

# Road Beat: Toyota Corolla, competent compact



Toyota Corolla remains a top performing go-to vehicle.  
Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Toyota is a default brand. It is the brand that the public understands to always be reliable, trustworthy, high quality, competent, economical and with decent performance. I could end my Road Beat on Corolla here, but let's examine why the Toyota reputation is so well deserved.

Corolla is in its umpteenth generation (11th) as Toyota's compact to the world, with well more than 40 million sold since the model was created in 1966 and by 1974 it was the best-selling car in the world and has remained so or at near the top since then. It surpassed the VW Beetle as the

bestselling model by 1997.

This new generation was introduced two years ago and has remained without significant changes since then. Outside the body remains crisp with some aggressive styling. I am still not a fan of the upside down frown grille. But the side view is excellent, as is the strong rear end. My special edition had some special touches in sportiness in the good looking blacked out 17-inch alloy wheels (shod with big 215/45 series tires), badging and trim, especially on the inside.



### **Specifications**

Price \$17,300 to about \$24,000 with destination

### **Engine**

1.8L DOHC 16 valve inline four cylinder with VVT-I 132 hp @ 6,000 rpm

128 lb-ft of torque @ 4,400 rpm

### **Transmission**

CVT

Six speed manual

### **Configuration**

Transverse front engine/front wheel drive

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 183.1 inches

Width 69.9 inches  
Height 57.3 inches  
Tread (track) (f/r) 59.8/59.9 inches  
Ground Clearance 5.6 inches  
Weight 2,845 pounds  
Fuel capacity 13.2 gallons  
Trunk volume 13.0 cubic feet  
Steering lock to lock 3.19 turns  
Turning circle 35.6 feet  
Wheels 17X7 inch alloys  
Tires 215/45X17 inch all season radials  
Co-efficient of drag 0.30

### **Performance**

0-60 mph 8.90 seconds  
50-70 mph 4.71 seconds  
50-70 mph uphill 8.46 seconds  
Top Speed Well into triple digits  
Fuel economy EPA rated 29/37/32 mpg city/highway/combined. Expect 42-44 mpg on the highway at legal speed and 33-35 mpg overall in rural country driving.

Sizing is compact all the way with a 106-inch wheelbase supporting a 183-inch body that is 70-inches wide. However, inside is mid-size volume of 110.5 cubic feet, 97 cubes in the passenger compartment and 13 cubes in the good size trunk. Even with a moonroof, it remains in the 110 cube mid-size category.

Under the hood is a contemporary 1.8L DOHC inline four cylinder putting out 132 hp at 6,000 rpm along with 128 pounds of twist at 4,400 rpm. While a six-speed manual is standard, go with the excellent CVT automatic that hooks up to the front wheels. Performance is about mid-pack with 0-60 mph taking

8.90 seconds, which is almost identical to my test of a 2014 Corolla that averaged 8.84 seconds. That's consistency. Passing times were almost identical as well with this edition knocking off 50-70 mph simulated passing runs of 4.71 seconds on a level highway and 8.46 seconds up a steep grade (7percent). The CVT makes the Corolla very responsive and actually feel quicker than it is.

Fuel economy is better than the EPA numbers of 29/37/32 mpg city/highway/combined. On the highway on cruise control at 70 mph the trip computer recorded an average of 44 mpg on a two-way 20 mile run. Highway mileage is helped by the CVT providing a super low final drive ratio and only 1,850 rpm at 70 mph. And with the CVT, stepping on the throttle provides an instant "downshift" for performance if needed. And the CVT is absolutely seamless and smooth although it can be programmed by the driver to simulate shifts. Average fuel economy for a round trip from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe on Highway 50 was an excellent 39 mpg. Corolla returned 28.9 mpg for the 6,000 foot climb from Placerville to Echo Summit. Overall the Corolla averaged between 33-35 mpg in rural country driving.

While Corolla may not be your weekend autocrosser or track car, handling is still quite competent. My special edition was helped with upgraded wheels and tires, but slow steering (3.2 turns lock to lock), a torsion beam rear end and a ride set up for more comfort than sport prevents the Corolla from being considered as a competitor in an F1 race, a GT contest or a drift competition. But the other 99 percent of drivers will find the Corolla quite handy and nimble. My special edition did remarkably well in the twisties even when pushed hard, holding its line with minimal body roll, good steering accuracy and following the exact course charted. It was more than fine. It does come with stabilizer bars at both ends. Its 35 foot turning circle will make tight parking lot maneuvering a snap.

Ride quality for the Corolla is good, compliant and well

controlled. In other words, it is comfortable. And with its extremely slow turning engine it is smooth and quiet on the highway with no road or wind noise. A big improvement over prior generations.

The S and upgraded special edition also gets you four-wheel disc brakes (front ventilated) and they are strong. All the safety acronyms are present including smart stop technology plus eight airbags are standard and a dozen or more other features or devices. But I have to emphasize that your best safety device is good judgment and attentiveness. Nothing will replace that until we are driven by robotic, autonomous cars which is a day we may all rue. With the government controlling the highways and traffic and you program your autonomous car to go somewhere, your computer response may be that you have a slot reservation in 42 minutes to get started, sort of like our air traffic control system when it gets busy. Headlights are good.

With the special edition you get an upgraded, tasty interior with lots of red accents including piping on the very comfortable seats. Done in Toyota's SofTex, imitation leather, it's some of the best in vinyl and the animals must really appreciate that. The instrument panel has all the correct gauges plus and easy to use center stack. This is a car you get in everyday and drive. It will be an enjoyable trip wherever you go.

Pricing for this Corolla starts at a reasonable \$20,635 plus \$865 the train ride from a window sticker that says Detroit. A base car stickers for \$17,300 plus destination. My tester had only two upgrades, a NAV/audio package (\$1,200) and a moonroof (\$850) bringing the total to \$23,550. I would forget the moonroof and save the money. Special edition floor mats are standard and the great looking, attention getting Absolutely Red paint is a no cost color choice. Go with it.

*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.*