

Road Beat: Toyota Corolla iM, new name, same great car



The Toyota Corolla iM handles great and is comfortable.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Two years ago, I tested the iM in a press preview in the Santa Cruz mountains, spending 100 miles behind the wheel and couldn't praise it enough. Of the carryover Scion brands, (the iA and iM), the iM is the one to buy. And the praise of my first test holds true two years later.

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, tail lights, and a nearly identical front end. It's as if the RAV4 was squished a

bit, leaving the iM looking sleeker (co-efficient of drag is a very low 0.30) and sportier while offering utility and fuel economy with a good level of performance and handling.

Dimensions are sub-compact, with a length of 172 inches a width of 67 inches and standing just 59 inches tall, which is a little taller than most sub-compacts making the iM a bit of a crossover genre.

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 then doing it all over again as if it upshifted through the "gears." 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. In sport mode, the iM will shift through seven distinct ratios manually.

In my prior review, I predicted 0-60 mph to be in the high eights. My seat of the pants number was exact as under the stop watch it averaged 8.87 seconds. Not bad, but even better is the responsive feel the CVT returns. It actually feels more powerful. Passing times are decent as well with a 50-70 mph simulated passing run taking 4.67 seconds on the level and 9.38 seconds up a seven percent grade.



Specifications

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 8.87 seconds
50-70 mph 4.67 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 9.38 seconds
Top speed over 129 mph
Fuel economy 28/36/31 mpg city/highway/combined.
Expect 31-32 mpg in aggressive overall driving and 40-41 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

EPA rates the new iM at 27/35/30 for the six-speed manual and 28/36/31 for the CVT. In my 100-mile road trip of aggressive hilly driving with more than half a dozen full throttle passes the iM averaged 32.0 mpg. In my 150 miles run to South Lake Tahoe and back to Rescue the iM averaged a solid 33.5 mpg and it included 16 full throttle passes and some otherwise very aggressive driving. No slow in my right foot. In a two-way level highway run at 70 mph, the iM averaged 40.6 mpg. Overall the iM averaged 31.3 mpg with the engine spinning just 2,000 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 17 x 7 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.

Even with a weight of 3,031 pounds, turn in is very crisp and changing directions is just a flick of the wheel. Transitions are very smooth; body roll is well controlled and the grip is amazing. Turning circle is a tight 35 feet.

Ride quality was excellent as this Scion is dialed in just right, plenty of sport without the punishment. And with the engine turning just 2,000 on the highway, there is little noise intrusion. It is quiet for a small car and doesn't beat you up.

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, they hold you in place during aggressive driving and are soft in all the right places and providing support where you need it. And they are large enough for 95 percent of drivers. 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 sub-compact vehicle, 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 \$19,490 for the automatic (\$740 less for the manual) plus \$865 for the boat ride from Aichi, Japan. There were a few minor PIO options, like floor mats, a film paint protector, wheel locks, a rear wind deflector, etc. totaling just under a \$1,000 bringing the total to \$21,498 all in. Your choice then becomes paint color and transmission. Get the auto and then pick a color (Electric Storm Blue as was my tester). Most everything else is standard, right down to the heated power mirrors with LED turn signals and back up camera. Also, standard here plus a driver knee airbag. Both vehicles do have

some other dealer installed systems such as NAV and there is a body kit for the iM to make it even sportier. iM 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.