

Scion iAM

Which is who? Toyota's youth brand may be having an identity crisis. By Joe Sage

We recently drove the new Scion iA and iM for a week each, not far apart.

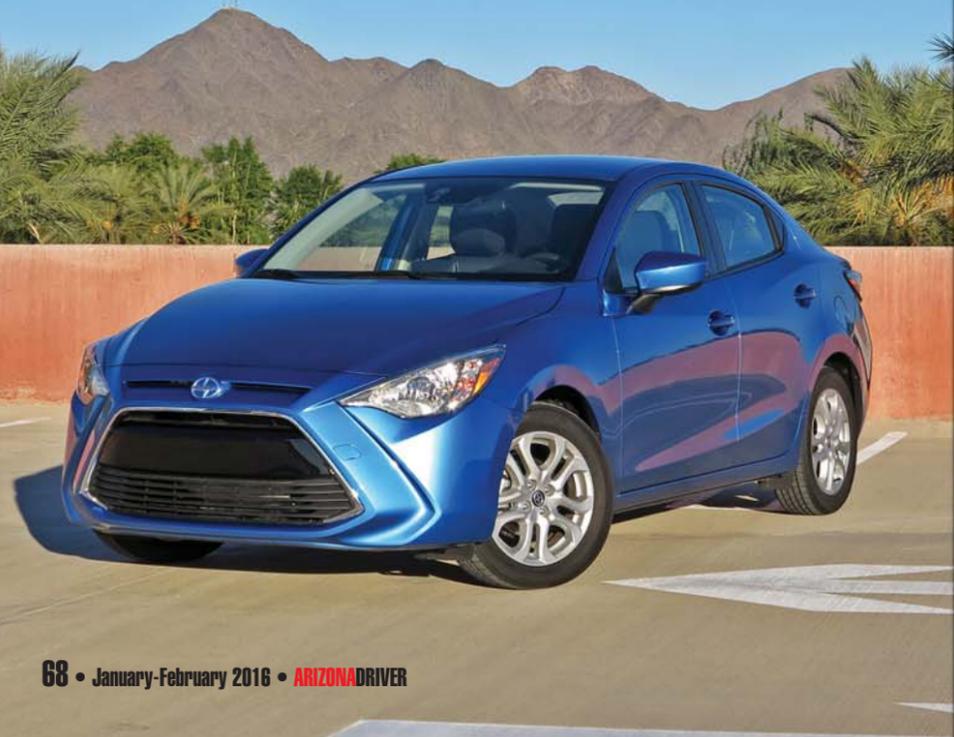
SCION iA: We knew the new Scion iA is really a Mazda2 with a new nose and badges (and is a Toyota Yaris in Canada and Mexico.) We attributed the Mazda core to the iA being basically a well-outfitted car at a good price.

Our lead-up materials had indicated the Scion iA would start at \$15-something thousand. Fifteen seemed a reasonable number for a base economy subcompact. In reality, it approaches sixteen (\$15,700 with a 6-speed manual, which we'd like fine). With an auto-

SPECIFICATIONS: 2016 SCION iA

ENGINE.....	1.5L DOHC 16v 4-cyl
HP/TORQUE.....	106 hp / 103 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION.....	6-speed automatic
DRIVETRAIN.....	FWD
BRAKES.....	10.2" ventilated disc / 7.9" drum
SEATING CAPACITY.....	5-passenger
TURNING CIRCLE.....	32.2 ft
CARGO CAPACITY.....	not stated
WEIGHT.....	2416 lb
MPG.....	33/42/37 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE.....	\$16,800
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	770
TOTAL.....	\$17,570

2016 Scion iA 4-Door Sedan



matic, it quickly approaches seventeen (\$16,800). With destination, it's \$17,570, starting to approach eighteen. With Kia Rio at \$14,165, Mitsubishi Mirage at \$12,995 or, for that matter, a US Toyota Yaris at \$14,895, this Scion was losing its edge on raw economy.

Value on the iA is a mix—it has power windows, a tach, a touchscreen and pushbutton start. But it lacks one-touch on the right window, the touchscreen only works in conjunction with distant knobs, and pushbutton start is of limited convenience when you still need your key in hand, anyway, for remote locks (which they dare to call keyless, but which means a button on the key like 25 years ago).

We referred to the manual more often than average, in search of features, finding some answers but mostly confirming the limitations of this entry level model. We were sometimes surprised at where value was delivered and where corners were cut.

On average, it's a nicely featured car, for well, somewhere just a little below its price. Brakes are low spec but stop its 2416 pounds solidly. (We were also disturbingly aware of the car's light weight in a heavy wind at one point.) The engine—well, 106 hp is 106 hp, but it makes the most of that, short of the lack of response we felt from the transmission.

The iA's 6-speed automatic was fine cruising (given 106 hp), but upon entering traffic—always aggressive in our neck of the woods—it would repeatedly just stop to think things

THE ORIGINAL LANDSCAPE AND A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCION

It's hard now to visualize the roads of 2003—full of big Oldsmobiles, Crown Vics and truck-framed SUVs. It was equally hard then to visualize what was coming, but we recall trying to do so. Things were crazy in the Middle East oil patch, and tiny Scions had been announced in 2002.

In 2003, the 18-24-year-old first-car-buying demographic had been born from 1979-1985, the tail end of Gen X and the first shoppers of Generation Y, the Millennials. Scion was a new brand, aimed squarely at this age range, using guerrilla marketing tactics, unprecedented online shopping and design features, and a new kind of ded-

Scion xA, Scion xB (1st gen), Scion iQ.



icated low-pressure dealer environment to appeal to this new breed of buyers.

The market, the message and the methodology were new, but so were the cars. Picking up cues from the Japanese homeland's "kei cars," these were tiny, urban and downright quirky—like nothing anyone had ever seen here before—as well as economical to purchase, fuel and maintain, all of which suited the target market well.

First up were the teeny Scion xA and teeny, boxy xB (which was soon joined by the Nissan Cube and some would say the bigger Honda Element).

• Next came the Scion tC, and it was at this point we thought the brand lost some individuality—it seemed to us to be mostly just another small coupe. Plus it didn't follow the "x" naming scheme. • Soon after that, the xB was replaced by a newer and bigger xB, and the xA by a newer and bigger xD. These hadn't changed that much, but in an evolving landscape were less quirky, less distinctive. • And for a couple of years, we had the tiny iQ, sort of an affordable Smart car, also made as an EV, but not very successfully. ■

over, like a 1960s automatic with bands slipping, before engaging. But a number of user postings online seem to particularly like this automatic. The difference may be Phoenix driving style—our fellow travelers seemed ready to kill us. It remains a puzzle to us, as we've found other Mazda automatics solid.

SCION iM: We had seen the Scion iM in concept form at the LA Auto Show a year earlier—impressive, even dazzling, with edgy body styling and dramatic detail, angularity in its hood, side sills, fascia and lights—all of which was gone by last spring's New York show, as it moved into production. Too bad. What we have instead is a global platform Toyota Auris, again with a rebadging job.

Unlike the iA, which had no added options, our iM added a few small things to its base price, tipping it above \$20 grand. And yet it lacked such common contemporary features as pushbutton start (which even the iA had).

The iM has more mature styling than we're used to in the Scion lineup—which is nice,

SPECIFICATIONS: 2016 SCION iM

ENGINE.....	1.8L DOHC 16v 4-cyl
HP/TORQUE.....	137 hp / 126 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION.....	"7-speed" CVT-i-S
DRIVETRAIN.....	FWD
BRAKES.....	11.7" disc / 11.0" disc
SEATING CAPACITY.....	5-passenger
TURNING CIRCLE.....	35.4 ft
CARGO CAPACITY.....	20.8 cu ft
WEIGHT.....	3031 lb
MPG.....	28/37/32 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE.....	\$19,200
CARPETED FLOOR MATS / CARGO MAT.....	185
WHEEL LOCKS.....	65
REAR BUMPER PROTECTOR.....	89
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	795
TOTAL.....	\$20,334

2016 Scion iM 5-Door Hatchback



but again seems to undermine any reason for the existence of Scion's separate marque.

Dollar for dollar and pound for pound, the iM struck us as a decidedly more appealing car than the iA, but we knew that was partly attributable to its decidedly cool wheels.

SCION THE BRAND: Somewhere in this same timeframe, we were having a conversation about the brand's origins, what it had been all about at that time and whether it had lost its compass in the 10 or 15 intervening years. Our fellow conversationalist was surprised—"Scion has been around for 10 or 15 years?!" And he is 27 years old—right in the exact demographic the brand was conceived for. This would not seem to bode well.

Scion does still serve a youthful segment of the market, with average buyer age about 15 years younger than Toyota or 25 younger than, say, Buick. Interesting, then, that our 27-year-old—who was 14 when Scion was born—thinks of this as a new brand. That is good, in that being new may boost youthful sales, but bad, in that it was targeted at him all those years, but he had not noticed.

The Scion lineup has been transformed. Gone are the quirky little cars that launched the brand. New this year are one rebadged Mazda and one rebadged Toyota. They join a rebadged Subaru and another rebadged Toyota. Which is fine, as far as it goes. They all get their jobs done as intended. But is this the basis for a separate brand?

Scion was above all founded upon ideas. Those seem to be running thin. ■

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE ...AND IF WE RAN SCION

The roads today are transformed, with legions of compact and subcompact cars and crossovers, arriving from Asia to Europe to Detroit. Millennials are now in the 20-to-36 age range, have often moved upscale, and a subsequent generation is hitting first-car age—if they care, that is, since much has been said about the next generation being the first not to champ at the bit to even get their first driver's license.

By the end of 2014 and 2015, the Scion xD, xB and iQ had all been dropped. They still sell the tC (a Toyota Yaris in emerging markets). In 2013, they introduced a departure, the FR-S roadster (a

Scion tC, Scion FR-S.



reskinned and rebadged Subaru BRZ). For 2016, they've added the iA (a Mazda2 worldwide) and iM (a Toyota Auris worldwide). All rebadges.

Tiny size is no longer distinctive, nor is low price, nor is fuel mileage in the 30-to-40 range. Where does that leave Scion? Just another small car player? We say be quirky, be decidedly different, be a head-turner, be the future. Or why be?

We'd suggest putting the Toyota i-Road into production. Badge it as a Scion. Attract a new generation of drivers who will drive the future. Be quirky. Be economical in purchase, fuel and operation. Turn heads. Sell like hotcakes. A radical idea? Yes. And that's the point. Scion was born as a radical idea, and it may take something like this to carry the brand into a new future. ■

Toyota i-Road.

