

Form-fitting

BY JOE SAGE

Among Toyota's lineup of fully 19 vehicles—cars, SUVs/crossovers, hybrids, pickups and a minivan—the Corolla Hatchback is considered a separate model from the Corolla. Rightly so. New for 2019, it was revealed last spring, months before a new Corolla sedan, letting the hatch establish a sportier new style direction. It suits the spirited little hatchback very well, while the hatchback suits the basic car so well, you'd be excused for thinking it has been around the whole time. That can be attributed to a number of other hot hatches in the segment, a league the Corolla Hatchback joins enthusiastically and fully ready to inhabit.

The Corolla Hatchback, which weighs in a just over a ton and a half, has a 168-hp 2.0-liter engine, versus a 132- or 140-hp 1.8-liter in the sedans.

Corolla Hatchback starts at just \$19,990 in SE trim and has the same engine, suspension, choice of automatic or rev-matching manual (IMT, or intelligent manual transmission) and other build basics as our XSE sample. For a few grand more, the XSE (the only other trim) adds worthwhile features inside and out—dual zone climate, heated leather seats, upgraded audio and a larger screen, fog lights, 18- rather than 16-inch wheels, and a chrome grille surround so you can spot the model straight

away. If you have a few grand, the XSE inclusions are winners. If you don't, the drive experience itself will be exactly equal in the SE. Best of all, the choice does not force buying a base trim just to get the manual trans, as in many other cases. (The automatic on the hatch is a "dynamic shift" CVT.)

It's a classic hot hatch formula, right down to more tangible than average front-drive torque, which tuners may embrace and others may soon ignore, though it can also provide front tire chirp (sometimes unwanted, other times ideal for street cred).

The IMT can be turned on or off. Ours arrived with it turned on, which we were told we'd love, but we turned it off pretty quickly. Someone who doesn't drive manuals all the time might like it, but if you drive manuals all the time you'll be happier taking charge of the details. We also turned off an automatic parking brake that seems out of character to the car (and paradoxically less convenient).

The hatch itself could use an engineering revisit on couple of ergonomic details—the release is very low, small and sharp, and the cargo cover can nail you right between the eyes, especially at night.

Despite 20 to 27 percent more horses than a Corolla sedan, the power curve does not have a lot of headroom in a tight move, all the more reason to welcome the 6-speed manual's gymnastics.

We also welcomed the Flame Blue paint job, the model's promotional color, which suits it well.

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE2.0L 4-cyl DOHC 16v dual inject w dual VVT-i	
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
HP/TORQUE	168 hp / 151 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION6-spd manual (iMT) w rev matching	
SUSPENSION	F: indep MacPherson strut w stblzr bar; R: multi-link w stblzr bar & springs
STEERING	elec power-assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 11.5" vented / R: 10.5" solid automatic electric parking brake
WHEELS / TIRES	18" alum bright machine finish w dark grey metallic paint / 225/40R18
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	169.9 / 103.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	37.4 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	5.1 in
SEATING CAPACITY	five
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.4 / 38.0 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.0 / 29.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	18.0 cu.ft
WEIGHT	3060 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	87 oct reg / 13.2 gal
MPG	28/37/31 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$22,990
ADAPTIVE HEADLIGHTS: LED headlights w level control and auto on/off.....	415
REAR WINDOW SPOILER	375
ALLOY WHEEL LOCKS	65
PROTECTION PKG: Carpeted floor mats, carpeted cargo mat, cargo net, rear bumper protector.....	358
DESTINATION CHARGE	920
TOTAL	25,123

You get interested in a car like this because it gets to the point—simple enough, and as a Toyota surely low maintenance, but sporty and fun. Tech inclusions are generous and inexpensive, though it might do just as well without a couple of them. ■

