



Toyota Corolla



THE JAPANESE HAVE A WORD FOR IT : “kaizen” or continuous improvement, and that’s what Toyota has been subjecting its Corolla to since 1970, four years after the model’s launch. This is now the eighth (or actually the eighth-and-a-half) model to carry the 34-year-old name, so it’s not surprising that the Corolla – or at least its long-lived moniker – is the world’s top seller with over 23 million sales to its credit.

This latest version may appear to be simply a facelift of the previous one, but in fact it’s rather more than that. Behind the reshaped nose, with its four faired-in headlamps and Toyota family look, there are two new petrol engines and a Peugeot-sourced diesel. The underbody has been stiffened and the facia restyled.

The line-up has been simplified, too. Out goes the unloved saloon, to leave a three-door hatchback, a five-door Liftback and a five-door estate, with three trim specs : S, GS and GLS, plus an SR hatch with six speeds and sportier suspension (originally known as the G6R).

With no significant changes to the chassis, it’s the two new 16-valve engines – 1.4 and longer-stroke 1.6 – that are the main focus of attention. Both feature Toyota’s VVT-i (Variable Valve Timing-intelligent) system, already seen in the Yaris and Celica, for which greater

torque, better fuel consumption and lower emissions are claimed.

What initially struck us about both engines was their uncanny inaudibility at idle. They’re smooth and lively, too, provided you keep them spinning beyond 3800rpm. The snag is that by then they begin to become quite vocal.

Expect 0-60mph in about 11sec for the 1.4 and 9sec for the 1.6, both aided by a crisp, light clutch and a superb gearchange. The unrefined 1.9-litre diesel (in the Liftback and estate) is an old, indirect-injection lump that, at 42.8mpg, is only 1.3mpg better on fuel than the 1.4 petrol – and costs £500 more. Forget it, and wait for the two-litre D-4D common-rail Peugeot oiler, already used in the Avensis, that’s coming this autumn.

Extra body bracing gives the new Corolla a tauter feel and nimble handling, together with steering that’s light and precise, if bereft of genuine feel. The unchanged suspension continues to provide an impressively supple ride that turns a little fidgety only at low speeds. Overall, it feels smooth and well controlled.

Inside, the driver sits rather low on the flatish seat (a tilt setting would help), but the steering wheel is adjustable for rake and most of the minor controls are worked by a pair of multi-function column stalks. There’s a clear

view of the instruments, but the small screen for the multi-information display (plus Toyota's clever turn-by-turn optional sat nav system) is difficult to read, except when illuminated at night.

Equipment levels are high and include power steering, two front airbags, tachometer, central locking and that fascia display on all models. Remote central locking, air conditioning, anti-lock brakes and electric front windows and door mirrors are also standard on all but S models.

Space apportionment isn't the Corolla's strong point. Indeed, with a not particularly tall driver at the wheel rear kneeroom is tight, and there's not much headroom, either. Boot space on the other hand is quite generous. There's a high sill to lift luggage over, but the tailgate rises well out of the way.

Maintenance costs have been reduced by the VVT-i engines, as they don't require a first/1000-mile service

and full services are called for only every 20,000 miles. The 1.9 diesel needs an intermediate service every 6000 miles and a major service every 12,000. There's a three-year/60,000-mile warranty and Toyota is claiming significantly lower replacement parts costs for the new model.

VERDICT

The new Corolla is more than just a prettier face. Those impressive new VVT-i engines, that new fascia, the revised specifications and the lower running costs have significantly improved a model that had little to apologise for in the first place. It remains somewhat short on character (you never feel really involved at the wheel), but (diesel apart) it's an even nicer, more refined car to drive now and will no doubt prove to be as reliable as ever.

FACTS AND FIGURES

	1.4VVT-i	1.6VVT-i	1.9 Diesel
ENGINE			
Type		transverse four cylinder	
		alloy block and head	
Size	1398cc	1598cc	1867cc
Power	95bhp at 6000rpm 96 lb ft at 4800rpm	109bhp at 6000rpm 110 lb ft at 3800rpm	68bhp at 4600rpm 92 lb ft at 2500rpm
Valve gear	chain-driven double overhead camshafts incorporating variable valve timing. 16 valves		single overhead camshaft 8 valves
Fuel/ignition	electronic multi-point petrol injection with direct ignition via four coils. Three-way catalyser and 50-litre fuel tank		electronically controlled indirect injection diesel. 50-litre fuel tank
TRANSMISSION			
Type		five-speed manual, front-wheel drive (1.6SR : six-speed manual, 1.6 automatic optional)	
Mph per 1000rpm	19.8 in 5th	19.8 in 5th (SR : 21.2 in 6th)	22.3 in 5th
CHASSIS			
Suspension - front	MacPherson coil spring/damper struts and an anti-roll bar		
- rear	MacPherson coil spring/damper struts with dual-link location and an anti-roll bar		
Steering	speed-sensitive rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance		
Wheels	5½J x 14 steel (6J x 14 alloy on GLS and SR) with 175/65 HR14 tyres. Full-size spare		
Brakes	servo-assisted ventilated discs front, drums rear (discs on SR and 1.6 GLS). Anti-lock control and electronic brake force distribution on all models except S		
DIMENSIONS	Hatchback	Liftback	Estate
Length	412	429	434
Width	169	169	169
Height	139	139	144