‘mini me’ suvs on the grow

JUST AS IN THE LIGHT CAR SEGMENT, WHERE THERE IS A GROWING ‘SUB’ CATEGORY, COMPACT SUVS ARE EXPERIENCING A BOOM IN DOWNSIZING... HERE ARE THREE NEW ARRIVALS...

IN THE PAST six months, Holden released its Trax, Peugeot its 2008 and Nissan its Juke – all mini SUVs pitched at young, or young-at-heart, urbanites.
Ford joined the party in November, but unfortunately its Ecosport offering arrived a tad too late to be included in our comparison. Ditto Suzuki, whose new S-Cross only rolled out in January. (See In the Showrooms, pages 56-57 for both new releases).

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Trax, 2008 and Juke all come with a choice of model variant. The former is available in two trim levels, LS and LTZ. Common to both is a 1.8-litre, 16-valve, four-cylinder petrol engine (as used in the base model Cruze and producing 103kW of power and 175Nm of torque). A five-speed manual is standard on the LS, while a six-speed auto with Active Select is standard on the LTZ and available as an option on the LS. 2008 is produced in three trim levels – Active (66kW/118Nm, 1.2-litre petrol engine/five-speed manual or 1.4-litre petrol/four-speed auto), Allure (1.4-litre, petrol/five-speed manual or four-speed auto) and Outdoor (1.6-litre, turbo-diesel/five-speed manual).

Juke buyers can pick between the ST (86kW/158Nm, 1.6-litre petrol engine/five-speed manual or ST-S and Ti-S, fitted with the more powerful, 1.6-litre turbo-petrol engine of the Pulsar SSS. A CVT, standard on the Ti-S, is an option on the ST, while the ST-S has a six-speed manual.

Given the price sensitivity of the segment, we opted to test the entry-level (i.e. cheapest) variants of each model for our comparison. This meant that, while our trio measured up closely on price, unfortunately engine capacity and resultant power and torque outputs differed more widely than usual.

VALUE FOR MONEY
At $21,990, Juke ST and 2008 Active shape up $1500 less than the Trax LS. In terms of likely depreciation, Glass’s Guide forecasts Trax, Juke and 2008 to have a retained dollar value of $8350, $8550 and $8000 respectively after five years/75,000km.

Commodiously, all have capped price servicing. Unfortunately, there is no standardisation to the way manufacturers detail their costs, which makes it difficult to compare like-with-like. But the fact is Nissan buyers could expect to pay more overall due to shorter service intervals (six months/10,000km) as opposed to Holden (nine months/15,000km) and Peugeot (12 months/15,000km).

The trade off is Nissan’s capped price servicing coverage is the most extensive at 72,000km/120,000km, as opposed to Holden’s first four services within the first 36 months/60,000km and Peugeot’s 60 months/75,000km.

Projected fuel costs are similarly not straightforward to compare. While the 2008 with its smaller three-cylinder engine can claim an ADR combined cycle figure of just 4.9 litres/100km, 1.1 better than Juke and 2.1 slimmer than Trax, only the latter runs on a recommended diet of 91 RON unleaded. The other two prefer the dearer 95 RON PULP.

On our 80km test, over a diversity of driving conditions, Juke got closest to its ADR figure with an average of 7.4 litres/100 km. Trax inbined at the rate of 8.6 and 2008 at 8.7.

All have the same warranty – three years/100,000km, which fails to match the more generous offerings by manufacturers such as Hyundai, Kia and Mitsubishi.

There’s little between the three on insurance costs, with the Peugeot’s premium being a touch over $50 less than Juke’s and $70 cheaper than Trax.

The final element to our value for money equation is the amount of standard equipment for price, and here we can say that all come relatively well kitted.

Safety wise, tick the boxes for six airbags, anti-lock brakes, adjustable front/rear headrests, lap/sash seatbelts for all occupants (height adjustable at the front with pretensioning and load limiting), traction and electronic stability control.

Ditto cruise control, powered windows and external mirrors (the 2008’s also fold and are heated) along with CD player with MP3/USB/iPod connectivity and bluetooth, three child restraint mounting points and ISIFIX.
There are some points of difference: Juke has climate control (the others, standard airconditioning), but misses out on steering reach adjustment, a reversing camera and rear parking sensors.

Trax is the only one with a full-size spare wheel. Special mention should be made of the Holden’s MyLink infotainment system, which comes with a seven-inch touch screen and embedded apps such as Pandora, Stitcher, SmartRadio, TuneIn and BringGo navigation. There is also voice control.

**DESIGN AND FUNCTION**

Each scores a five (out of five) star safety rating (ANCAP in the case of the Holden and Nissan, EuroNCAP for the Peugeot). In terms of environmental ratings, the French car gets five (out of five) stars in the Federal Government’s Green Vehicle Guide, half a star better than Trax and one up on Juke.

The seating is no frills – but par for course in this segment – being cloth with no seat cushion tilt or lumbar, just height, slide and back rest adjustment. All three cars do an acceptable job of accommodating their drivers in comfortable fashion, though. After a day behind the wheel in above 40-degree weather, over a diversity of road surfaces and conditions, none of the testers reported any major discomfort.

By our standard measurements, Trax is superior in front headroom and seat travel, ditto rear head and seat cushion length, Juke is best for front leg room and seat cushion length, along with rear knee room, but is restrictive in rear headroom. And the 2018 is tightest in all front measurements, but comes out on top for rear bench width.

Car makers measure cargo space in litres. Using this methodology, 2008 offers up the best capacity with 410 litres (with rear seats in place) and 1460 litres (with seats folded and measured to the roofline). Both numbers pip Trax (356 and 1370) and are way ahead of Juke (251 and 830). The Juke, though, does have a large, lift-out storage tray under the cargo floor that is handy for oddments.

Build and finish quality favours the Peugeot, ahead of the Nissan, particularly throughout the interior. The Holden had too much hard plastic for our liking, along with an annoying rattle around the right front door.

**ON THE ROAD**

That old adage, “There ain’t no substitute for horsepower”, didn’t exactly ring true in our testing. Trax might boast the highest power output (and best power-to-weight figure), but it was pipped by Juke in all straight line and roll-on acceleration tests, bar from 50-80km/h (in third gear).

We’re talking one or two tenths of a second, except from 0-100km/h where the Nissan pulled a sizeable half-second clear of the Holden. The letter seems most at home cruising the highway, pulling 2700rpm at a steady 100km/h, some 100rpm lower than the Nissan at the same speed.

With its comparatively diminutive three-cylinder engine putting out 60kW, 2008 trailed by sizeable margin whenever the hammer went down. Hilly driving is not its forte. Around town, when the going is level, is where it gives its best by way of a smooth and flowing drive.

We had no complaint about any of the five-speed transmissions. But our pick was the Nissan, which had the better weighted clutch action and slightly shorter gear shift ‘throws’.

European suspension settings are often too firm for our typical backblock roads, but 2008 impressed in the way it handled the creases and corrugations. Overall, its ride quality surpassed that of Juke (stiffer) and Trax (not as composed).

The French car also showed itself to be the best handler, feeling more like a light or small car than SUV with its agility and lightness. Grip levels are good, with very little body roll and negligible tyre squeal. And the steering is communicative, if a tad too quick on initial turn-in.

Juke is not as convincing when interrogated as to its limits, particularly by way of front end grip. The steering is reasonably weighted, but could offer up more feel for the road. It’s a step ahead of Trax, though. On straight ahead, the latter’s steering feels dull, then sharpens quickly as lock is applied, making for a less than fluid drive.

Braking performance is another win for 2008. From 80km/h to a stop, the Peugeot pulled up in 23.3m, 1.4m shorter than the Holden and Nissan. For the record, Juke and 2008 boast front and rear disc brakes, while Trax sports a front disc/rear drum combination.

Our noise meter readings have a history of producing a mixed bag and so it was again. Juke recorded a significantly quieter decibel reading at idle. The 2008 and Trax finished equal best under acceleration from 50-80km/h, while the former disturbed the meter the least at a steady 80km/h.

**CONCLUSION**

Trax, although the dearest, is stacked with kit and technology (Holden claims best in class for the latter), but is less gifted dynamically.

2008 is the best of this three if you’re looking for a more involving drive, though there are times when a lack of power and torque means it is found wanting.

While it is the most responsive performer, Juke is not as agile as the Peugeot or as well equipped as the Holden. And the ‘confrontational’ styling is a plus, or minus, depending on how you see it.

That said, consensus is the Nissan does more overall to take the win, just shading the 2008.

Though there is no standout, each of our test trio is user friendly and capable of meeting most people’s everyday driving requirements in this segment.