

Road Beat: Toyota Corolla XSE Lacks performance



The 2018 Toyota Corolla XSE does not get high marks in all categories. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Maybe it was too spiffed up to compete with other compact sporty models, or maybe it was for good looks, but if it was spiffed up and made to sound good by adding TRD (Toyota Racing Development) Performance Exhaust and Performance air filter, that addition does little if anything to improve the vehicle performance. When it comes to sporty performance in a compact, Corolla XSE is not the leader and by a long shot.

Corolla's new body, introduced a couple of years ago, is certainly a looker and looks is a huge ingredient in a customer's purchase decision, but it still lacks in the

performance department. It should be said, the XSE does a great job for its rated horsepower of 132 from its 1.8L DOHC 16 valve four banger that also produces 128 pounds of peak twist at 4,400 rpm.

Corolla is one of those default cars that people buy who want a good car that is reliable and bullet proof as a bank vault. Nothing to think about as Corolla will give you all that and more.

Corollas drive the front wheels via a six-speed manual tranny or a stepped CVT which runs smoother than greased silk. In my XSE tester it had paddle shifters to give you six pre-selected ratios which are created by the computer and not by actual gears as with a planetary gear-set.



Specifications

Price \$25,337 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 (S model)
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

Passenger volume 97.1 cubic
feet

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 0.29

Performance

0-60 mph 8.31 seconds

50-70 mph 4.58 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 7.66
seconds

Top Speed Well into triple
digits

Fuel economy EPA rated
28/35/31 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect 41 mpg plus on the
highway at legal speed and
33-35 mpg overall in rural
country driving.

In my XSE version, the Corolla was an overachiever (maybe Toyota underrated the hp) knocking off 0-60 mph in about 8 seconds posting an elapsed time of 8.31 seconds. Passing times are also respectable recording a 50-70 mph sprint in 4.58 seconds and the same run up a 6-7 percent grade of 7.66 seconds. It is the best performing Corolla I've tested in 20 years. I never tested one before that anyway. And while tip-in is a bit soft, once under way, say from 10 mph, this Corolla feels very responsive which might be enhanced by the exhaust note, which by the way sounds good at times. Starting the engine definitely gets your attention, but the promises heard are a bit misleading. This XSE is hardly a race car. At speed, at least it's quiet and the potential droning does not exist. Part throttle response is good as well.

Fuel economy is what Corollas are about and the XSE will not disappoint. EPA numbers are 28/35/31 mpg city/highway/combined. Overall, the XSE averaged between 33-34 mpg and at a constant 70 mph in cruise control on a level highway, the XSE posted an average number in a two-way run of 41.6 mpg. In my round trip to Carson City from Placerville, the XSE averaged 38.6 mpg in 200 miles of moderately aggressive driving with a dozen full throttle passes in the passing zones. Fuel capacity is a diminutive 13.2 gallons.

One of the upgrades with the XSE are bigger wheels and tires with 17 x 7 inch alloys shod with substantial 215/45 series rubber. It also gets upgraded four-wheel disc brakes from rear drums, but otherwise its standard Corolla, with MacPherson struts up front, a semi-independent torsion beam in the rear, two small stab bars, front and rear, slower electric power steering at 3.19 turns lock to lock and not much else. The bigger wheels and tires plus a 60-inch track make the reasonably nimble Corolla a bit more nimble but don't expect a Toyota 86 here, it's not. But most Corolla drivers will like its predictability just as they love its reliability as the sun will rise tomorrow.

When it comes to ride and quiet, Corollas shine with a smooth compliant, quiet ride with no noise from its tires or wind. Now in the XSE, engine noise is another story if not the whole story. Get your foot into the gas and it will let you know the engine is making fire, but be aware the size of the fire will be a bit of an optical illusion. It may sound like a rocket sled but it goes more like just a sled.

Safety is all Toyota with Toyota Safety Sense which includes things like lane departure warning and assist, radar cruise and auto high beams and about everything in between. LED low beams while bright have a sharp cut off, but the LED high beams are very good. Brakes are strong.

Toyota "Softex" bathes the interior which can almost fool you into thinking its leather and the blue stitching and piping adds a sporty touch, but remember it's only a touch in the interior and not under the hood. It comes with all the requisite gauges including a large tach and speedo flanking the trip computer/info center. Easy to read and use as is the center stack, sound system and HVAC. No advance college courses necessary.

For a compact car, the EPA rates it as a mid-size as there is a combined 110 cubic feet of internal room with the trunk owning 13 well shaped cubes of that total. It's a roomy car for just 183 inches of length and 70 inches of width. It's a pretty good wind cheater with a co-efficient of drag of 0.29.

Sticker for this fanciest of Corollas starts at \$22,730 plus \$895 for the train and truck from its Cambridge, Ontario assembly plant. My tester had a couple of grand of options including \$649 for the TRD performance exhaust, \$80 for a TRD air filter and a hundred bucks for a TRD rear sway bar. Save your money or if you want to spend \$25 large for a sporty sedan, go for an 86 for about a grand more and get real. And an 86 with an automatic would still be a blast to drive. Total list for my tester was \$25,337.

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.