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# Toyota RAV4 Excel AWD – First Impressions

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Chris Adamson takes to the wheel of Toyota's latest RAV4...

*(All words and photos by Chris).*

Over the years I have been on many new vehicle launches where the makers have claimed revolutionary prowess for their latest model – few have met this expectation but one I recall that did was the original Toyota RAV4.

Billed as a fun town car with the ability to go off-road (Recreational All-terrain Vehicle) it





may not have quite had the go-anywhere abilities of the promotion but it was a game changer in terms of vehicle positioning.

It only had two-wheel drive but its raised suspension, chunky body panels and funky interior matched the hype, and the modern urban sports utility was born.



Its spiritual followers have come to dominate the new car market and the likes of the Nissan Qashqai (one of Britain's top selling models) owe their success to the pioneering work of the RAV4.

Over the years the SUV sector has grown as has the RAV4 but while it started things off,



Toyota's baby has never quite reached the sales success that it deserves.

Today's fifth generation RAV4 is not revolutionary but continues the evolution of the model that has gone from quirky to functional as it has swelled in proportion and absorbed more and more technology.

Bigger and chunkier than its predecessors, the latest RAV4 has lots of angles and character lines, sits higher than before, and has a lower roof and bonnet yet somehow feels more compact than many of its rivals.

Front end emphasis is on width and strength with a vertical grille and a deeper lower bumper section. It's a similar story at the rear where strong horizontal lines are created by the tail lights and the sharply angled rear screen, while the side profile is dominated by the open wheel arches and angled surrounds.





Inside the comfortable soft-touch cabin (with a longer wheelbase for added passenger space) has more of a utilitarian atmosphere than a sophisticated one and isn't helped by the combination of black and blue for the choice of cabin colours.





The repetition of textures and materials deprives the RAV4 of a bit of character or individuality but it's functional and everything (including some bold chunky controls) falls conveniently to hand.

The sweeping dashboard is dominated by the elevation of an eight inch multi-media touchscreen that looks like an after-thought, while the driver gets all the necessary information from a seven inch multi-information display.

When it comes to functionality, as well as plenty of passenger head and leg room, Toyota claims class leading 580 litres (20.48 cu.ft) of luggage space with the rear seats in place -





that's 79 litres (2.79 cu.ft) more than previously.



The load deck board sits flush with the low entry sill and has the option of a lower position to increase space and can be reversed to carry dirty items – or, for friends of mine, their two dogs back from a swim in the sea. The rear seats fold down 60/40 in a quick and easy action to boost load carrying should it be required.

In the UK the latest RAV4 is available in four trim levels, the range topper being the Excel (as tested).

This includes items such as dual-zone air conditioning, heated steering wheel, heated front





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seats, full leather upholstery, front and rear parking sensors, rear view camera, rear privacy glass, black roof rails, 18 inch silver alloy wheels, powered tailgate, and rain sensing wipers.

It also comes with a plethora of high tech safety items wrapped up as Toyota's Safety Sense system, such as pre-collision warning, pedestrian detection, lane departure alert, road sign assist, intelligent adaptive cruise control, rear cross traffic alert and eCall emergency system.



## On the Road

At the heart of the new RAV4 is one of Toyota's well tried and tested self-charging hybrid





powertrains featuring, in this instance, a new 2.5 litre four cylinder in-line petrol engine and electric motor offering 215 bhp in front wheel drive and 219 bhp in all-wheel drive (as tested here) which is up from 195 bhp for the previous unit.



Together they offer smooth, linear acceleration controlled by an electric automatic CVT transmission which allows the RAV4 to pull away with plenty of instant driveability and lots of torque on tap when required for sudden bursts of energy.

Its eco credentials come from the ability to move just using electric power (now with a lighter and more compact nickel-metal hydride battery) when the EV switch is selected. This can propel the RAV4 at speeds up to 30 mph, ideal in slow moving traffic. But, as with all



hybrids, there is limited battery life and it needs the regeneration from braking to give it a re-charge after just a relatively short distance.

Battery power for the electric motor is restricted so most of the time you are reliant on the conventional petrol engine which, with direct and indirect injection, promises fuel economy approaching 50 mpg and Co2 emissions (factoring in times when running on electric only) at just above 100 g/km, so while this is encouraging it isn't going to be class leading.

Underpinning the RAV4 is a new lightweight platform which offers a low centre of gravity, a near 50/50 front to rear weight balance and increased body rigidity.

This delivers competent ride and handling that feels more like a hatchback than an SUV, thanks to the elimination of a lot of body movement and, in part due to the adoption of double wishbone rear suspension, a flat ride profile.

The all-wheel drive version uses an intelligent electronic system that can vary the power delivery front to rear from 100 per cent to the front to 80 per cent at the rear (equal to 1,300 Nm or 99 lb.ft of torque) depending on driving conditions.

Drivers are not going to notice this change as for the vast majority of time the car is going to be operating as standard in front-wheel drive configuration. It will only be when conditions on the ground become slippery that there is a reassurance of all-wheel drive.

There is the option to select between Normal, Eco and Sport modes. Sport modifies the steering assist, throttle control and drive torque distribution to offer brisker on-road driving but don't expect supercar levels of performance.

There is also a Trail mode button that activates an automatic limited slip differential control to make the best use of traction in low grip situations by braking the spinning wheel and diverting power to the wheel with the best grip.

The electric power steering is lighter than before and more responsive and direct thanks to





Toyota moving the motor from the column to the rack.

## VERDICT

The latest RAV4 is a worthy hybrid SUV that sadly doesn't stand out from the crowd as its predecessor once did.

It is packed with Toyota's clever technology which has been refined by many years of development but ultimately these days when there are so many good cars out there, its lack of individual character makes it feel the safe choice rather than the inspired one.





## Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:

### Toyota RAV4 Excel AWD

Engine: 2,487cc

Transmission: Electric CVT

Power: 219 bhp

Torque: n/a

Performance:

0-62 mph: 8.1 seconds

Top Speed: 112 mph

Fuel Consumption (WLTP Figures):

Combined: 48.7 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 103 g/km

Price (On the Road): £36,155