

“DON'T EVER CHANGE”

BY JOE SAGE

A few years ago, a friend's kid had some math homework that included a “word problem” couched as the depreciation of a Toyota 4Runner. The automotive people all pounced. “That’s a trick question! A 4Runner never depreciates!” It makes a point: even after years of duty, a 4Runner is likely to be as strong, solid and capable as the day it was born. And why not? It’s basically the same as one born today—the gen-five 4Runner has been in service since introduced in 2009 as a 2010 model.

And that, to many, is a very good thing.

“Change is good” is a mantra to some, while “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” is a mantra to others. As the years roll by, a collective sigh of relief rises from a great many 4Runner fans as the fundamentals of this body-on-frame SUV remain intact.

Sure, there have been light facelifts and big feature upgrades along the way. More noticeable than changes year to year, though, are differences from trim to trim—there are currently a full nine models (and/or special editions) in the 4Runner lineup,

with another on the way for 2022 (see footnote). Of these, four out of nine are TRD models (Venture Edition is built upon the TRD Off-Road), plus there’s a new TRD Sport next year. Even the SR5-based Trail Edition is (as its name might suggest) well up the scale toward TRD off-road-worthiness.

While the entry level SR5 and next-up SR5 Premium have a choice of rear-drive or full-time four-wheel drive, as do a couple of upper end models, all the rest are 4x4 only—real 4x4, a classic part-time system with a 4HI/4LO transfer case.

It’s noteworthy that, even against more luxurious models such as Nightshade and Limited, TRD Pro—the most off-road-worthy of all and the one we’re driving here, available as a 4x4 only—still comes in as the top model by price. It’s significant that they’ve kept this in the top spot, as it plays a big role in defining the whole 4Runner lineup.

Choosing an SUV from Toyota is complex and varied—there are six very different ones, nine if you count hybrids and plug-in hybrids separately,

as they do—while choosing your 4Runner is varied, too, but simpler. All have the same 270-hp 4.0-liter V6 and 5-speed automatic. Even with trim and outfitting variables, weight is about the same for any (varying just 130 pounds among 4x4s), with all achieving the same fuel mileage (other than one point higher for highway only on two-wheel-drive models). Of note to some buyers, the same models that offer rear-drive also offer three rows of seating. Any and all tow 5000 pounds. Wheel size varies, on some for style, most for function. Suspension architecture is the same, though there are upgrades to components on the tougher ones.

TRD Pro is the toughest and priciest 4Runner, but, with two rows of seating, not the heaviest.

New this year is our sample’s no-cost special paint option, Lunar Rock, perfect for both 4Runner and Tacoma TRD Pro, replacing last year’s equally perfect Army Green. (The new color carries special significance for Toyota, as they are currently developing a manned lunar rover.)

Stronger and lighter black TRD alloy flow-form wheels are new, too, equipped with Nitto Terra

Grappler tires. Wheels are a deeper dish design, allowing more play for re-tuned Fox internal bypass shocks and coil springs, all TRD-tuned. Other TRD Pro inclusions are noted in the sidebar.

At 270 hp and almost 5000 pounds, the 4Runner is not bought as a street racing machine, though it performs and feels exactly as an owner expects it to. It does not have a lot of power, but in the spirit of the machine, that feels right, like it’s strictly business. Heading to the wilds northeast of the Valley, we had no trouble maintaining our speed and position in the always competitive surface street traffic for our initial 1,000-foot paved elevation gain. Considering the 4Runner’s off-road-oriented gearing and its venerable 5-speed automatic, that’s impressive. It’s a smooth-running transmission—now with electronically controlled intelligence—but you can feel and hear how busy it is behind the scenes. It strains some, runs its range some, lugs some, but basically maintains your speed and power uniformly. No doubt Toyota has something else in the works for the not too distant future, but it’s certainly no deal-killer today.

The 4Runner’s interior is clean and attractive, somewhat lean and spartan, and bearing many controls with a traditional look and feel—knobs,

in particular, which we appreciate not only for style and inherent function, but because this is a vehicle you’ll likely take into the snows of Flagstaff or farther north, and it’s one of the few in which you can control heat and audio with gloves on. The screen is appropriately smaller, yet the system overall is chock full of the usual higher tech.

We arrived at the start of our rugged off-road spot and popped it from 2HI into 4HI—confirming to ourselves that we love a manual transfer case.

The 4Runner’s reputation precedes it for off-roading, and its visuals confirm it all, even standing still. Specs round it out: generous ground clearance and approach/departure angles, and bigger tires with strong sidewalls (on smaller wheels than the luxe trims). We gave it quite a run, and best of all is that, much as we love the 4Runner, the drive itself is what sticks with you—the mechanicals are splendid but a transparent experience, as things should be with any good tool.

There’s an overall flavor to the 4Runner that some might call a throwback. Call it what you will, this is all key to its charm. We haven’t seen any potential alternative—whatever they might do with this nameplate in the future—but count us among the fans of 4Runner just the way it is. ■



SPECIFICATIONS (TRD PRO)

ASSEMBLY.....	Tahara, Aichi, Japan
ENGINE.....	4.0L alum/alum EFI 24v DOHC V6
COMPRESSION RATIO.....	10.4:1
HP/TORQUE.....	270 hp / 278 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN.....	part time 4x4 w Active TRAC
TRANSMISSION.....	5-spd auto w ECT-I
TRANSFER CASE (HI/LO).....	1.0 / 2.566
TORQUE SPLIT.....	40/60 up to 30/70 or 53/47
SUSPENSION.....	F: coils, indep dbl-wishbone, stblzr bar; R: coils, 4-link rigid, stblzr bar
STEERING.....	pwr assist var gear rack & pinion
BRAKES.....	F: 13.3 vented; R: 12.3 vented
WHEELS.....	17x7.5 TRD Pro alloy, black
TIRES.....	P265/70 R17
TRACK (F/R).....	(TRD Pro) 64.1 / 64.1
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....	191.3 / 109.8 in
HEIGHT.....	w TRD Pro roof rack 72 in
TURNING CIRCLE.....	37.4 ft
APPROACH / DEPARTURE.....	33 / 26°
ROWS / SEATS.....	2-row / 5-passenger
HEADROOM (F/R).....	39.3 / 38.6 in
LEGROOM (F/R).....	41.7 / 32.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY.....	47.2 / 89.7 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	9.6 in
WEIGHT.....	4750 lb
PAYLOAD / GVWR.....	1550 / 6300 lb
TOW CAPACITY.....	5000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY.....	.87 oct unl reg / 23.0 gal
MPG.....	16/19/17 (city/hwy/comb)

2021 TOYOTA 4RUNNER LINEUP

All have 4.0L V6 / 5-spd auto.....	4x2.....	4x4.....
SR5.....	\$36,765.....	\$38,640
SR5 Premium.....	39,825.....	41,700
Trail Edition.....	40,615.....	40,730
TRD Off-Road.....	40,730.....	43,325
TRD Off-Road Premium.....	43,325.....	44,895
Venture Edition.....	44,895.....	45,670
Limited.....	45,670.....	47,705
Nightshade.....	47,085.....	49,120
TRD Pro ▼.....	49,120.....	50,745

(Our sample’s sticker price varies slightly from master price list.)

Arriving for 2022: 4Runner TRD Sport

As with the Tacoma midsize pickup, a new 4Runner TRD Sport will complement TRD Off-Road and TRD Pro, but where those add trail-ready features for the toughest terrain, TRD Sport’s emphasis will be on everyday comfort, adding style points plus exclusive road-handling Cross-Linked Relative Absorber System (X-REAS) suspension (and 2WD or 4WD). Price should fall between SR5 and TRD Off-Road.



BASE PRICE.....\$50,470

TRD PRO INCL: 2.5" Fox internal bypass shocks front/rear w piggyback reservoir rear; TRD-tuned front springs; 1/4"-thick TRD aluminum front skid plate with red TRD lettering; 17" matte black flow-formed TRD alloy wheels w P265/70R17 Nitto Terra Grappler all-terrain tires; TRD branded cat-back exhaust; color-keyed front & rear bumpers w black accents, door handles, heated & power outside mirrors, overfenders, side rocker panels, hood scoop & rear spoiler; black hood scoop insert & black TRD roof rack; unique TOYOTA front grille; black TRD Pro external hard badges; smart key with push-button start.

OPTIONS: TRD Pro floor mats (169); cargo cover (179); cargo mat (100); door edge guard (79); paint protection film (395).....total: 922

DESTINATION CHARGE.....1175

TOTAL.....\$52,567