

# Road beat: Scion iA and iM fresh, refined



The sub-compact Scion iA is super fuel efficient. Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

New nomenclature means all new cars from Scion. Stodgy is out and fun is in. And these cutting-edge vehicles are from Scion, an inexpensive, high value brand from Toyota. One of the models, the upscale iM is all Scion, but the other model, the iA, is a joint project from Scion and Mazda. Don't get upset as Scion has one other joint product, the FR-S, which is Scion/Subaru. If the FR-S is any indication, the new iA should be fabulous.

So let's start with the iA. Clearly a sub compact in size with

a 101-inch wheelbase and length and width of 172 and 67 inches, respectively, the new iA delivers large. Compared to the original xA, introduced 12 years ago, this new model feels incredibly refined in every way, starting with the stylish new body. No more is it an ugly box with four wheels. The new design is aggressive and sporty to the point you might think under the hood is a fire breathing 300 hp race engine. Besides the aggressive wide mouth snout grille (it has a slight resemblance to the new Mazda Takeri design philosophy), there are three main character lines, one defining the front fenders, another doing the same over the rear and a third above the rocker panel creating some lean muscle with a trim, coke bottle waist.



### **Specifications**

#### **Scion iA**

Price \$16,495 to \$17,595 including destination of \$795

Engine 1.5L inline four, DOHC, 16 valves with DI 106 hp @ 6,000 RPM

103 lb-ft of torque @ 4,000 RPM

#### **Transmission**

Six speed manual

Six speed automatic

#### **Configuration**

Transverse front  
engine/front wheel drive

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 101.2 inches

Length 171.7 inches

Width 66.7 inches

Height 58.5 inches

Track (f/r) 58.9/58.5 inches

Ground clearance 5.5 inches

Weight (m/a) 2385/2416  
pounds

Fuel capacity 11.6 gallons

Trunk capacity 13.5 cubic  
feet

Passenger volume 85.9 cubic  
feet

Wheels 16X5.5 inches

Tires 185/60X16 inches

Steering lock to lock 2.84  
turns

Turning circle 32.2 feet

### **Performance**

0-60 est 9.2 seconds

Top speed over 100 mph

### **Fuel economy**

EPA rated  
(manual//automatic) 31/41/35  
mpg//33/42/37 mpg  
city/highway/combined. iA  
should meet those numbers

### **Scion iM**

#### **Engine**

1.8L DOHC, 16 valve inline  
four cylinder 137 hp @ 6,100  
rpm

126 lb-ft of torque @ 4,000  
rpm

**Transmission**

Six speed manual

Seven speed CVT

**Configuration**

Transverse front  
engine/front wheel drive

**Dimensions**

Wheelbase 102.4 inches

Length 170.5 inches

Width 69.3 inches

Height 55.3 inches

Ground clearance 5.5 inches

Track (f/r) 59.6/59.3 inches

Passenger volume 90.4 cubic  
feet

Cargo capacity 20.8 cubic  
feet

Fuel capacity 14 gallons

Weight (m/a) 2,943/3,031  
pounds

Steering lock to lock 2.59  
turns

Turning circle 35.4

Tires 225/45X17 inches

Co-efficient of drag 0.30

**Performance**

0-60 mph est 8.7 seconds

Top speed over 100 mph

Fuel economy (m//a)

27/36/31//28/37/32 mpg  
city/highway/combined. iM

should meet or exceed those  
numbers

Don't get too excited as it gets a super efficient direct injected 1.5L inline, DOHC, 16 valve four banger with all but a 106 hp at 6,000 rpm and 103 pounds of peak twist at 4,000

rpm. It's connected to the front wheels via one of two six speed trannies, a manual or an aggressive lock-up torque converter unit. The early and quick lock up makes the tranny more efficient. It also has tall gearing especially in fifth and sixth gear giving it very long legs.

While no exact performance numbers were extracted in my 100 mile drive from Santa Cruz back to San Francisco, it would be fair to estimate 0-60 mph times in the high eights to the low nines which is at least a full second better than my last xA and closer to the top of subcompacts and slightly better than most compacts.

But maybe the bad news is the small 11.6 gallon fuel tank, but don't fret, this iA averaged 38.3 mpg during that 100 miles of aggressive driving. Range equates to well over 400 miles which is well beyond most humans. That's even pushing into hybrid territory even though I couldn't find any hidden secondary electric power system anywhere. EPA rates the iA at 31/41/35 for the manual and a better 33/42/37 for the auto. Aggressive programming, early lock-up and ultra tall top gear ratios do pay dividends. RPMs drop to about 2,100 rpm at 70 mph.

Driving characteristics are impressive. Suspension is torsion beam semi independent in the rear and MacPherson struts up front, pretty standard in subcompact cars. But don't expect a subcompact type driving performance and it shows in the drive. Aside from the noticeable quiet, the ride and handling is certainly top of the class and equals cars substantially more expensive. Steering is also very quick at 2.84 turns lock to lock and the turning circle is a go-kart like 32.2 feet. One other point adding to iA's performance, fuel economy and handling is its low curb weight of 2,416 pounds with the automatic. Subtract only 31 pounds for the manual.

However, the first thing that you will notice aside from its great looking upscale design will be by your backside. While leather is not an option, the quality of the seats will be

readily noticeable once you are ensconced as they seem to form around you and provide great support with perfect foam densities.

If there is any complaint in the interior, it's the legibility of the ancillary gauges. They are too small and need more illumination. Everything you need is there, including a tach, but they are difficult to read except for the big round speedo which is front and center. One other note is the high quality of the appointments and most materials are soft touch. Trunk is a huge 13.5 cubic feet.

iA is basically sold one way, there are no factory options. Everything is standard like full power except the seats. Cruise, a great sound system, seven-inch display screen, Bluetooth, voice recognition, a pre-collision safety system, tilt telescopic steering wheel, TPMS and even a first aid kit and visor vanity mirrors are standard. Price for the manual is about \$15,700 and the auto is \$16,800. Add \$795 for destination. That's it. All you have to do is pick a color. Is there any rub? A slight one in that the standard alloys at 16X5.5 inches and the rubber is 185/60X16. The wheels are sharp looking, but if they were to offer an option it would be nice to see even a dealer installed upgrade to say a 17X6.5 or 17X7 inch alloy and 205/50X17rubber. It might even improve its already substantial handling and give it a more aggressive look. As with the iM below it is expected in dealer showrooms on Sept. 1.



### **Scion iM, a quality affordable AAV**

While the iA and iM have almost identical dimensions as you will see, they are totally different cars with no relationship other than they are both motor vehicles with a Scion badge. Wheelbase of the iM is only an inch longer than the iA at 102 inches, but its length is actually an inch shorter at 171 inches. Remember the new iM is a hatchback; no trunk. But there are 21 cubic feet of cargo volume behind the second row of seats.

If the new iM design looks a bit familiar, don't think you are hallucinating, it does and that vehicle is the RAV4. If you study the iM's shape it has an almost identical window line, roof line, shoulder and character line and a nearly identical front end. The iM is almost a RAV4 redone to look sleeker (coefficient of drag is a very low 0.30 and sportier while offering utility and fuel economy with a good level of performance and handling.

Powering the iM is a powerful 1.8L 16 valve, DOHC inline four cylinder engine of 137 hp at 6,100 rpm and 126 pounds of twist at 4,000 rpm. It drives the front wheels through a seven speed CVT automatic. While its gear ratios are infinite, under full throttle you can detect it acting like a seven speed geared tranny as it accelerates up to its peak hp rpm and drops to about 5,000 rpm and do it all over again as if it upshifted. A CVT will normally accelerate to near peak hp rpm and then remain there as tranny ratios infinitely numerically lower themselves as the vehicle accelerates. Zero to 60 mph should be in the high eights.

EPA rates the new iM at 27/36/31 for the six speed manual and 28/37/32 for the CVT. During my 100 mile road trip of aggressive hilly driving with more than half a dozen full throttle passes the iM averaged 32.0 mpg or right at the EPA combined rating. And there were a few miles in downtown San Francisco. With the engine spinning just 2,100 rpm at 70 mph, highway fuel economy might be a bit better than advertised. Fuel tank is a larger than average 14 gallons.

Scion has put some high tech quality features in this small compact like double wishbone rear suspension along with the MacPherson front struts. Wheels and tires are big and beautiful 17X7 inch alloys shod with super wide (for this class) 225/45 series tires. They are not just calling it sporty, the data says it is. Besides having an extremely refined overall drive (very quiet and smooth), it also has oodles of cornering power. You want more? Steering is radically quick at 2.59 turns lock to lock. I can see a new class of SCCA type of race car here. It even comes standard with stabilizer bars front and rear.

Ride quality was excellent as this Scion is dialed in just right, plenty of sport without the punishment. Turning circle is a tight 35 feet.

Inside is another quality interior. If I liked and praised the



seats in the iA, the iM cloth seats are even better for the same reasons and they feel a bit larger. They feel like they were custom design for my backside. Materials are mostly soft touch. It does have a real two holer dash with a big speedo and tach. For a vehicle just one half an inch beyond 170 inches, 69 inches wide and just 55 inches tall it has a huge amount of volume with 90 cubes in the passenger area and 21 cubes in the cargo area. That is the volume of a midsize sedan.

Pricing is \$18,460 for the manual and just \$19,200 for the CVT plus \$795 for the boat ride from Japan. As with the iA, there are no factory options. Your choice becomes paint color and transmission. Get the auto and then pick a color (Electric Storm Blue). As with the iA, everything is standard, right down to the heated power mirrors with LED turn signals and back up camera. Everything standard in the iA is also standard here plus a driver knee airbag. Both vehicles do have some dealer installed systems such a NAV and there is a body kit for the iM to make it even sportier. Both are a lot of car for the money.

*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.*