

Toyota Celica

Featured model: 1.8 VVT-i 140bhp



MOST CARS TURN THEIR wheels, but Toyota's stunning new Celica turns heads, too. The sporty 2+2 coupé – now into its seventh generation – looks as though it's doing 100mph even when it's standing still. It's all a long way from the heady days when Toyota's answer to the Ford Capri hit the streets in the early seventies.

Narrower and shorter than the model it replaces (by 15mm and 90mm respectively), the new coupé sports a 65mm-longer wheelbase. This not only aids the eye-catching, "wheel-at-each-corner" looks, but also makes the new Celica smaller than the previous model, yet with a bigger cabin.

Since its late-1999 launch, the Celica has come in just one well-equipped version, powered by Toyota's 140bhp 1.8 VVT-i engine, but a major power boost is imminent, with the addition of a 189bhp version of the existing 1.8 unit.

As soon as you settle into the Celica's racy, low-slung cockpit, the sportily bolstered seats, rake-adjustable three-spoke leather steering wheel and garish orange instruments leave you in little doubt as to its sporting intentions.

Right from the off, the suspension feels firm (but rarely to the point of harshness), while the engine is refined and well-mannered, yet it lacks the thrusting mid-range immediacy the rakish, coupé looks lead you to expect. It's brisk enough when revved to the dizzy heights of its 7000rpm rev limiter, but despite that standard-fit six-speed

gearbox, the long-legged, spaced-out ratios fail to disguise the engine's relatively limp (albeit usefully tractable) mid-range delivery.

Given its head, it sprints, stops and steers in such a rewarding, fun-loving manner, but there's always a nagging yearning for just a bit more "grunt" from under the bonnet.

Coupés are rarely bought for their back seat space and ease of getting there, but the Celica makes a fair stab at providing usable four-seat accommodation – as long as the back seat occupants aren't too tall.

Beyond this, it's well equipped, with plenty of everyday conveniences around the cabin, while the large, low-silled load area has a healthy appetite for luggage, although there's only relatively modest height available under the load cover.

To round it all off, the Celica offers modest thirst and insurance rates, plus a three-year warranty and a reliability reputation second to none.

VERDICT

The sleek, wedge-shaped Celica certainly looks stunning, but this angular coupé isn't just a pretty face. It thrives on twisty, cross-country jaunts and mops up motorway miles with ease, but it's also roomy, well equipped and refined – in the front, at least. A bit more "go" from the forthcoming 189bhp version should make it even better.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○
Controls/displays	★★★★○
Safety	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Fuel economy	★★★★○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1794cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 140bhp at 6400rpm, 125 lb ft at 4200rpm; chain-driven DOHC, 16 valves, VVTi variable valve timing
transmission 6-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 22.3mph/1000rpm in 6th, 18.7 in 5th, 15.7 in 4th
suspension front: independent damper/struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar. Rear: independent double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar
steering hydraulic power assisted; 2.9 turns lock-to-lock; 10.6m diameter turning circle between kerbs (15.2m for one turn of the wheel)
brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with standard ABS and EBD
wheels/tyres 6½in alloy with 205/50R16 87V tyres (Yokohama ADVAN A680 on test car) (optional 17in alloy with 205/45 ZR17 tyres); full-size (alloy) spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

supercar looks with shopping-car usability
 efficient, well-equipped cabin
 top-notch handling, steering and brakes
 large, regular-shaped load space

gear slots close together but ratios spread out
 front seats "forget" settings when tipped
 tricky back seat access; "cosy" once there
 restricted over-the-shoulder and rear vision

THE CELICA RANGE

body 3-door coupé
trim levels single, with Premium, Sport and Dynamic (aero body styling) options
engines petrol: 1.8/140bhp VVT-i (1.8/189bhp VVT-i due late 2000)
drive front-wheel drive, 6-speed manual; no auto option

OVERTAKING ABILITY					☆☆☆☆○	
<i>Feels less lively than power output suggests but cruises in a quiet, refined manner. Avoid the long-legged higher gears for overtaking, but slick gearshift and engine's tractable urge help ease the shortfall</i>						
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	③ rd gear	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	⑥ th gear	
20-40mph	2.6	5.1	6.9	8.8	11.8	
30-50mph	3.1	5.1	6.7	8.4	11.3	
40-60mph	4.0	5.2	7.0	8.5	11.3	
50-70mph	5.0	5.4	7.4	9.6	12.4	
30-70mph	8.1	10.5	14.1	18.0	23.7	
max speed in each gear (*using 6850rpm for best acceleration)						
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤	⑥
speed (mph)	35	58	84	108	128	125

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★○			
<i>Back seat best for kids only, but there's ample space and comfort up front, a big boot and plenty of handy storage spaces. Headroom a bit tight and you sit low, so access can be tricky for the less agile</i>			
<i>in centimetres (3-door coupé)</i>		inside (†with optional sunroof)	
outside		front - legroom	86-113
length	434	- headroom	89-93 †
width - inc mirrors	196	rear - typical leg/	81
- mirrors folded	174	kneeroom	66
height	132	- headroom	83 ¹
load sill height	20/79	- hiproom	120
(inside/outside)		load space (litres/cu ft)	
steering		(all seats in use)	290/10.3
turns lock-to-lock	2.9	load length	81-162
turning circle (metres)	10.6	full length to fascia	no
easy to park/garage?		load width	94-131
	★★★★○	load height (under shelf/	36/
		to top of aperture)	63
¹ heads touch tailgate glass			

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★○	
<i>Curvy, well-presented facia (despite italicised orange dials), fingertip-reach gear lever and handbrake plus a fine driving position impress, but a few switches and minor radio controls are poorly sited or fiddly</i>	
	

HOW THE CELICA COMPARES		engine cap/power (cyl/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes† - best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	overall length (cm)
TOYOTA CELICA 1.8 VVT-i 3DR		4/1794/140	3130 ¹	8.1	23.7/18.0/14.1§	35	25/14	113	81/66	2.9/10.6	434
Alfa Romeo 156 2.0 Twin Spark 4dr		4/1970/155	3310	7.8	22.6/15.7	31	26/22	106	95/76	2.2/11.4	443
Ford Puma 1.7 3dr coupé		4/1679/123	3565	8.6	18.9/13.2	37	24½/32	109	95/67	2.8/10.3	398
Mazda MX-5 1.8 2dr convertible		4/1839/140	3560	8.1	21.4/14.7	32½	25/20	110	n/a	2.7/9.6	398
Peugeot 206 2.0 GTi 3dr		4/1997/137	3430	7.2	16.7/12.4	35	25/20	108	94/66	3.1/10.8	384
Subaru Impreza 2.0 Turbo 5dr		4/1994/215	2890	5.2	19.7/10.8	23	25/22	108	95/67	2.8/10.9	434
		¹ in 6th gear		§ in 6th/5th/4th		† all with ABS					

SAFETY ★★★★○	
<i>Safety spec includes a full set of front and side airbags, fine ABS with Electronic Brake force Distribution and a quartet of three-point seatbelts. Proximity of adult heads to tailgate glass in the rear not so clever, though</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>
pedal feel ★★★★○	pedal load
in emergency ★★★★○	10kg 30m
handbrake ★★★★○	14kg 25m best stop
	+4kg ie 18kg 26m ABS working

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
New Celica not yet tested

SECURITY FEATURES	
central locking ✓	alarm ✓
remote control ✓	immobiliser ✓
auto window closure ✗	luggage security ★★★★○
deadlocks ✓	
✓ standard	○ factory option ✗ not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★○	
<i>Taut, compliant ride, sharp, incisive steering and nimble chassis provide plenty of confidence-inspiring fun at the wheel. Celica's fine chassis should comfortably handle the boosted power version coming soon</i>	
	
COMFORT ★★★★○	
<i>Fine in the front, but cosier in the back – once you've negotiated the sleek, low-roofed doorways. Ride is sportily firm yet rarely harsh, while lanky gearing and plenty of creature comforts aid quiet, refined cruising</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★○	
<i>Mid-thirties mpg impressive for a brisk, relatively bulky coupé – aided by variable valve timing and spaced out, long-legged gearing. Electronic bar graph fuel gauge and twin trip meters aid keeping an eye on economy</i>	
AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)
worst (hard/urban) 22	urban 27.4
best (gentle/rural) 43	extra urban 45.6
overall mpg on test 35	combined 36.7
realistic tank capacity 47 litres	CO ₂ emissions 185g/km
typical range 360 miles	car tax band C