

All-purpose

by Joe Sage

Getting to Mudfest, the NWAPA Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year event on Washington State's lower Olympic Peninsula, sounds simple enough—fly to Seattle and drive to a lodging base about 65 miles away. Up there, it's more complex than it sounds here—from the Sea-Tac maze, south on I-5 to Tacoma, over the bridge, and on to successively smaller roads and towns till we reach our destination. And a torrent of rain slowed traffic down to single-digit speeds at times.

For the return, we compared Washington State Ferry options, some with long waits that could cost us our flight, and others too tight to count on. But Bremerton was doable, if we were lucky; and if not, there would still be time to double back and retrace our original land-and-bridge route. At this point, we had the heaviest rain of the trip, but we nonetheless hit the ferry just right, loading about two minutes before we left the dock for a great hour-long ride to downtown Seattle.

The Toyota Highlander comes in a whopping 22 builds—seven trim levels, all available with your

choice of front- or all-wheel drive, all but two optionally available as a fuel-frugal 35-MPG hybrid, and one available only as the hybrid. Base prices range from \$35,855 to \$51,460.

The Highlander assigned to our task was a special new Bronze Edition (the one available only as a hybrid), at upper-middle price for the range, with tough 18-inch bronze wheels, bronze-stitched SofTex seats and other touches that make it equal parts showy and low-key outdoorsy. Ours was finished in attractive Cement paint; it's also available in Wind Chill Pearl or Midnight Black Metallic.

Transmission on non-hybrids is an 8-speed automatic, while hybrids have a CVT. The all-wheel-drive system is electronic on-demand, applying an electric motor to the rear wheels as needed.

A trip like this adds up to limited time in a vehicle, but it included everything other than driving the muddy event courses themselves. Highlander was perfect for the mission—room for gear, all-wheel drive for slick conditions, and throughout it all—rain, mud, traffic, slippery ferry ramps and more—backing up its own popularity and reputation of being as solid, comfortable, reliable and generally useful a vehicle as you can find. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

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| FINAL ASSEMBLY | Princeton, Indiana |
| SIZE / ROWS / SEATS | midsize SUV / three / seven |
| ENGINE | 2.5L I4HV DOHC 4-cyl 16v Atkinson cycle w Dual VVTIE (var valve timing-intelligent, motor intake) |
| HP/TORQUE | engine 186 combined 243 hp / 175 lb-ft |
| COMPRESSION RATIO | 14:1 |
| TRANSMISSION | electronic CVT (ECVT), sequential mode |
| DRIVETRAIN | electronic on-demand AWD |
| SUSPENSION | F: indep MacPherson strut w stblzr bar, trailing-wishbone; R: multi-link w stblzr bar |
| STEERING | elec pwr assist rack & pinion |
| BRAKES | F: 13.3 vented; R: 13.3 solid w electronic control, integrated regenerative braking |
| WHEELS | 18-in bronze-colored alum-alloy |
| TIRES | P235/65R18 |
| LENGTH / WHEELBASE | 194.9 / 112.2 in |
| TURNING CIRCLE | 37.4 ft |
| APPRCH / DEPART | 18.1 / 22.7° |
| GROUND CLEARANCE | 8.0 in |
| HEADROOM (F/2/3) | (w/moonroof) 38.4 / 39.4 / 36.1 in |
| LEGROOM (F/2/3) | 40.4 / 41.0 / 27.7 in |
| CARGO CAPACITY | 16.0 / 48.4 / 84.3 cu.ft |
| WEIGHT | (AWD) 4515 lb |
| PAYLOAD / GVWR | (AWD) 1485 / 6000 lb |
| TOW CAPACITY | 3500 lb |
| FUEL / CAPACITY | .87 oct reg unl / 17.1 gal |
| MPG | 35/35/35 (city/hwy/comb) |
| BASE PRICE | \$45,480 |
| ALL-WEATHER FLOOR/CARGO LINER | .318 |
| DESTINATION CHARGE | 1215 |
| TOTAL | \$47,013 |

