

# Road Beat: Camry quality continues to shine



The Toyota Camry continues to evolve and be at the top of its class. Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Now in about its eighth generation, the Camry, which holds the title of the largest selling American made car in the U.S. (about 430,000 annually), is one of Toyota's bread and butter vehicles. It has the reputation of being bullet-proof among its quality attributes.

Having tested several recent models, it is understandable. While it may not be the best handling, most economical or best performing in its midsize class, it still is always at the top of the sales charts because of its quality reputation and because since most drivers don't track their vehicles on the

weekends or engage in autocross and club racing events, drivers appreciate the Camry's features of comfort and quiet while still performing well in other categories. Toyota Camry is, as Bob Lutz said 10 years ago, a default brand or model. It has such a reputation; buyers don't think about other brands as the Camry has the aura of being a great car. And it is.

Face-lifted in 2015, the Camry has an overall pleasing appearance, but the front end still looks like a big frown. From the side and rear it looks great. Another issue I have is the new side view window line, while better looking than before, it uses a metal applique behind the rear window to lengthen the line instead of more side glass. Size-wise, the Camry defines the class with a 109-inch wheelbase and a length of 191 inches. Width is 72 inches while the Camry stands 58 inches tall. Camry has a very low coefficient of drag of 0.27.

Under the hood is a Toyota synergy system of combining a four cylinder DOHC, 16 valve gas engine that puts out 156 hp at 5,700 rpm plus 156 pounds of twist at 4,500 rpm with a 141 hp electric motor (at 4,500 rpm) and 199 pounds of twist at 0-1,500 rpm. But the combined power is not 297 hp (156+141), it is a more modest 200 hp. The reason being a limitation on the electrical energy output of the nickel-metal hydride battery of just 44 hp. By tightly controlling battery discharge and recharge rates the Toyota hybrid batteries almost last indefinitely, probably outlasting the rest of the car.

Camry hybrid outperforms its conventional counterpart with a significantly quicker 0-60 mph run of 6.79 seconds putting the Camry in a class of very high performance automobiles. Passing performance in simulated 50-70 mph runs required 4.03 seconds on level ground and a very quick 5.42 seconds up a 6-7 percent grade. The standard four cylinder Camry SE had times of 7.47, 3.99 and 6.19 seconds respectively. With the Hybrid, the kick in of the electric boost sometimes took a tenth or two, sort

of like turbo lag, but once online, this hybrid scoots.

I also found while braking is linear, the throttle wasn't, sometimes giving you more power from the engine room than desired. I am sure that this just requires some more miles to dialing in the right amount of acceleration. The only other niggle is feeling a tish of roughness from tip in when the gas engine comes online. But this condition now affects most cars including BMW which have auto engine stop and start features. There is no question this new hybrid is a solid performer.



### **Specifications**

Price (base including transportation) XLE \$30,140 to over \$35 large loaded up.

### **Engines**

2.5L, DOHC 16 valve inline four 156 hp @ 5,700 rpm  
156 lbs.-ft. of torque @ 4,500 rpm

### **Electric system**

141 hp electric motor @ 4,500 rpm  
199 lb.-ft. of torque from 0-1,500 rpm  
244.8V, 6.5 a/h nickel metal hydride battery; max voltage output 650  
About 44 hp of energy

Combined power output 200 hp

### **Transmissions**

CVT

### **Configuration**

Transverse front  
engine/front wheel drive

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 109.3 inches

Length 190.9 inches

Width 71.7 inches

Height 57.9 inches

Track (f/r) 62.4/62.0 inches

Ground clearance 6.1 inches

Weight 3,305 pounds

Tow capacity 1,000 pounds

Passenger volume 102.7 cubic  
feet

Trunk capacity 13.1 cubic  
feet

Fuel capacity 17.0

Steering lock to lock 2.85  
turns

Turning circle 36.7 feet

Wheel sizes 7X17 inches  
alloy

Tires 215/55X17

Co efficient of drag 0.27

### **Performance**

0-60 mph 6.79 seconds

50-70 mph 4.03 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 5.42  
seconds

Top speed Do you think that  
any of the prior nine or so  
million Camry buyers in the  
United States really care  
(except for the NASCAR

drivers)? But without intervention electronic or otherwise even the four cylinder should top out at close to 130 mph (but not with me in the car).

Fuel economy EPA rated at 40/38/40 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect to achieve 40 mpg in overall driving and 43 mpg plus on the highway at legal speeds.

But its fuel economy as to why most people opt for the Camry Hybrid. EPA rated at 40/38/40 mpg city/highway/combine fuel economy, you can expect to do a little better. Overall the Camry averaged between 38-40 mpg mostly in rural country driving, but its highway fuel economy averaged on a two way run at 70 mph 43.3 mpg. In a run to South Lake Tahoe and back to Placerville the Camry averaged 40.4 mpg. Those numbers show a 5-10 percent improvement over the EPA test cycle. In fact, when reviewing the recent Camry SE test fuel economy numbers, overall mileage was up by almost 10 mpg and highway mileage was up by 4-5 mpg.

My XLE tester came standard 17 inch alloys and 215/55 rubber instead of the LE's 16-inch steel wheels and 205/65 shoes. The SE model also gets the upgraded wheels and tires. If you like good handling, opt for the XLE or SE. Suspension is MacPherson struts up front and a fully independent multilink system in the rear. Steering is performed by an electric rack that is less than three turns lock to lock. I have driven hundreds of different cars and I have to tell you unless you are doing club racing or auto crossing, the handling of this hybrid is impressive. Body roll is well controlled, understeer in mild and it has plenty of grip. In my trip up Highway 50 and other

twisties, this hybrid handled so well at even slightly supra legal speeds it might impress Kyle Busch. Wait a minute, Busch drives a Camry in NASCAR racing even though NASCARs are anything but a stock car. Ninety-nine percent of all drivers will be impressed by this Camry's handling.

But its ride and quiet where the Camry Hybrid shines. Even my brother whose normal ride is an almost new near luxury sporting sedan was impressed with its ability to handle bumps and its anechoic chamber quiet. On smooth roads while doing about 48 mph on pure electric (it's about the max speed on pure electric) Camry becomes a magic carpet. There is no tach so engine speed at 70 mph is unknown, but considering its fuel economy it's probably below 2,000 rpm.

Of course, safety is second to none with four wheel discs brakes and all the safety acronyms including smart stop technology. My tester had the Advanced Tech Package (\$750) which gets you the pre-collision system, lane departure alert, radar cruise and auto high beams (great head lights, too). Blind spot detection and rear cross traffic alert was in another package (\$500).

Inside was a standard leather trimmed interior and sublime seating. The instrument panel was pretty standard nowadays with a Hybrid info gauge taking the place of the tach which is separated from the large speedo by an info center and trip computer. The center stack, HVAC and sound system is a snap to use. Rear seating is good for three June Taylor dancers. About the only compromise for the hybrid system is the trunk which is 13 cubic feet (the battery system takes up a couple cubic feet).

Sticker shock is not that bad even though this is a partially electrified vehicle. A base LE is just \$26,790 plus the train fare (\$865) from Georgetown Kentucky. Step up to the SE (recommended) and the sticker rises to a reasonable \$27,995 and my leather loaded XLE stickers at \$30,140. My tester had

about \$4K in options including its Ruby Flare Pearl paint (\$395) bring the total to \$35,800 all in. Now understand that is only about \$2K more than the Prius I just tested (it was about \$33,800) and a nicely equipped SE with the same options as this XLE would sticker for less than the Prius. Sure the Prius gets about 10 more mpg, but 40 plus mpg day in and day out is still excellent fuel economy. And the SE gets to 60 mph over 4 seconds quicker and accelerates up a steep grade in half the time.

Unless 50 mpg is a must, the Camry Hybrid SE, which is about the same price as a Prius, would be far and away my choice. It so much more car for the money. And it's still a Toyota using the same power system.

*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.*