Nissan’s bigger-battery BEV—the 2019 Leaf Plus review

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- The Nissan Leaf Plus starts at $36,550.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- One of the Leaf Plus’ better angles. The shape has a drag coefficient (Cd) of 0.28.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- From other angles it can be an ungainly thing, to my eyes.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Unfortunately, it rained a lot during my time with the Leaf Plus.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Under the hood you’ll find an uprated 160kW/250hp electric motor.
- The Leaf Plus’ interior. Visibility is mostly good, although there are blind spots from the very thick A pillar. The quarter glass helps a little.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- My other complaint about the interior is that the driver’s seat feels like it’s overstuffed, which exacerbates the feeling of sitting on top of the car instead of in it.
- The Eco button is on the left. The car is not that much slower in this mode, and you get a meaningful range

increase. Next to it is the switch to toggle one-pedal driving.
Jonathan Gitlin

- 128 miles of range at 60% SoC in Normal.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- 136 miles of range at 60% SoC in Eco mode.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- A week wasn’t long enough to entirely deplete the Leaf Plus’ battery, even though I drove it at every possible occasion, free of carbon guilt.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The Leaf Plus uses the CHAdeMO plug and can charge at up too 100kW. Unlike the smaller-battery Leaf, all Leaf Pluses can fast-charge as standard.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The NissanConnect app. Unlike Nissan’s old connected-car service, this one shouldn’t be vulnerable to a 2G man-in-the-middle attack.
- The new 8-inch infotainment screen.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Nissan’s infotainment system is middle of the pack.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Sirius XM is standard on all Leaf Pluses.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- But you have to buy the SV or SL if you want navigation that doesn’t use your smartphone’s GNSS.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- There are 360° parking cameras.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The main instrument panel can be configured to show a few different screens.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Nav directions would go here if I had a route set.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Nissan’s ProPilot Assist is a pretty good ADAS (advanced driver-assistance system).
  Jonathan Gitlin

- With the 60/40 rear seat in use, there's 23.6 cubic feet (668L) of cargo space. Drop the seat back and that goes up to 30 cubic feet (850L).
  Jonathan Gitlin
- There are 33.5 inches (851mm) of rear leg room.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Nissan brought this NISMO Leaf to the NY Auto Show. I wonder if they'd let me have a go in it?
  Jonathan Gitlin

Electric vehicles are the future of driving, even if it might take us a few more decades to get there. They were also the past of driving; early automobiles, as often as not, ran on battery power, and even Henry Ford's wife eschewed one of his creations for a more sophisticated European-made EV. It's just that right now, EVs aren't really the present of driving. I'm sure global EV sales will set another new record for year-on-year growth, but 2018's banner year still represented just 2.1% of global light-passenger vehicle sales.

Of course, people can only buy electric cars if someone builds them. And it has taken a combination of draconian European carbon fines and diesel's utter disgrace for the world's biggest car makers to truly catch that religion. But there were some early converts. Like the charismatic car company CEO who bet big on mass-produced EVs and lithium-ion batteries, earning a description from Wired as "either a brilliant visionary or crazy as a loon."

No, not *that* CEO, although I did discover that quote reading Edward Niedermeyer's forthcoming book on Tesla. I am referring to Carlos Ghosn, former CEO of Nissan and Renault, who wanted his companies building a half-million EVs a year—back in 2013. Obviously, that plan didn't quite work out, but Nissan sold almost 300,000 Leafs (Leaves?) by the time the second-generation Leaf went on sale in 2017.

Many blamed the original Leaf's small battery size and low

range for it failing to take the world quietly by storm. Indeed, there were plenty of similar complaints in the comments when we tested the second-gen Leaf, even though its 40kWh battery was 25% larger than the outgoing model. Which is where the $36,550 2019 Leaf Plus comes in.

45% more power, 55% more kWh

Nissan was always planning a bigger-battery option for its BEV, and that option finally went on sale earlier this year. The Leaf now packs 62kWh of lithium-ion between its axles, and there's now a more powerful 160kW (214hp), 339Nm (250lb-ft) AC synchronous electric motor under the hood. Yes, the motor, inverter, and HVAC stuff still live under the hood—it's still a small hatchback, and that stuff had to go somewhere. And no, the battery still doesn't use liquid cooling, although it has a warranty for eight years or 100,000 miles against excessive loss of capacity.

There are some other notable changes compared to the 40kWh Leaf. The Leaf Plus is capable of faster DC fast-charging; it will now accept up to 100kW, still via the CHAdeMO connector. There's a new 8-inch infotainment system, although you have to opt for the $38,510 Leaf Plus SV or $42,550 Leaf Plus SL trims if you want it to have onboard navigation. (Android Auto and Apple CarPlay are standard even on the Leaf Plus S.)

The SV and SL also come with expanded connectivity via NissanConnect smartphone apps. The app lets you check on your car's status and start or stop it charging. You can also use it to remotely turn on the lights or the climate control, a useful feature if you park your car outdoors during summer.

Otherwise, the new Leaf shares much with the car I tested a couple of years ago.

That extra power is noticeable, though. The larger battery has added another 347lbs (157kg) to the party—a Leaf Plus weighs

between 3,780-3,853lbs (1,714-1,748kg) depending on trim. But it’s only about 10% more than the 40kWh Leaf; by contrast, the motor has 45% more power. Nissan says that the Leaf Plus is 13% quicker than the standard Leaf when going from 50-75mph (80-120km/h). If you do want to drive the Leaf Plus like a hooligan, the tires quickly reach their limits, and you’re rewarded first with torque steer, then with understeer.

I’m not sure it needs Normal mode

In fact, I spent very little time with the Leaf Plus in Normal. It’s more than quick enough for city life in Eco, which remaps the accelerator, limits power output, and reduces the energy draw from the car’s climate control. Switching to Eco also resulted in a meaningful (~10%) increase in estimated range. During my week with the Leaf Plus, I averaged 3.5 miles/kWh from mostly city driving, exactly matching the EPA rating for the heavier SV and SL trims. According to EPA figures, the SV and SL have a range of 215 miles (346km); the lighter Leaf Plus S was scored at 3.6 miles/kWh and 226 miles (364km) of range.

Unfortunately I wasn’t able to test out the Leaf Plus with a 100kW DC fast charger, just an older 50kW unit. Nissan says that the Leaf Plus will go from 0-80% state of charge in 45 minutes at 100kW; at 50kW that takes an hour, and a full charge using 240v AC requires 11.5 hours.

The 2019 Leaf Plus faces a much more crowded market than its brave predecessor back in 2011. There’s the Tesla Model 3 obviously, although one of those will cost a good deal more; because Nissan has yet to sell 200,000 EVs in the US, all Leafs are eligible for the full $7,500 IRS tax credit. BEV buyers looking for value can also pick from the Kia Niro EV and Hyundai Kona EV, but only if they live in a zero-emissions state. And, of course, the venerable Chevrolet Bolt and BMW i3. (I mean, have you *seen* used i3 prices recently?)

But the Leaf Plus is a good car; certainly the best new Nissan you can buy. Whether you think the extra range and power is worth the extra $6,000 over the already-good 40kWh version probably depends on how far your commute is and how many road trips you think you'll do.

Listing image by Jonathan Gitlin

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