

Toyota RAV4

Featured model: 2.0 NRG 3-door



TOYOTA WOULD LIKE TO THINK that it put Sport Utility Vehicles on the map when it introduced the racy RAV4 "soft-roader" back in 1994; owners of surfboard-toting Suzuki Vitaras and Daihatsu Sportraks might beg to differ.

Although it didn't write the SUV rule book, the cheeky, GTi-brisk RAV4 spearheaded significant growth in the chic, "grass-and-gravel" camp when it was introduced.

There are notably more players on the scene now, though, with the likes of Land Rover's "weekend off-roader" Freelander, Honda's CR-V/HR-V duo, a revitalised Vitaras, plus a gaggle of mud-plugging MPVs and high-riding, all-wheel-drive estates, all vying for a slice of the lifestyle green-laner loot.

Toyota hasn't exactly rested on its laurels, however. The all-new (Mark 2) RAV4 amounts to significantly more than a nip-and-tuck facelift of the old model. Beneath bigger and bolder looks, Toyota's town and country trekker sports all-new mechanicals, a host of MPV-style features and adds an entry-level, front-wheel drive model for the first time. It also offers more style and individuality than its predecessor, with sporty (three-door) and family-oriented (five-door) models separately conceived from the outset.

Mating lively two-litre, 4x4 running gear with the RAV4's dock-tailed, three-door body gives it a decidedly sporty slant, yielding brisk GTi-style pace, despite the new model's bulkier, brawnier form. The sporting angle continues in the lofty,

jazzily themed, but quality-feel cabin, echoed by supportive, sports-shaped seats, white dials and a leather-clad steering wheel and gear knob.

Up front, there's ample space and creature comforts to go round, but the three-door's stubby, almost coupé-like proportions prove more telling in back-seat space and access to it, but particularly in the load space (or rather, the *lack* of it) behind.

This isn't the bind it might be, however. The three-door's back seats fold individually, slide or take out to match the versatility of any MPV – a saving grace – yet restricted opening of the side-hinged tailgate remains an obstructive annoyance when dealing with larger items of cargo.

While the RAV4's visual appeal and peppy pace may not be sufficient to tempt hardened boy-racers out of their hot-hatchbacks, its mix of decent off-road abilities allied to relaxed, wieldy, and only occasional rock-and-roll progress on the tarmac, significantly builds on its predecessor's class-leading qualities in the increasingly competitive (and populated) SUV class.

VERDICT

The RAV4 may not be as racy as dedicated sports machines for on-road use, neither is it able to venture as far into the undergrowth as more macho mud-pluggers, but as an affordable, stylish and now more versatile blend of the two, it takes an awful lot of beating.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1998cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 147bhp at 6000rpm, 142 lb ft at 4000rpm; chain-driven DOHC, 16 valves, VVT-i variable valve timing

transmission 5-speed manual, full-time 4-wheel drive; 20.9mph/1000rpm in 5th, 16.7 in 4th

suspension front: independent MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar. Rear: double wishbones/trailing arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar

steering hydraulic power assisted; 3.0 turns lock-to-lock; 10.3m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.8m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with ABS and EBD on all versions

wheels/tyres 6½in alloy with 235/60R16 tyres (NRG and VX), steel on all other models with 215/70R16 tyres; space-saver spare

LIKES ...

sporty 3-door and 5-door family models base two-wheel drive version available MPV-like slide/fold/remove back seats lofty cabin with easy controls

and GRIPES

tail door only opens halfway limited luggage space as a four-seater only left front seat gives rear access no parcel shelf to conceal valuables

THE RAV4 RANGE

body 3- and 5-door Sport Utility Vehicle
trim levels NV and NRG (3-door); NV, GX and VX (5-door)

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.8 litre/123bhp (3-dr/fwd only); 4/2.0/147 on all 4x4s (2.0/110bhp common-rail diesel due October 2001)

drive full-time 4-wheel drive, 5-speed manual. 1.8/front-wheel drive (3-door only) and 4-speed automatic (2.0/4x4 only) options

OVERTAKING ABILITY				★★★★○	
<i>Lively, willing nature makes the RAV4 more of a GTi than a 4x4, thanks to punchy 147bhp and slick, sporty gearing. Free-revving and frisky; easy-going and amiable at a less hectic pace, too</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	③ th gear	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	
20-40mph	2.9	5.6	7.8	11.3	
30-50mph	3.2	5.4	7.6	10.8	
40-60mph	4.3	5.4	7.9	11.2	
50-70mph	5.8	6.0	8.4	12.6	
30-70mph	9.0	11.4	16.0	23.4	
max speed in each gear (*using 6500rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤
speed (mph)	29	55	84	108	115

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★○○○				
<i>Three-door's dock-tailed form mars load space, while restricted swing of tail door hinders access to it. Lift-out, MPV-style rear seats a real help, plus ample supply of cup holders and cubbies</i>				
<i>in centimetres (3-door SUV)</i>		<i>inside († without sunroof)</i>		
outside		front	- legroom	87-110
length	387		- headroom	100-105†
width - inc mirrors	196	rear	- typical leg/	98
- mirrors folded	174		kneeroom	73
height (inc roof rails)	170		- headroom	94
load sill height	2/55		- hiproom	100
(inside/outside)		load space (all seats in use)		
steering		(litres/cu ft)		195/6.9
turns lock-to-lock	3.0	load length		27/76/105'
turning circle (metres)	10.3	full length to fascia		197
easy to park/garage?		load width		87
★★★★○		load height (to glass line/		66/
*rear seats fully backfolded/removed		to top of aperture)		102

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★○				
<i>White dials plus leather steering wheel and gear knob reinforce RAV4's sporting slant. Slick, well-sorted fascia, good hi-fi and a comfortable, "in-charge" driving position ease time at the wheel</i>				
				

HOW THE RAV4 3-DOOR 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/ kneeroom – rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
TOYOTA RAV4 2.0 3DR 4X4	4/1998/147	3350	9.0	23.4/16.0	30	26/16	110	98/73	3.0/10.3	387
Chrysler PT Cruiser 2.0 5dr	4/1996/140	3100	10.8	31.3/23.5	28	26/41	108	105/75	2.8/11.9	429
Honda CR-V 2.0i 5dr 4x4	4/1973/126	3440	11.2	29.4/17.5	27	29½/16	107	110/74	3.2/11.1	452
Honda HR-V 1.6 VTEC 5dr 4x4	4/1590/122	3760	11.2	28.4/20.3	30	25½/16	107	103/78	2.75/11.1	411
Renault Scenic RX4 2.0 16v 4x4	4/1998/140	3260	12.8	28.9/20.3	28½	NA	106	102/76*	3.5/10.6	444
Vauxhall Zafira 2.2 5dr	4/2198/145	3270	9.3	21.9/16.4	30	27/23	103	102/75	3.2/10.9	432
						†all with ABS	*109/85 as 4-seater			

SAFETY ★★★★○				
<i>ABS with EBD, dual airbags "Whiplash Injury Lessening" seats up front. Three-door's coupé-like cabin means safety kit for just two behind, who sit close to the tail, yet heads remain clear of the glass</i>				
braking		dry road stopping distance		
pedal feel	★★★★○	from 50 mph (with standard ABS)		
in emergency	★★★★○	pedal load	distance	
handbrake	★★★★○	10kg	30m	
		16kg	26m best stop	
		+4kg ie 20kg	28m	

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS				
Current RAV4 not yet tested				

SECURITY FEATURES				
central locking	✓	alarm	✓	
remote control	✓	immobiliser	✓	
auto window closure	✗	luggage security		★★★★○
deadlocks	✓			
✓ standard		0 factory option		✗ not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★○				
<i>Not quite the tall, all-wheel drive coupé the 3-door's looks hint at, but loads more wieldy and fun than many dirt-bashers. Direct (for a 4x4) steering and taut, "pointy" chassis underline sporting intent</i>				
				

COMFORT ★★★★○				
<i>Lofty cabin, comfy seating and ample space for four (if not their luggage) mean few compromises to "soft-roading" Toyota-style. Five-door model offers more family-oriented space and comfort</i>				

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★○				
<i>Fair economy aided by variable valve timing, but chunky build, spirited pace and full-time 4-wheel drive peg economy back a little. Generous tank capacity, an easy filler, plus standard trip computer</i>				
AA test results (mpg)		official figures (mpg)		
worst (hard/urban)	20	urban	24.8	
best (gentle/rural)	39	extra urban	38.7	
overall mpg on test	30	combined	32.1	
realistic tank capacity	50 litres	CO ₂ emissions	211g/km	
typical range	330 miles	car tax band	D	