

Reigning champion BY JOE SAGE

If you haven't discovered the all-new fifth-generation Prius (introduced during the lockdown era), you need to. It is totally transformed, while truer than ever to the mission where it has long reigned.

Everywhere we went, ours caused quite a stir. Some were seeing it for the first time: "That's the new Prius?!" Some already knew what it was: "That's the new Prius!" "And it gets 52 MPG!" we'd be sure to point out to all. (Some versions get even more, as high as 57 MPG.) And everyone left thoroughly impressed. Our sample's Mustard yellow paint was a big hit—a great choice by Toyota for what is essentially a promotional copy.

Our Prius came in new-for-'25 Nightshade trim, the latest update to this pioneering hybrid. Based on XLE, Nightshade blacks out its 19-inch alloy wheels, badging, bumper trim, shark fin antenna, even its doorsills. Inside are black 8-way SofTex front seats with grey stitching, as well as carbon

fiber details on the dash. It also optionally offers a 12.3-inch multimedia system otherwise only available on Limited (it was on ours, for just \$735).

We'll confirm right up front that we had a ball with this car. Is there anything it can't do? It maneuvers into tight spots like a compact, while at 6-foot-2 we did not feel cramped inside. And this is before even getting to its cargo capacity.

It was so peppy, we were not even thinking of sport mode till we were on an uphill grade and it crossed our minds to experiment. We did sense an immediate bump in terms of power, while shifting and acoustics seemed about the same. We don't dwell on modes much, with a philosophy that we almost wish they didn't exist—just engineer the best possible mix out of the box. But this wins either game, a well balanced occasional pick-me-up, or easily ignored and unneeded most of the time.

In aggressive 90-plus-degree turns from cross

streets up to freeway speeds, it tracked true with no hint of front-drive torquiness.

The highly aerodynamic body creates additional depth atop the dashboard, but Toyota has created a binnacle instrument set that, unlike most in this situation, was one more delight, giving us the feel of piloting an advanced yet simple future-jet.

We had initially thought we wished we had a pickup that particular week, as we had a number of things to move. But with the back seats down (one of the easiest such operations ever), it gobbled up boxes galore, even 24x24x19 U-Hauls, and even a dresser. Useful cargo volume, without even specifically comparing endless numbers, probably beats many a crossover. (And even if you had to make two trips, or maybe even three, it'll use less gas than one trip in that pickup.)

And the price of entry starts in the upper \$20s.

Our best surprise was yet to come. With an absolutely last-minute schedule change on the vehicle due to arrive next, the Toyota fleet saved the day by extending this one into a second week. To



us, this was an immediate win-win. We already loved the thing, but better still, we were headed into a series of daily runs from the far northeast Valley to NASCAR in the far southwestern corner, with multiple runs to Fountain Hills, Tempe, Glendale and north Phoenix throughout. Wow. The cancelled vehicle was a different brand's EV, and we were anticipating repeated all-night recharging. But what could be better than a 52-mpg all-purpose vehicle we could refill in minutes? What's more, we could drive it all week without refilling at all. (We

did refill once as we rolled into our second week.)

Ours was a 2025, but if you want one more dimension to the possibilities, for 2026 they are adding a plug-in hybrid (PHEV) version with an estimated 44 miles of pure-EV range.

Born as the humble—some may say homely—original king of the hybrid movement, Toyota Prius is now a handsome head-turning showpiece. And it is still royalty in the hybrid segment. Even as hybrids are now far more common than they were in the earlier era, Prius still rules the game. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Toyota, Aichi, Japan
ENGINE	.....M20A-FXS (Atkinson cycle) 2.0L 4-cyl, DOHC 16v VVT-i, alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	.....150 hp / 139 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....14.0:1
MOTOR GENERATOR	.....perm magnet AC synchronous, DC 600V
HP/TORQUE	.....111 hp / 152 lb-ft
HYB BATTERY PACK	.....Li-ion, 222V, 4.08Ah
HYBRID SYSTEM NET HP	.....(FWD) 194
TRANSMISSION	.....e-CVT
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
SUSPENSION	.....F: indep MacPherson strut, stblzr bar; R: multi-link, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....elec pwr assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....electronically controlled system: F: 11.1-in vented; R: 11.0-in solid
WHEELS/TIRES	.....19-in alloy / 195/50R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....181.1 / 108.3 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....6.0 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....35.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....38.0 / 36.4 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....43.2 / 34.8 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....(seats up) 20.3 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3164 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....87 reg unl / 11.3 gal
MPG	.....52/52/52 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$32,560
12.3-IN TOYOTA AUDIO MULTIMEDIA	.....735
FIXED GLASS ROOF	.....1000
PREFERRED ACCESSORY PKG W CARPET MATS:	
carpet mats, cargo net, carpet cargo mat,	
carpet floor mats, first aid kit, rear bumper	
appliqué	.....463
ALLOY WHEEL LOCKS	.....90
CONNECTED SERVICES TRIAL: 2 addtl years	.....325
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1135

TOTAL **\$36,308**
Note: 2025 model; 2026 pricing info below.

2026 TOYOTA PRIUS LINEUP

	FWD	AWD
LE	\$28,550	\$29,950
XLE	31,995	33,395
Nightshade	▼ 32,800	34,200
Limited	35,565	36,965
PHEV SE	\$33,775	
PHEV XSE	37,025	
PHEV Nightshade	37,795	
PHEV XSE Premium	40,470	

