**Nissan Tiida**

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**Verdict The Pulsar replacement has size on its side but little else, writes Terry Martin**

Nissan Tiida ST sedan **Comment:** Tiida is meant to represent a new era for Nissan's small car – but makes fewer gains over the Pulsar than we expected. Severe shortage of equipment in base model although engine performance is a highlight. **Lap slap . . .** centre-rear lap belt just isn't good enough. **Price:** $19,990 **Warranty:** 3 years/100,000km **Engine:** 1.8-litre four-cylinder **Power/Torque:** 93kW/174Nm **Transmission:** Front-drive, six-speed manual (four-speed auto $2000) **Seats/Weight:** Five/1104kg **Fuel tank/type:** 52 litres/unleaded **Litres/100km:** 7.6 combined **0-100km/h:** N/A **Turning circle:** 10.4m **Airbags/ABS:** Two/No IN more than name, the Tiida is so unlike Nissan that we wonder just how much surgery "le cost cutter" Carlos Ghosn performed on the near-bankrupt Japanese car-maker when he took over at the end of last decade.

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Like a medical student attacking a first cadaver, Ghosn slashed workers, suppliers, platforms and debts, and got the balance sheet back into the black. In doing so, he also turned out some fabulous Z cars, the excellent X-Trail and the honourable new Maxima. But the latest Pathfinder has some serious flaws, the Murano is so-so . . . and now this.

We can only marvel at the wisdom behind Nissan Japan's decision to kill off the Pulsar, which over 25 years had become a household name in Australia.

Yet our concerns with the Tiida (pronounced "tee-da") run deeper than merely a crook moniker and, we might add, too strong a connection with a single buyer group – liberated young women – following the huge launch advertising campaign with *Sex in the City* actress Kim Cattrall.

Take a good, long look inside the entry-level ST sedan and you'll see what we mean.

While we could coo like Cattrall about the cabin being "sooo big" we were, in fact, stunned by the cost-cutting measures Nissan has built into the car – and the compromises on equipment Australian management was prepared to make in order to keep the starting price below $20,000.

Items deemed essential were dual front airbags, airconditioning, remote central locking, electric mirrors, variable intermittent wipers and a four-speaker CD stereo. What's left out includes ABS brakes, alloy wheels, cruise control, traction control, curtain airbags, electric windows, maplights, vanity mirrors, a centre-console armrest and, for the steering wheel, reach adjustment and satellite stereo controls. Appallingly, the rear seat area lacks head restraints, a lap-sash seatbelt for the centre occupant, overhead grab-handles (there's a recess for them in the headlining), a thoroughfare to the boot and basic amenities such as a pull-down centre armrest, map pockets and door bins. The parcel shelf is flimsy, the centre-rear position uncomfortable and the seatbelt sash guides for the window-seat occupants are, for taller adults, too low for a comfortable fit.

The boot is deep, lined and contains a full-size spare wheel, but there are no separate areas for stowing small items, no luggage tie-down points and nothing so convenient as a 12-volt power outlet or hooks for shopping bags or cargo nets. The boot can be opened from the rear, which is good. However, it took two goes to close it almost every time.

Back up front, the thickly padded driver's seat forces the seat-height adjustment ratchet on to the left-hand side, which could be mistaken for the handbrake. The seat lacks comfort over a long (say, two-hour) tour, highlighting the absence of lumbar adjustment. And the footwell is too shallow to make the footrest a convenient item.

There's more. Plastic surfaces across the cabin are hard, uncomfortable and uninviting. There's no lock on the glovebox, and no coolant temperature gauge in the instrument panel. And build quality is in question after we discovered loose and ill-fitting interior trim at the front pillar of our test car. A rattle also developed behind the dashboard.

Good points? The glovebox is cavernous and front-compartment storage facilities in general are plentiful, even if an overhead sunglasses console is restricted to higher-spec models. The speedo and tacho are easy to read at a glance. The stereo controls are well-positioned and simple to use, despite the need for the hand to leave the steering wheel. The climate controls are also nicely located, although there's an antiquated lever for moving between fresh air and recirculation.

In the driving department the car's most impressive feature is the 1.8-litre engine that features "continuous valve timing control" and can reach a maximum 93kW at 5200rpm and 174Nm at 4800rpm. Although somewhat raucous at high revs, the engine is smooth and willing with decent mid-range pulling power and the benefit of short gearing from the standard six-speed manual gearbox to keep things humming along.

While the gearshift creates a sound like bones clicking rather than gears snicking, it does enable smart acceleration from standstill and cruises at 100km/h at a high 3000rpm in sixth gear, rising to 3500rpm in fifth – the latter being the sort of revs the engine needs before delivering its best. Importantly, the ST still returned a commendable 8.95 litres per 100km on our test.

The Tiida's road behaviour is an altogether different story. Based on a platform shared with Renault and using a conventional front strut/rear torsion beam suspension, the car feels out of sorts in Australia. Ride quality is crass and uncomfortable over potholes and other poor road surfaces.

Across mid-corner bumps, the kickback that rises through to the steering wheel is nothing short of violent – the worst we've encountered in years – while in less demanding conditions the steering simply feels over-assisted and numb.

Bodyroll is apparent during quick directional changes, but the 185/65 R15 Toyo tyres offer an acceptable amount of cornering grip before safe, predictable understeer sets in. Braking performance is also fair, despite drums being used at the rear.

There is wind noise off the wing mirrors at higher speeds, and lots of pinging in the wheel arches across gravel roads.

The Tiida comes to Australia as a vehicle that looks and sounds like something from Renault rather than Nissan, and which – in ST sedan form, at least – feels underdone in terms of equipment and engineering.

We know how things turned out when Nissans were built in Australia (it went under). And we remember well the previous Pulsar (it was mediocre). But we expected much better than this.