

Road beat: Toyota Yaris – economical, efficient



Toyota Yaris evolves through the years – especially in looks.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Yaris has been in the Toyota stable since 1999 starting as the egg shaped Echo, not exactly the most attractive car in Toyota history, but it was quite a performer knocking off 0-60 mph times in the eights and easily achieving 30 mpg plus. Now in its third generation (since 2011) and the second generation using the Yaris name (2005), it remains a sporty runner.

Styling since the introduction of the second generation was a significant improvement over the original Echo, now appearing as a two-box shape with sharper lines. It's a small car with a

long wheelbase of 99 inches and a short length of 155 inches. Width is svelte at 67 inches and it stands tall at 59 inches. For 2015 the new Yaris, while keeping the shape of the third generation, gets a face lift with the new Toyota themed front end which looks like a black wide upside down smile. You can see the same look in the Corolla and Camry. Even the Highlander gets a similar front end styling theme. Yaris is not a bad looking car, as its design is based on maximum utility, but it is also designed for maximizing economy. Yaris co-efficient of drag is a low 0.29. If you look at the Yaris from the side, you can see its slick profile and the steep rake of the windshield.

Getting to the nuts and bolts of the Yaris, it is powered by a peppy little 1.5L DOHC 16 valve inline four-cylinder engine cranking out 106 hp at 6,000 rpm and 103 pounds of torque at 4,200 rpm (82 hp at 4,200 rpm). It is connected to a five-speed manual tranny or an optional four-speed torque converter automatic as was my tester. When I tested the original Echo about 15 years ago, it had an almost identical 1.5L inline four rated at 108 hp and 106 pounds of twist. With a five-speed manual, it could scamper to 60 mph in 8 seconds and at 163 inches in length it was slighter larger, but I couldn't say anything nice about its appearance.

This new Yaris is a bit quicker than its perhaps small car rival



Specifications

Price

\$15,670 to about \$19,500 all in

Engine

1.5L 16 valve, DOHC inline four cylinder 106 hp @ 6,000 103 lb-ft of torque @ 4,200 rpm

Transmission

Five speed manual
Four speed automatic

Configuration
Front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 98.8 inches

the Mitsu Mirage by stopping the chondex in a sprint to 60 mph in 9.94 seconds. Not as quick as the original Echo, but the Echo was a five-speed manual. This Yaris with a manual should break into the high eights. Passing times also show a bit of spirit with a 50-70 mph simulated passing time of 5.63 seconds on a level highway and 11.19 seconds up a 6 percent grade. Yaris wasn't designed for racing.

But Yaris was designed to pass gas stations. EPA rated at 30/36/32 mpg city/highway/combined it does a bit better. Overall the Yaris averaged 34 mpg in suburban driving and 39.2 mpg in a two-way level highway run at 70 mph. While it may be quicker than a Mitsu Mirage, the Mirage returns about 5 more mpg. At least Toyota saw fit to have a larger fuel tank with 11.1 gallons giving you a solid 300-plus-mile range.

Suspension is MacPherson struts up front with a semi-independent torsion beam in the rear. But instead of tires modeled after a Winchell's doughnut, my test came with 16-inch alloys with 195/50 series rubber that was V rated to withstand 149 mph for 24 hours. Don't expect the Yaris to approach

Length 155.5 inches
Width 66.7 inches
Height 59.4 inches
Track 57.5/56.9 inches
Ground clearance 5.5 inches
Weight 2,335 pounds
Fuel capacity 11.1 gallons
Passenger volume 85.5 c/f
Cargo volume 15.5 c/f
Turning circle 36.1 feet
Steering lock to lock 2.65 turns
Wheels 16 inch alloys
Tires 195/50VR16
Co-efficient of drag 0.29
Performance
0-60 mph 9.94 seconds
50-70 mph 5.63 seconds
50-70 uphill 11.19 seconds
Top speed, well over the century mark
Fuel economy EPA rated 30/36/32 mpg city/highway/combined. Expect 34 mpg in suburban driving, 39 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

149 mph, but it is sporty rubber and it shows when you get aggressive in the twisties. Besides its quick steering of 2.65 turns lock to lock its turning circle is only 36 feet. On center steering feel is very good. With that wider 16-inch low profile rubber the Yaris can corner. It only weighs 2,335 pounds, which also reduces tire loads improving cornering power. Turn in is crisp making it powerful, predictable, balanced and fun in the twisties with good feedback. It was surprisingly good even getting some controlled rotation when pushed very hard in the corners. Wait a second; the Yaris might be fun in an autocross. Even the base Yaris gets 15-inch steel wheels with 175/65 series rubber.

Ride quality is smooth on the highway, but on coarse roads there is some road noise. It handles bumps well, but you can feel when the suspension reaches its limits on huge bumps. The engine spins 2,950 rpm at 70 mph and is nearly inaudible. A fifth gear could improve the highway mileage. Wind noise is at a minimum.

With SE model you also get four-wheel disc brakes instead of drum rear brakes on the base model. Of course ABS and most every other safety acronym is standard. Stops from 40 mph are made in a very good 42 feet with perfect control. Nine airbags are standard along with a tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS). Of course vehicle stability control, traction control and even smart stop technology is standard.

Inside are firm, stylish comfortable seats with complete manual adjustments. They are actually quite nice and the back seat is roomy for two full size adults. Behind the rear seats there still remains over 15 cubic feet of cargo volume. Folding the rear 60/40 seats turns the Yaris into a mini SUV.



Mileage makes the Yaris a good commuter vehicle.

Instrumentation is complete with a speedo and tach plus a trip computer. All the materials are Toyota quality. The center stack has a large touch screen and the \$899 upgrade to a NAV system works well. It is a terrific commuter that actually gives you a lot more. Full power is standard, including power windows, locks and mirrors.

Pricing for Yaris L starts at \$14,845 plus \$825 for the boat from France (yes, Yaris is assembled in France. You will need to check for croissant crumbs on delivery). That is for a manual, three-door model with still standard power windows, locks and mirrors. The full boat model SE that I tested stickered for \$17,620 plus destination plus the NAV system. Embroidered carpeted floor mats were \$180 bringing the total to \$19,524. In combined driving you should get 36 mpg, spunky performance with plenty of bells and whistles. And the sound system sounds great. What's not to like. I drove it for a week and enjoyed every day going places.

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.