

TASTY TOYOTA TRIO

THREE QUICK LOOPS JUST 'ROUND TOWN By Joe Sage

We recently had a chance to drive a few of Toyota's latest. We met at the Phoenix Zoo, and each drive was about 20 minutes long—though it gave us city streets, a stretch of freeway, and we even devised a tight-circle handling test.

The vehicles were three of Toyota's best known: the midsize Camry sedan; the subcompact Yaris; and the Sienna minivan.

CAMRY: The midsize sedan segment is the biggest in the industry, and more competitive each year. Camry has long been the midsize sales leader, as well as the best-selling car (not truck) overall in the US.

Toyota brand strategy manager Ethan Leighton calls Camry a "harbinger for the brand," so its new face, with a "trapezoidal" grille evocative of the Lexus

"spindle," is likely to catch on (a version has already been applied to the Yaris). Toyota is excited about the new Camry—with new style that goes beyond years of vanilla, as well as an extensive feature set.

Camry is available in nine versions: four trim levels, two of those available in a choice of four-cylinder or V6 powerplant, plus three trim levels in a hybrid.

By the numbers, the difference in V6 horsepower is far more dramatic than its tradeoff in fuel mileage (both top 30 MPG on the highway; see sidebar), though you do slip above \$30,000 with the V6, on a car that starts at \$22-something. All in all, you have a wide range of choice.

LE and SE trim levels create a matrix of luxury (L), sport (S) and comfort. XLE and XSE models are amped-up versions of each, but even a four-cylinder SE has spe-

cific attention paid to sporty suspension and handling. A mid-priced SE trim grade for the hybrid model is new this year.

This five-seater comes with 16-, 17- or 18-inch wheels, depending on model.

In our brief comparisons, we thought the hybrid outperformed the four-cylinder among the more fuel-miserly models, although hybrids cost about four grand more than gasoline equivalents. The hybrid's shifter has a B mode as well as D, which can optimize fuel mileage through augmented regenerative braking.

The 2015 Camry is built in Kentucky, with 75 percent US parts. Research and development is all done in the US, and this new model—with over 1900 changes listed, including an all new body except for the roof panel—is the result of considerable customer input, resulting in reengineered ride, handling and brakes.

The instrument panel is new, soft-touch surfaces abound, and electronics and controls are all updated, including the segment's first wireless smartphone charging.

There have been over 10 million Camrys sold



(Front to back): the 2015 Toyota Camry midsize sedan; the 2015 Toyota Yaris subcompact; and the 2015 Toyota Sienna minivan.

in the US, selling at about 50 an hour, and almost 7 million are still on the road.

YARIS: This perennial value purchase has slipped dramatically in sales, from over 100,000 in 2008 to just over 13,000 for 2014. The subcompact segment is important, though volume is about a quarter that of compacts or midsize. Yaris has long seemed to hold an enviable spot as the scotch-tape/xerox of the bunch, the name used to represent any of them.

This is actually one of the toughest segments to satisfy. Leighton tells us it has to be "stylish, cool, safe, reliable and fun to drive. They want it all." The 2015 model has a new instrument panel with a wider feel, 20 percent better sound insulation, a 6.1-inch touchscreen and 60/40 split fold-down rear seat standard.

The chassis and suspension are tighter, steering is retuned, and tires and wheels gain about a half-inch of stance in width.

We enjoyed driving it, even on notoriously competitive Valley roads. The shifter's manual mode helped, although there were some limitations in its L-2-3 range. Suspension was strong, and it handled well in our tight circle test at speed.

SIENNA: There are four big sellers in the minivan segment: Chrysler, Dodge, Nissan and the Sienna from Toyota—all just about equal in sales (others are minimal). With the Dodge Caravan pulling out, its customers may be up for grabs, or they may simply move to Chrysler, which could give it a more than double-volume lead over the others. Toyota knows this is a good time to put its best foot forward. The 2015 Sienna is a midcycle refresh.

Toyota addresses the minivan market with five trim levels, then adds Preferred, Premium, Navigation and Advanced Tech subsets to those. The price of entry can be in the 20s or can approach fifty grand. There are 7- and 8-seaters, though this is not correlated to the climb up trim levels.

Kia Sedona, small in sales, is all new this year, and one of its trick features is luxurious "first class lounge" second-row seating. Toyota Sienna has similar seats, though with three inches less legroom.

The Sienna felt big to us, luxury yacht sized. Its 37.5-foot turning circle may bear this out, though that's only about a foot more than the nimble Kia Sedona. Most of Sienna's feel comes with its sig-

nificant interior volume—150 cu.ft. behind the first row (eight more than Kia). It has room for everything, and as soon as we were accelerating powerfully up the first freeway ramp, we knew the Sienna could be a great experience for a long road trip.

ENTUNE AND JBL AUDIO: There are three levels of Entune Audio, working up vehicle trim levels. At the Camry XSE and XLE V6 level, you can further upgrade to Entune Premium JBL Audio, with ten speakers and the same Clari-Fi compression restoration technology as in Harman-Infinity systems used by the Korean car brands. It's unfortunate that this only comes with the V6, as those (somewhat surprisingly) represent only about six percent of Camry sales.

We had driven with audio off most of the morning, to better concentrate on engine and drive characteristics. Once we had a solid demo of the JBL system while parked, we hit the road again, but with audio maxed out.

And that's when the most fun began. ■

2015 TOYOTA CAMRY

ENGINE (4)	.....2.5L 4-cyl 16v aluminum alloy
POWER/TORQUE	.....178 hp / 170 lb-ft
MPG	.....25/35/28 (city/hwy/comb)
TRANSMISSION	.....6-speed ECTi automatic
ENGINE (V6)	.....3.5L V6 24v aluminum alloy
POWER/TORQUE	.....268 hp / 248 lb-ft
MPG	.....21/31/25 (city/hwy/comb)
TRANSMISSION	.....6-speed ECTi automatic
HYBRID	.....2.5L 4-cyl, 105 kW elec, NiMH batt
POWER/TORQUE	.....156 hp / 156+199 lb-ft
MPG	.....43/39/41-40/38/40 (cty/hwy/com)
TRANSMISSION	.....CVT
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
WEIGHT	.....3240-3480 lb

BASE PRICE	LE (4-cyl)	.....\$22,970
	SE (4-cyl)	.....\$23,840
	XLE or XSE (4)	.....\$26,150
	XLE or XSE (V6)	.....\$31,370
	Hybrid	.....\$26,790-29,980
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....	.....\$825

2015 TOYOTA YARIS

ENGINE	.....1.5L 4-cyl 16v DOHC with VVTi
POWER/TORQUE	.....106 hp / 103 lb-ft
MPG	.....5-manual 30/37/33 (city/hwy/comb)
	.....6-auto 30/36/32 (city/hwy/comb)
TRANSMISSION	.....5-spd man, 6-spd ECT auto
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
WHEELS	.....L, LE 15-in steel; SE 16-in alloy
BRAKES	.....L, LE: disc/drum; SE disc/disc
SEATING	.....five (5)
LENGTH	.....155.5 in
WHEELBASE	.....98.8 in
WEIGHT	.....2315-2335 lb

BASE PRICE	L (3-dr) manual	.....\$14,845
	" (") auto	.....\$15,570
	" (5-dr) "	.....\$15,945
	LE (3-dr) auto	.....\$16,505
	" (5-dr) "	.....\$16,880
	SE (5-dr) manual	.....\$16,820
	" (") auto	.....\$17,620
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....	.....\$825

2015 TOYOTA SIENNA

ENGINE	.....3.5L V6 24v aluminum alloy
POWER/TORQUE	.....266 hp / 245 lb-ft
MPG	.....FWD: 18/25/21 (city/hwy/comb)
	.....AWD: 16/23/19 (city/hwy/comb)
TRANSMISSION	.....6-speed ECT automatic
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD or AWD
WHEELS	.....6.5x17, 7x18, 7x19
BRAKES (DISC)	.....fr 12.9 vent / rear 12.2 solid
SEATING	.....seven (7) or eight (8)
LENGTH	.....200.2 in
WHEELBASE	.....119.3 in
WEIGHT	.....4375-4705 lb
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....6.2 in
TOWING CAPACITY	.....3500 lb

BASE PRICE (examples from 16 models):	
L (V6 7-pass)	.....\$28,600
XLE Premium (8-pass)	.....\$38,355
Limited Premium (AWD 7p)	.....\$46,150
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....\$825