go shore-diving by car. Now if only they would let me keep it...

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