

Road Beat: 2018 Toyota Camry V-6 impresses



The 2018 Toyota Camry V-6 is not your daddy's Camry. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Camry's have been offered for decades with a V-6 option and all of them have been high performance automobiles in their time, even the original 2.5L V-6 going back to the late 1980s with about 160 hp. With the advent of this eighth generation Camry comes the most powerful Camry ever now sporting 301 hp. Imagine a Camry with over 300 hp.

Camry's new design has received noteworthy praise from the entire automotive spectrum. It is the best-looking Camry yet with smooth muscular flanks, clever lines and perfect proportions giving it the look and feel of a much more

expensive ride. It is bigger with a 111-inch wheelbase supporting a 193-inch body. Width is a tidy 72 inches and while it stands 57 inches tall it looks sleeker.

My only other test of the newest Camry iteration was the hybrid and I couldn't stop saying superlatives about its drive qualities. Performance was outstanding and its fuel economy was spectacular pulling down mpg numbers approaching a Prius. It road and handled better than any predecessor, more like a luxo ride. Now add 300 plus hp and more buttoned-down handling to the equation.

Under the hood is a massaged Toyota 3.5L V-6 with all the bells and whistles now cranking out 301 hp at a lofty 6,600 rpm and a strong 267 pounds of twist at 4,700 rpm. Direct injection allows for a super high compression ratio of 11.8:1 on regular fuel. This monster motor drives the front wheels through a slick shifting eight speed cog-swapper. Performance is world class with 0-60 mph arriving in just over five ticks stopping the Chrondex is a miniscule 5.42 seconds. That's some very serious motivation.



Specifications

Price \$34,950 to about \$38,000

Engine

3.5L DOHC, 246 valve V-6 301 hp @ 6,600 rpm

267 lb.-ft. of torque @

4,700 rpm

Transmission

Eight-speed torque converter automatic

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 111.2 inches

Length 192.7 inches

Width 72.4 inches

Height 56.9 inches

Ground clearance 5.7 inches

Track (f/r) 62.2/62.6 inches

Fuel capacity 13.0 gallons

Trunk capacity 15.1 cubic feet

Weight (SE) 3,549 pounds

Interior passenger volume 100.4 cubic feet

Steering lock to lock 2.6 turns

Turning circle 38.0 feet

Wheels 19X8 inch alloys

Tires 235/40X19

Performance

0-60 mph 5.42 seconds

50-70 mph 2.73 seconds

50-70 (up 6-7 percent grade) 4.06 seconds

Top speed anyone care?

Fuel economy EPA rated 22/32/26

city/highway/combined.

Expect 25-26 mpg in rural country/suburban driving; 37 mpg on a level highway at

legal speeds.

Passing times are also lightning quick with a 50-70 mph pass taking just 2.73 seconds and the same run up a steep (6-7 percent) grade slowing that time to 4.06 seconds. And it achieves this gravity defying performance while improving its fuel economy.

In a two-way 20-mile run on a level highway with the cruise control set at 70 mph, the Camry V-6 averaged a solid 37.2 mpg. EPA cycle tests said you should expect 22/32/26 mpg city/highway/combined. Overall in rural, suburban driving the Camry did average about 26 mpg but in my 200-mile aggressive run over the Sierras to Carson City the Camry averaged a solid 30.5 mpg. Those are numbers that ten years ago would be good for a 170 hp four banger that would struggle to make it to 60 mph in 8 seconds.

In XSE V-6 trim, the state of the art four-wheel independent suspension (MacPherson struts up front and a sophisticated double wishbone system in the rear) gets sports tuning with tightened up shock valving and springs. Otherwise the trick layout remains uniform with other Camrys. Steering is already a nicely weighted power rack of just 2.6 turns lock to lock but the wheels are 19 x 8 inch alloys shod with some very serious 235/40X19 series radial rubber. It all adds up to one fine handling automobile. Its turn in is very crisp, it bits beautifully with tenacious grip. It makes short work of the most difficult twisties. Camry can now change directions with the best of them and it makes accelerating out of apexes downright fun.

But don't think the Camry has lost any of its comfort quotient. It hasn't. It is still the quietest of midsize rides and its ride quality is second to none. In that respect, it remains the most comfortable of midsize sedans. There is no wind, engine or tire noise and with the V-6, the engine spins an incredibly low 1,600 rpm at 70 mph. It's one of the reasons

for its new-found highway fuel economy.

Toyota Safety Sense is standard meaning Camry is loaded with all the acronyms including lane departure warning and steering assist and my favorite feature of automatic high beam control. Camry headlights are very good on low and high beam. Camrys come with ten airbags. Did I mention the very strong all wheel discs?

In my XSE is soft, standard perforated leather seating that is sublime. Rear seating is also spacious and comfortable. The rest of the appointments are top quality and mostly soft touch.

Instrumentation is also first rate with a large tach and speedo flanking left and right of a digital info center which includes a trip computer. The center stack is topped by a large display screen which also has a detailed fuel computer in it as well. I am surprised no one has installed a digitized version of the Encyclopedia Britannica in the info system as it has almost everything else.

Cargo capacity is over 15 cubic feet and well-shaped.

Camry's price of admission is 50 bucks shy of \$35 large, plus \$895 for the train and truck from its Georgetown, Ky., assembly plant. My tester had three options, the Driver's assist package which includes the Bird's Eye Camera which gives you a 360-degree view of what surrounds the vehicle (\$1,050). A NAV package for \$940 and special Ruby Flare Pearl paint which is \$395 bringing to total price of admission to \$38,230. But this is no ordinary mid-size sedan, it is effectively a near luxury sports sedan that becomes an excellent alternative to some German offerings. Who needs a propeller when you can drive a jet?

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.