

Road beat: Toyota's RAV4 is all grown up



The RAV4 is one of many reasons why Toyota is No. 1. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Toyota as of late, at least ever since the Camry unintended acceleration problem five years ago, has been flying under the radar while still maintaining its No. 1 position in the world. (Although the government bludgeoned Toyota into a large fine, data still shows that the problem was caused by driver error, stepping on the gas instead of the brake. As to Toyota losing some of the lawsuits, it only demonstrates the need for a professional jury system.)

Under the radar or not this new RAV4 shows why Toyota is still

the No. 1 car company in the world. They make great cars. After 19 years of production, the RAV4 entered its fourth generation as a 2013 model about a year ago and it has become a grown up SUV as the first two generations were more of a mini-SUV variety. 2006 was the first year of the third generation RAV4 and its first year into the larger, compact SUV class and sales more than doubled. When this fourth generation hit the show room floor, first-year sales jumped again by another 20 percent. Toyota is doing something right.



Specifications

Price \$23,550 to about \$33,000

Engine

DOHC 16 valve Inline four cylinder gasoline 176 hp @ 6,000 rpm

172 lb-ft of torque @ 4,100 rpm

134 hp @ 4,100 rpm

Transmission

Six speed automatic

Configuration

Transverse front mounted engine/FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 104.7 inches

Length 179.9 inches

Width 72.6 inches
Height 67.1 inches
Ground clearance 6.3 inches
Track (f/r) 61.4/61.4 inches
Weight 3,610 pounds
GVWR 4,600 pounds
Fuel capacity 15.9 gallons
Tow capacity 1,500 pounds
Cargo volume (rear seat
down/up 73.4/38.4 cubic feet
Wheels (LE/XLE/LTD)
6.5×17/7.0×17/7.5×18
steel/alloy/alloy
Tires (LE&XLE/LTD)
P225/65×17/P235/55×18
Turning circle 36.7 feet
Steering lock to lock 2.68
turns
Performance
0-60 mph 8.51 seconds
50-70 mph 4.57 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 7.73
seconds
Top speed Who cares?
Fuel Economy EPA rated at
22/29/25 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 25-26 mpg overall in
a combination of all driving
and 32 mpg on the highway at
legal speeds.

Sleeker is the watchword of the new design. The window line shows more style and the front end is more rakish. Its high belt line terminates in the taillights almost creating a shelf on top of the taillights and encircling the tailgate. Once you notice this unique styling you will find it amazing, like, "I

never noticed that before.” But the RAV4 styling doesn’t take any chances, it is like the Camry of compact CUVs.

While everything is all-new on the outside, the platform remains the same as generation three with an identical 105-inch wheelbase. Length also fits into the center of compact CUVs at 180 inches while its beam is a wide 73 inches. Those dimensions play a big roll in its outsized utility as you will see later.

Under the bonnet is a choice of one engine, Toyota’s 2.5L inline four cylinder DOHC, 16 valve unit of undersquare dimensions with VVT-I that pumps out 176 hp at 6,000 rpm while peak torque settles in at 172 pounds of twist at a moderate 4,100 rpm meaning that at 4,100 rpm the engine is producing 134 hp. While there is a definite front wheel bias, power is sent to all four wheels via a six speed auto cog swapper. If you want a manual transmission you will have to buy a different CUV.

Although built on the same platform as generation three, a 3.5L V-6 is no longer offered in the RAV4, but with the new generation of inline fours, it really isn’t necessary and the fuel economy benefits are pleasing. Zero to 60 mph tests reveal good performance at 8.51 seconds. Better yet it feels quite sprightly, part of that is due to its six-speed cog swapper. Passing times are also good with a 50-70 mph simulated pass requiring only 4.57 seconds and the same pass up a six percent grade only slows that time to 7.73 seconds. That bests many performance vehicles of 15-20 years ago.

On the flip side is fuel economy that you will appreciate. EPA rate the RAV4 at 22/29/25mpg city/highway/combined . Testing reveals it does a bit better with a two-way level highway run averaging 32.7 mpg. Overall mpg averaged between 25-26 mpg during all kinds of driving, including heavy stop and go, a few miles on the highway, performance testing and rural, hilly country roads. One of the reasons for the very good fuel

economy is the tall sixth gear allowing the engine to spin a low 2,150 rpms at 70 mph that also makes the vehicle very quiet. It is also trim weighing in at a svelte 3,610 pounds. Fuel capacity is a medium 15.9 gallons.

Handling is surprisingly good and here's why. While most people would look at a RAV4 and think it is a tall SUV because it stands 67-inches high there is not that much weight up high. The ground clearance is only 6.3 inches which is only about an inch more than many cars so the center of gravity is still quite low. In addition the track is wide, about 62 inches and it has 18 x 7.5 inch alloys shod with some meaty rubber that is 235/55 series. And then there is the state of the art suspension, MacPherson struts up front and double wishbones holding up the rear with coils at all four corners and stab bars at both ends. Add that to a very quick power rack steering that is 2.68 turns lock to lock, and you have some serious credentials.

How does it all work? Splendid would be a good one word answer. In a special course all Road Beat vehicles go through, grip was tenacious, turn in was crisp and the cornering power was quite surprising. This baby can motor through the twisties more like a sports sedan. It responds well, easily changing directions exactly as asked. Part of this is also due to its relatively low weight and well controlled body roll.

Ride quality is smooth, handling big and small bumps and dips alike with aplomb. There is no heading tossing and about the only thing you can say is that it is not as quiet in ride noise or interior noise as the Lexus GX460 tested last week. Of course that was twice the money, too. Road and wind noise was also very subdued. After being spoiled with the vault like, bullet proof Lexus GX460 and LX570, anything will not quite have that muted feel these vehicles provide, as if everything is covered or packed in a super dense foam material, but the RAV4 on its own was impressive.

Braking is performed by four wheel discs of nearly a foot in diameter with the front discs being ventilated with all the acronyms including ABS stopping the RAV4 in an excellent 42 feet from 40 mph. The reason only the front brakes are ventilated is that front brakes do 80 percent or more of the stopping and thereby get the hottest for which the ventilation provides cooling. It is the reason that in most vehicles, except those vehicles that are designed for super high performance have only front ventilated brakes. Rear ventilated brakes would be a waste of money. How many of you are going to drive your RAV4 hard on the race track as a weekly event?

Of course the RAV4 has a plethora of airbags, VSC and other stability and electronic traction devices and at least half a dozen more items that specifically enhance occupant safety all of which can be attributed to a significantly lowering highway death rate.



Performance and handling have not been compromised.

Inside is a quality interior. Sure it has its share of hard plastic, but it is high quality stuff that has a nice feel. Seats are done in a new Toyota material they call Softex. It is some of the best synthetic as it looks and feels like leather. Now if Toyota can get that leather smell in the Softex? Seats have excellent support and comfort and in the Limited the driver's seat is eight way powered plus both front seats are heated.

Instrumentation is complete with a large tach flanking left and a full trip computer to the right. The center stack which includes the inexpensive (\$785) JBL audio, Nav and connectivity systems is easy to use and well displayed and the JBL system sounds like Carnegie Hall.

Rear seat is copious and comfortable. Another plus is the RAV4's large Home Depot quotient. Behind the front chairs is over 73 cubes and even with three kids occupying the second row you almost have 40 cubic feet. Small on the outside, big on the inside.

Pricing starts \$23,550 for a base LE FWD (AWD is a bargain at \$1,400) and tops out at \$29,720 for my AWD Limited tester. The bargain JBL Nav system is a \$785 bargain and the \$725 tech package includes blind spot monitor, lane departure warning and rear cross traffic alert plus auto high beam. Another bargain. Carpeted floor mats are \$225. Then there is \$860 for the choo-choo from Detroit. All toll the bottom line is \$32,315. And its looks have grown on me. This is what Toyota is all about.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.