

Toyota Avensis Verso

Featured model: 2.0 GLS manual



WHETHER IT WAS DOWN TO the name "Picnic", its so-so looks or a mediocre load space with a full set of six travellers on board, Toyota's previous mid-sized MPV didn't exactly fly off the forecourts.

Its all-new successor – the Avensis Verso – uses a stretched version of the Mondeo-sized Avensis platform. It's not only more appealing than its predecessor, but also offers one more seat this time – allowing it to compete with the popular Zafira in the school run stakes.

Arguably not the prettiest of the people-carriers, the Avensis Verso is 15cm shorter than a Mondeo estate at the kerbside, yet packs in seating for seven, with the three mid-row seats all sliding individually, and both middle and rear rows sporting three-point seatbelts as well as performing all the usual MPV tricks. However, in this case, the tail-end perches don't tuck away under the floor when not required, as in baby brother Yaris Verso and the Zafira.

Under its distinctive, stubby nose resides either 147bhp, two-litre petrol power or Toyota's new D4-D common-rail, direct-injection diesel, driving the front wheels via a five-speed manual gearbox, or (optionally) a four-speed automatic on 2.0 petrol models.

The Verso is a little less lofty than many MPVs, so climbing aboard presents few snags, and once installed there's ample space to stretch out in – in the first two rows, at least. The two rearmost seats are best suited to smaller passengers, but sliding the centre-row seats forward yields

passable space for lankier types on all but the longest of journeys. Compliant, easy-going suspension mops up lumps and bumps impressively, and the Verso rarely feels too top-heavy or roly-poly.

The ace up the Verso's sleeve, however, is that, even with a full house, it can still carry a surprising amount of luggage, thanks to an additional underfloor "boot" (about half the size of a supermini's). This is achieved by rerouting the exhaust and relocating the spare wheel forward under the left-side floor.

The two-litre VVT-i power unit delivers respectably brisk mid-range pace and cruises quietly, although it grows notably more vocal when revved to the red line. As with most MPVs, however, this one uses a bit more fuel than conventional models.

The Verso is well equipped, well screwed together and easy to get along with. There are lots of neat touches, too, such as the GLS's standard-fit navigation system which, despite lacking a map display, is one of the most helpful "virtual co-pilots" we've met.

VERDICT

Verso by name, versatile by nature, Toyota's "family-pack" MPV looks a lot more convincing this time round. It's roomy with a flexible layout, and runs and rides significantly better than its predecessor. But if it's still a little too big for your needs, don't worry, as there's a new Corolla Verso just around the corner.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1998cc, 4-cylinder petrol; 147bhp at 6000rpm, 142 lb ft at 4000rpm; chain-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves, VVT-i variable valve timing
transmission 5-speed manual; front-wheel drive; 22.7mph/1000rpm in 5th, 17.2 in 4th (GS: 22.4/16.9 on 15in wheels)
suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs, anti-roll bar. Rear: torsion beam/trailing arms with separate coil springs and inclined dampers, anti-roll bar
steering hydraulic power assistance; 3.3 turns lock-to-lock; 11.2m diameter turning circle between kerbs (18.0m for one turn of the wheel)
brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with standard anti-lock, brake force distribution and brake assist
wheels/tyres 16in alloy with 205/60R16 92H tyres on GLS (Dunlop SP Sport 300 on test car); 15in steel with 205/65R15 tyres on GS; temporary spare

LIKES ...

roomy "secret" storage under load floor
 illuminated ignition lock surround
 GPS satnav's helpful voice guidance
 rear air conditioning (on GLS)

and GRIPES

gearshift notchy and set well back
 no left footrest
 back seats don't flip-fold to vertical
 limited centre console storage space

THE AVENSIS VERSO RANGE

size and type upper-medium (mid-priced) 7-seater MPV
trim levels GS and GLS
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/2.0 litre/147bhp; diesel: 4/2.0/114bhp direct injection
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4-speed auto on 2.0 VVT-i petrol only)

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★ ★ ★ ○ ○

Lively (if quite vocal) when revved, but tardier in top gear. Otherwise, ample power, relaxed gearing and respectable mid-range urge ensure smooth, subdued progress, spoilt only by a mediocre gearshift

acceleration in seconds	through gears*	③ rd gear	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	
20-40mph	3.1	5.9	8.4	13.5	
30-50mph	3.7	5.8	8.1	12.5	
40-60mph	4.6	5.8	8.3	12.7	
50-70mph	6.0	6.2	8.7	14.1	
30-70mph	9.7	12.0	16.8	26.6	
max speed in each gear (*using 6500rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤
speed (mph)	30	56	86	112	119

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★ ★ ★ ★ ○

Verso tag (synonymous with quarts into pint pots) brings two extra seats plus major space/versatility gains over a more traditional estate. Load space still tight all-up yet better than most MPVs, aided by extra underfloor space

<i>in centimetres (5-door MPV)</i>	inside	(† without sunroof)
outside	front - legroom	85-111
length	- headroom	100-107†
width - inc mirrors	mid/	- typical leg/ 104/ (85)
- mirrors folded	(rear) kneeroom	85/ (57)
height (inc roof bars)	rows - headroom	101 (90)
load sill height	§ - hiproom	135/ (113)
(inside/outside)	load space (7/5 seats in use)	
steering	[(litres/cu ft)]	315(11.2)/780(27.5)
turns lock-to-lock	load length (7s/5/2)	33/107/216
turning circle (metres)	full length to fascia	290
easy to park/garage?	load width	103-125
★ ★ ★ ○ ○	load height (to cover/	55
§ mid row seats slid fully back	to top of aperture)	95

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★ ★ ★ ★ ○

Good, lofty driving position (with seat height-adjuster that also tailors cushion tilt), plus clear displays and well-placed controls. 'Turn-by-turn' sat nav lacks a moving map display, but otherwise a fine performer



SAFETY ★ ★ ★ ★ ○

Good safety inventory includes two front airbags, ABS with EBD and emergency brake assist, ISO-FIX child seat mounts, plus adjustable head restraints and three-point seatbelts all round

braking

pedal feel	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
in emergency	★ ★ ★ ★ ○
handbrake	★ ★ ★ ○ ○

dry road stopping distance

from 50 mph (with ABS/EBD/EBA)

pedal load	distance
unhurried 10kg	33m
sudden 18kg +4kg ie 22kg	25½m best stop 25½m ABS on

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS

Avensis Verso not yet tested

SECURITY FEATURES

central locking	✓	deadlocks	✓
remote control	✓	alarm	✓
auto window closure	✗	immobiliser	✓
		luggage security	
✓ standard	0 option	✗ not available	

HANDLING AND STEERING ★ ★ ★ ○ ○

Light, if a little low-geared, steering keeps the Verso easy around town, while well-sorted chassis cleans up with a happy balance between lithe bend-swinging, modest body roll and a smooth, compliant ride



COMFORT ★ ★ ★ ★ ○

Quality, comfortable seating, ample space (for the first two rows, at least), refined cruising and ample creature comforts keep travellers content, while GLS's sat nav preserves harmony on the 'domestic' front

FUEL ECONOMY ★ ★ ★ ○ ○

Penalised by lofty MPV build and respectable pace, the Verso still delivers respectable 30mpg-plus parsimony. Easy filler with a fair range, plus basic trip computer functions integrated into audio/sat nav system

AA test results (mpg)	urban	24.6	
worst (hard/urban)	extra urban	41.5	
best (gentle/rural)	combined	32.8	
overall mpg on test	CO ₂ emissions	202g/km	
realistic tank capacity	53 litres	car tax band	D
typical range	360 miles		
official figures (mpg)			

HOW THE AVENSIS VERSO COMPARES*

	engine cyl/cap/power (no/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/ kneeeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
TOYOTA AVENSIS VERSO 2.0	4/1998/147	3085	9.7	26.6/16.8	31	25½/18	111	104/85 §	3.3/11.2	465
Ford Galaxy 2.3 16v	4/2295/145	3290	11.0	26.3/19.9	29	26/25	108	104/84	3.3/11.3	464
Mitsubishi Space Wagon 2.4GDI	4/2351/147	3000	11.7	28.6/19.1	30½	25/14	107	102/80 §	3.3/11.5	460
Renault Scenic 2.0 16v	4/1998/140	3120	9.7	26.9/17.6	30	24/50	106	102/76 §	3.5/10.6	413
Vauxhall Zafira 2.2	4/2198/145	3270	9.3	21.9/16.4	30	27/23	103	102/75 §	3.2/10.9	432
Ford Mondeo 2.0 16v Estate	4/1999/145	3120	8.6	26.3/17.5	33	24/16	111	108/84	2.8/11.3	480

* maximum seating capacity (7), except Scenic and Mondeo (5)

† all with ABS

§ with middle row seats slid fully back