

Simplicity

by Joe Sage

The name says it all, or at least sets the stage—the new Toyota Corolla Cross picks up the aura of the immensely popular Corolla compact sedan, while Cross suggests a crossover, though officially categorized as a Small SUV (a category invented up a few years ago along with urban, adventure and other new classifications, as vehicles started popping up below, near or overlapping sub-compact crossovers). SUV and crossover terms have blended so much by now, Cross works.

The compact Corolla sedan is a close second to the top-selling midsize Camry among seven Toyota cars in the US. With nine models (already almost 30 percent more by pure head count), their SUV and crossover sales total about 50 percent more than cars. The hot new RAV4—which sells some 40 or 50 percent more than either Corolla or Camry (or the popular Tacoma midsize pickup)—is top seller for the entire brand.

Put that all together, and a compact crossover

version of the Corolla is a formula that seems destined for immediate success.

Corolla Cross is built on the same high-strength TNGA-C global platform (as are a half-dozen or so, with some 16 variants, including Toyota C-HR and Lexus UX crossovers). But there's no mistaking its commonality with Corolla—powertrains are the same, and the platform is adjusted only minimally, with wheelbase about two and a half inches shorter and total length about six and a half inches shorter on the Corolla Cross than the Corolla.

Our calendar brought us the Corolla Cross (its top trim in top all-wheel-drive fitment) immediately following a super luxury vehicle at about six times the cost. That sounds like a recipe for a shock, but our first words upon entering the Toyota were, "this is a perfectly fine little unit." We noted its power seats and mirrors, and we appreciated its smaller and relatively simply screen, as well as tangible, quickly grabbable knobs for everything

from climate to audio, all refreshingly user-friendly and reliable in these days of screen-dependent distraction. (We did find the radio preset arrangement a bit limited.)

The relatively large and stylish wheels are one of the main things that make this vehicle look like more than it might otherwise and thus such a value. Nice move. Yet they aren't so big that you have expensive and vulnerable low-profile tires. Nice fitment.

Our reverie continued during a predawn run to the post office and airport, then was interrupted as a six-figure luxury performance coupe promptly blew our doors off, crossing multiple lanes, making multiple turns and blowing through the ramp-metering red light without signaling or stopping. This type of, uh, competitive behavior is common in these parts, so if gets the best of you, this little SUV's 169 horses may not be enough. But in other areas, where the culture is different, and/or where its 8.1 inches of ground clearance, all-wheel drive and presumably its (as yet unspecified) cargo volume are more important, it will turn many heads.

While there are a lot of people who profess to dislike CVTs across the board, we tend to think most users will find them transparent in most situations. This one, however, did make itself pretty known to us, settling in on the freeway at about 10 mph less than the rest of the traffic and pushing to keep up. In some parts of the country that would be no problem, but around here it is noticeable.

Power is a little weak from the line, though fine once in motion. In a righthand turn after a full stop, it could pause mid-turn, a common behavior in a great many automatics. We might expect smoother continuity from a CVT, but that's what we got.

We hesitate to call anything a starter car, though that's a great term for something that may not be everything you dream of, but is everything you need and then some, and you can aspire from there. We avoid "starter car" because this may be exactly what you need not just for a first car, but at any point in your lifetime or vehicle history. The clean and simple Corolla Cross easily fills the need parameters, if not the "starter" term, from a purely positive point of view.

This affordable utility is rock solid, nicely equipped and a good handler. Though not super powerful or dressed in exotic hides and timbers,



it's spacious, capable and really lacking nothing. And of course it's notably economical both in purchase and operation.

Many times during our week, the Corolla Cross brought to mind that top-selling RAV4, in general personality. We nicknamed it the RAV3.

If your aspirations run higher, the RAV4 starts for \$4500 more. But if the Corolla Cross is ringing your bell and you can't aspire further till later, this vehicle is a great place to dive in right now. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Huntsville, Alabama
EPA CLASS	.....small SUV
ROWS / SEATS	.....two / five
ENGINE	.....2.0L Dynamic Force 4-cyl DOHC, 16v w Dual VVT-i, alum alloy block/head
HP/TORQUE	.....169 hp / 150 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....13.0:1
TRANSMISSION	.....Direct Shift-CVT (gear ratios 1st - 3.377, final 4.014)
DRIVETRAIN	.....AWD / Dynamic Torque Control
SUSPENSION	.....F: indep MacPherson strut, 25mm stblzr bar; R: multi-link, 21mm stblzr bar
STEERING	.....elec pwr-assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 12.0 vented; R: 11.1 solid disc
WHEELS / TIRES	.....18-in alloy / 225/55R18
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....175.6 / 103.9 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....8.1 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....35.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....39.5 / 39.1 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....42.9 / 32.0 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....24.3 / TBD cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3325 lb
PAYLOAD / GVWR	.....1130 / 4455 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....1500 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....reg unl or higher / 13.2 gal
MPG	.....29/32/30 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$27,625
AUDIO PLUS	.....8-in touchscreen, 9 JBL speakers incl subwoofer & amp, Android/Apple/Alexa, SiriusXM w 3 mos, security alarm .....1465
MOONROOF / BACK DOOR	.....tilt & slide moonroof, power back door .....1250
FRONT LIGHTING	.....auto-leveling adaptive .....615
MATS	.....carpet floor mat, cargo mat .....249
MIRROR	.....frameless, HomeLink .....175
ACTIVITY MOUNT	.....399
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1215
TOTAL	.....\$32,993

(Note: prices have increased; see below.)

2022 COROLLA CROSS LINEUP

	FWD	AWD
L	.....\$22,445	.....\$23,745
LE	.....24,795	.....26,095
XLE	.....26,575	.....27,875

