

Tried & tested



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Nissan Figaro

Year: 1991 **Price:** £6985
Mileage: 64,502 (converted)
MoT: 12 months
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Can a car shamelessly old before its time be considered a classic? We await the angry letters.

Sold exclusively in Japan via lottery, the Nissan Figaro is the familiar face of the late 'Nineties grey import phenomenon; those unfamiliar with the scores of roll-on roll-off Imprezas, Lucida Estimas and Eunox Roadsters could no doubt pick the twee little Nissan out of a line-up.

The Figaro was the last offering from Nissan's Pike Factory, previously responsible for the Be-1, Pao and S-Cargo delivery van. A specialist subcontractor geared up for a small production run, the workshop formerly known as the Aichi Machine Industry Plant survives today building engines for Nissan's Juke and Cube.

Like its niche brethren, the Figaro housed workaday underpinnings – in its case, from a K10 Micra (sold as the March in Japan) – in old-fashioned clothes. Like the smash-hit New Beetle and R50 'Bini' (BMW MINI) it preceded, the Figaro offered the aesthetics of an old car without the mechanical drawbacks; power steering, air conditioning, leather trim and electric windows (with sea-shell switches) all came as standard. Four distinctly seasonal colours were available, their pastel hues recalling 'Fifties and 'Sixties European colour palettes. Plenty



of people customise Figaros these days – those hot pink and flip shaded examples saw a spray booth this side of the Atlantic.

The Pale Aqua car for sale at DCY Europe is typical of the breed; a low mileage car in need of a thorough detailing and very little else. It seems odd to be discussing brightwork on a 1991 car, but that's part of the Figaro's shtick. Everything on DCY's car seems in order, including the bumpers, headlight peaks and wing strips. Free from dents and corrosion, the body panels are in excellent order. Figaros can rust horribly around their wings and rear wheelarches, but this car is fine, with no signs of blistering or warping.

For those used to Nissan's early 'Nineties cabins, the cream and ivory hues of the Figaro's cabin will come as a shock. Pale interiors show up neglect easily, but there's little here to concern a buyer. All the controls function as they should on the dashboard, the simple chrome-effect

ventilation controls labelled in English for those unfamiliar with Kanji. Crucially, the air conditioning works. You may question the validity of climate control in a convertible, but in Japan's suburban crawl, it's a must.

Limited to a pair of dials, the Figaro's white-faced serif instruments drew inspiration from contemporary Swatch watches; although this car displays its speed in kilometres per hour, DCY can convert the read-outs into miles per hour on request. The leather upholstery on the seats (including the vestigial rear bench) has survived well too, with no cracks or tears in the hide or piping.

Popping the deck lid (with the aid of a solenoid switch on the side of the centre console) gains you access to the manual hood. The canvas is in excellent condition, as is the glass rear window complete with heating element.



ON THE ROAD

Emblazoned key in hand, the Figaro starts readily, with a slight clatter from the valve train in keeping with its appearance. Fans of warning buzzers will delight in the Figaro; an unpleasant tone reminds you to put your seatbelt on, while another (reminiscent of a reversing arctic) bongs when reverse is selected on the standard three-speed automatic.

The one-litre turbo-charged four-pot pulls the front-wheel drive Figaro off the line convincingly enough – the light controls and eager gearbox make it an ideal city car. Acceleration is stout up to 50mph or so, beyond that you can tell the 'MA10-S' engine under the bonnet is working hard. That said, with 76bhp and 810kg to propel, the Figaro copes fine with inclines and faster sections of road, managing the national speed limit without much drama.

Push the Figaro through bends and its limitations become apparent. Those tiny 12-inch wheels quickly run out of travel on bumpy roads, although there's nothing inherently wrong with its road holding. Keep within its limits and the Figaro's dynamics are acceptable – with the roof up in traffic it's surprisingly refined.

VERDICT

DCY's Figaro is as good as these cars get. Everything behaves as it should, with no creaks, bangs

or worrying noises. Yes, it has a silly name and indifferent road manners – but this is one early 'Nineties Nissan that will hold its money. Although demand isn't what it once was for these cars, you won't lose money on a well-presented Figaro – with only 20,000 made during an eight-month period in 1991, rust and bodging has claimed more than their fair share of the UK population.

Offering much of the appeal of a classic car without the mechanical pitfalls, Figaros have enjoyed a loyal following and buoyant prices in the UK and Europe for nearly 25 years. 2016 will ring in the quarter century, with the Figaro Owners' Club on hand to roll out the bunting.

DCY usually has a few examples in stock and *Classic Car Buyer's* visit was no exception. There were no fewer than three Figaros in the showroom. Should you have a particular car in mind, co-founder Barry Rycroft can easily source it from Japan.

If you can stand the attention, aren't bothered by its performance and are prepared to spend nearly £7000 on what, in brutal terms, is a K10 Micra in drag, you could do worse than to give DCY a call. As an appreciating asset, it's a sound investment.

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INSURANCE QUOTE

For a 1991 Nissan Figaro, valued at £7000, garaged at night and driven by a 51-year old enthusiast living in the TN1 area, with a clean record (and so no accidents, claims or convictions), and who's a member of a general car club, Footman James will offer comprehensive cover at the competitive price of either £128.72 or £138.72 for an agreed value policy. For further info, including a policy summary plus terms and conditions, visit: <http://tinyurl.com/nbvkyte> This quote was issued by Footman James on Tuesday, August 25.

TECH SPEC

ENGINE:	987cc
POWER:	76bhp
TOP SPEED:	110mph
0-60mph:	12 secs
ECONOMY:	50mpg
GEARBOX:	3-sp auto

