

## Sedan Still Matters

### Redesigned Sentra Blends Style, Value And Unexpected Driving Charm

By Derek Price

CARGAZING.COM

Then Nissan handed me the redesigned 2026 Sentra SL, and I spent a week wondering why more cars like this don't exist.

The new Sentra feels like a company actually cared while developing it. Not just about fuel economy numbers or lease payments, but about proportions, steering feel and the way a car makes someone feel walking up to it in a parking lot.

It starts with the styling.

This is one of the best-looking compact sedans on sale right now, regardless of price. The proportions are clean, and the subtle trunk lip gives the rear a hint of old-school BMW sport sedan energy. Nissan's designers managed to make it look upscale without going overboard trying to appear futuristic.

That matters because the Sentra is still an affordable car.

My loaded SL tester came to \$30,990 including destination and several accessories. In a world where the average new vehicle transaction price hovers near \$50,000, this Nissan feels refreshingly grounded.

And it does not feel cheap inside.

The cabin punches above its price point with rich-looking materials, clean



The 2026 Nissan Sentra combines sculpted bodywork, sharp lighting and clean proportions to create one of the most stylish compact sedans on the road.

dashboard design and large digital displays that genuinely look modern instead of budget-conscious afterthoughts. Nissan's available dual 12.3-inch screens give the interior a premium feel usually reserved for more expensive vehicles.

The SL trim also gets thoughtful details that make the car feel more complete, including quilted TailorFit seating surfaces, ambient lighting, a Bose audio system and a heated steering wheel.

More importantly, it feels solid from behind the wheel.

The biggest surprise of

the week was how much I enjoyed driving it.

No, it is not fast. The 2.0-liter four-cylinder makes 149 horsepower and 146 pound-feet of torque, which sounds modest because it is modest. But the Sentra has something many modern affordable cars lack: personality.

In corners, the car feels lighter and more playful than the specifications suggest.

Oddly enough, it reminded me of an early Mazda Miata. Not because it is objectively quick, but because it feels quicker than it really is. That sensation matters. A car that

encourages you to carry momentum and enjoy a winding road can be more satisfying than something with giant horsepower numbers and no soul.

That is why the Sentra left me wanting more.

There is a genuinely good sports sedan hiding underneath this vehicle. The chassis feels capable enough to handle a firmer suspension, more aggressive tires and significantly more power. Nissan already knows how to build compelling performance cars with the Z and GT-R, and honestly, part of me wishes the company would take a swing at a true Sentra

performance model aimed at cars like the Honda Civic Si or even the Civic Type R.

The bones are there.

Unfortunately, the continuously variable transmission remains the weak link.

To Nissan's credit, the CVT is better calibrated than many rivals, and the new Sport mode helps sharpen responses. But a CVT still cannot replicate the engagement of a traditional automatic or manual gearbox. Occasionally, the drivetrain feels disconnected from the rest of the car's surprisingly sporty character.

I also wish Nissan offered a more powerful engine option. The current setup is perfectly adequate for commuting, errands and highway driving, but enthusiastic drivers will eventually find themselves wanting more muscle.

Still, the Sentra succeeds because it understands its mission.

This is an affordable sedan that looks expensive, feels thoughtfully engineered and delivers real value at a time when many new vehicles feel financially absurd. It also proves there is still life left in the traditional four-door formula.

Crossovers may dominate the market, but after a week in the new Sentra, I'm not convinced they deserve to.

#### AT A GLANCE

##### WHAT WAS TESTED?

2026 Nissan Sentra SL (\$27,990). Options: Floor mats package (\$290), illuminated kick plates (\$370), power delivery charging ports (\$245), illuminated trunk scuff plates (\$400), premium paint (\$450). Price as tested (including \$1,245 destination charge): \$30,990

##### BY THE NUMBERS

Wheelbase: 106.5 in.  
Length: 183.3 in.  
Width: 71.5 in.  
Height: 57.1 in.  
Engine: 2.0-liter four cylinder (149 hp, 146 lb.-ft.)  
Transmission:  
Continuously variable  
MPG: 29 city, 36 highway

##### RATINGS

Style: 9  
Performance: 6  
Price: 8  
Handling: 7  
Ride: 7  
Comfort: 6  
Quality: 7  
Overall: 7

##### WHY BUY IT?

The redesigned Sentra offers upscale styling, impressive value and surprisingly enjoyable road manners in a compact sedan that still feels genuinely desirable.

# CARGAZING



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And it does not feel cheap inside.

The cabin punches above its price point with rich-looking materials, clean dashboard design and large digital displays that genuinely look modern instead of budget-conscious afterthoughts. Nissan's available dual 12.3-inch screens give the interior a premium feel usually reserved for more expensive vehicles.

The SL trim also gets thoughtful details that make the car feel more complete,



Inside, the Sentra features large digital displays, upscale materials and a modern cabin layout that feels more premium than its price suggests.

including quilted TailorFit seating surfaces, ambient lighting, a Bose audio system and a heated steering wheel.

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#### A CLOSER LOOK



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FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

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