

Entry-level sophistication from Toyota

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer



Toyota Yaris S sedan

STANDARD EQUIPMENT:

Air conditioning; Electronic power steering; Side rocker panels, Driver side vertical seat adjustment; 60/40 split folding rear seat; Tilt steering wheel; AM/FM w/ CD & MP3. Base Price:..... \$14,050
Options: Power package (15-Inch alloy wheels, Anti-lock brakes, Power door locks, Power windows, Power outside mirrors, Audio with LCD display, Cruise control, Upgraded interior trim, Tachometer \$1,425; Rear spoiler with LED stop lamp \$435; Carpeted floor/cargo mat \$150; Rear bumper protector \$65.
Total Options.....\$2,075
Freight.....\$580
Price as Tested.....\$16,705

DIMENSIONS

EPA Sizecompact
Weight.....2,326 lb.
Wheelbase100.4 in.
Length.....169.3 in.
Width.....66.5 in.
Height56.7 in.
Fuel Capacity11.1 gal.
Cargo Capacity.....12.9 cu. ft.

MECHANICAL

Engine1.5L DOHC 4-Cyl.
Horsepower106@6000
Torque103@4200
Transmission4-Spd. Auto
DriveFront wheel
Brakes.....Disc/Drum ABS
Tires185/60R15

PERFORMANCE

0 to 60 mph.....est. 9.0 sec.
EPA economy rating34/39 mpg
Our actual fuel econ35.6 mpg

COMPETITORS

Chevrolet Aveo, Ford Focus, Honda Fit, Hyundai Elantra, Hyundai Accent, Kia Spectra, Kia Rio, Nissan Versa, Saturn Ion, Scion xA, Suzuki Aerio, Suzuki Reno



The 2007 subcompact Toyota Yaris has replaced Toyota's entry-level Echo, which wasn't a runaway sales success. The new Yaris boasts EPA ratings of 34 mpg city and 40 mpg highway – not quite the numbers advertised by the hybrids, but the Yaris is about \$10,000 cheaper to buy. Of course, fuel economy varies depending on how heavy footed you are on the accelerator, (one of us gets at least about 10 percent better fuel economy than the other, who has bigger shoes).

What took them so long? Toyota's Yaris was first launched in Europe in 1999, was named the European "Car of the Year" and has since become Toyota's best-selling model in that market. It also was named "Japan Car of the Year" the same year. Now eight years later, Toyota is bringing the Yaris to North America. Again, we ask, what took them so long?

Coming in a three-door liftback or a four-door sedan, the Yaris is economical, stylish and fun to drive. It has short overhangs, a low center of gravity and a chrome-trimmed front grille that is centered between sharp character lines. Before bringing the pair to the US market, they were refined to make them a little more sophisticated and less Spartan in an effort to expand the appeal. The rear of the Liftback features a more substantial appearance with large taillights and a wide rear door for easy cargo area access. The rear of the sedan has a wide trunk

that extends down to the bumper molding, which provides a more substantial appearance.

Inside we found the interior of both models surprisingly spacious, with a higher quality of material than we expected. The instrument panel in the center of the dashboard was a bit disconcerting, but after a little driving time we found it very convenient from either front seat. It also allowed us to keep a closer eye on each other's speeds. At night, it was strange to see no lights in front of the steering wheel, which we actually thought was less distracting.

There's no secret to how the Yaris gets good fuel economy. It starts with a light-weight 2,300 pound vehicle and then propels it with a little 1.5-liter four-cylinder engine with variable valve timing with intelligence (VVT-i) rated at 106 horsepower. The combination of those two elements produces 34 mpg for city driving and up to 40 mpg for highway driving, or 39 with the optional automatic transmission. We think those fuel economy numbers are realistic, too. We drove both the liftback and the sedan and averaged 35.6 mpg for both cars.

The drivetrain is a typical front-wheel-drive configuration and includes front disc brakes and rear drum brakes. The steering is an electronic rack-and-pinion system. The suspension is a tried and true MacPherson strut in the front, while

the rear uses a simple torsion bar to save weight and money. Nevertheless, the system produces a very smooth ride. The handling is a little on the soft side with some body roll, but this is not the kind of car that is normally driven hard.

The Liftback and the sedan come in the entry-level CE and the LE plus the sedans adds the sport-themed Yaris S. The CE Liftback is modestly equipped with features like hand-crank windows, air conditioning, tilt steering wheel, four-way adjustable front seats, audio prep package, front and rear cup holders, advanced front seat airbags and liftback luggage cover plus several other small features.

The CE Liftback starts at \$12,430 including the destination charge. The LE Liftback adds AM/FM/CD audio system with MP3 capability and MP3 mini-jack, 15-inch steel wheels with covers and a rear wiper. The 4-door S sedan has a base price of \$14,630 including delivery.

Aside from the basic configuration, the liftback and hatchback are both cars are very different in design and have few shared body parts. Under the surface they both start with the same unibody platform, but the sedan gets stretched 3.5-inches in the wheelbase and measures 19.3-inches longer. This creates 3 cubic feet more interior space. Both cars also have just short of 13 cubic feet of cargo space and both rear seats

fold down (except on the CE sedan) to expand cargo space.

The modestly equipped CE sedan has all the same features of the CE liftback plus six-way adjustable front seats and side mirror remote over the liftback standard equipment. The LE Sedan adds 60/40 split rear seat, rear defroster and the Yaris S sedan adds front and rear under bumper spoiler, side rocker panels and special badges. The 4-door SE sedan has a base price of \$14,630 including delivery. Of course, there is optional equipment that I strongly suggest. The power package that adds power door locks/windows/outside mirrors, cruise control, AM/FM/CD with LED display, 15-inch alloy wheels and anti-lock brakes for just \$1,425. It's a big value!

Yaris performance is very respectable for such a small engine. The buff magazines show 0 to 60 mph times in the 9-plus second range. We recorded 69 mph in our own acceleration test of about one-eighth mile.

The Yaris is good basic transportation, economical to operate and relatively fun to drive, all for a very affordable price.

Toyota has tried to appeal to a broad market with the Yaris As a three-door hatchback it has more of a sporty, but economical appeal, while the sedan works better for a family or empty nesters who occasionally take friends or grandchildren along. ■