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# Toyota RAV4 Hybrid Road Test

Published: February 16, 2017

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/toyota-rav4-hybrid-road-test-2/>



Hybrid becomes the most popular power source in the Toyota RAV4 range. David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) explains...

The RAV4 mid-sized SUV was first introduced in 1994 and billed by Toyota as the first compact 4WD SUV. Since then there has been a continual supply of new and updated models. The latest major change has been the introduction of petrol electric Hybrid two and four wheel drive versions.

With the Hybrid's 2.5 litre VVT-i variable valve timing petrol engine plus an electric motor for the 2WD version and additional rear mounted electric motor for 4WD models, but with no PHEV plug-in electric charging facility which really brings down CO2 emissions, it



caused me to wonder just how these latest RAV4 petrol/electric Hybrid versions would appeal over other petrol or diesel variants.



Well in the UK Hybrid RAV4s have proved to be more popular, with higher sales than petrol and diesel versions. Last year 4,544 petrol/diesel RAV4s were sold versus 4,682 Hybrids. Of the Hybrid sales it would not be uneducated to assume that most of these went to fleet and business user chooser customers because of the lower CO2 emission figures which mean lower taxes. In fact there was a more or less even split between demand from retail and fleet customers. For conventional RAV4 petrol/diesel model sales to retail customers are significantly more than fleet users. Another surprising fact, given the vehicle's past



reputation as a workhorse 4WD SUV, that in the UK almost 60% of modern day RAV4 sales are for 2WD models.

Toyota GB says it follows the trend of owners wanting the SUV type vehicle in terms of size and height but without the higher running costs associated with 4WD.

So times are changing in today's motoring world, never assume anything now when it comes to the public's choice of what to buy. Diesel models, given this shift in buying patterns, are now only available with front wheel drive and only with a manual gearbox, with prices starting from £24,205 for the base spec Active version, indeed it is the only engine choice for this spec level. Moving up to Business Edition/ Business Edition Plus levels the diesel manual 2WD prices start from £26,730/£27,430 compared with the 2.5-litre petrol/electric Hybrid automatic 2WD (the only gearbox choice) costing £28,530. Above these versions are Icon and Excel spec levels with the manual gearbox 2WD diesel being the least expensive at £29,600. The lowest cost petrol version is a 2.0 litre version with Icon spec, 4WD and an automatic gearbox, and priced at £30,900. Range prices top out at £33,425 for the petrol/electric Hybrid, auto with 4WD is priced at £33,425.

As you can see it's a complicated choice. However if you can ignore the difference in purchase price the easier way is to look at all important tax costs. The 197 hp petrol/electric Hybrid 2WD auto has CO2 emissions of 115 g/km, VED is initially £0 and BIK company car tax is rated at 20%. The 4WD Hybrid variant has 118 g/km of CO2 with VED initially £0 and BIK remains 20%. The 143 hp diesel has 123/124 g/km of CO2, VED is £0 and BIK 24%. The 2.0 litre, 151hp petrol, only available with 4WD and an auto gearbox, has CO2 emissions of 152 g/km, VED is £185 and BIK is 27%.

My latest RAV4 experience was the 2.5 petrol/electric Hybrid auto with 2WD and with Business Edition Plus specification priced at £28,530. With today's UK customers buying more Hybrids than petrol or diesel models and more 2WD than 4WD versions this seemed the likely best selling version.



With a combined power system of 194 bhp top speed is 112 mph with zero to 62 mph taking 8.4 seconds. Drive to the front wheels is through a CVT automatic gearbox. Officially the Combined Cycle fuel economy is 57.6 mpg and on my week long test drive the vehicle returned a poor overall figure of 42.3 mpg, driven mostly in Eco mode. It also has a selectable EV mode where the electric motor only drives the vehicle with a range of about one mile. Unfortunately there is no plug-in mains electric charging facility which would extend that range much further. More appealing for most customers is the low CO2 emission figure of 115 g/km so VED is £0 for the First Year rate and currently £30 for Year Two onwards. Company car drivers will pay 20% Benefit in Kind tax and insurance is Group 27E.

Styling wise the mid-sized RAV4 retains its robust SUV styling although slightly softened by



curved styling lines more in keeping with the styling of popular 'soft' SUVs commonly known now as Crossovers. It has a slightly rising waistline and a prominent roof rear spoiler to give it a more athletic look, but retains its black plastic protective mouldings around the wheelarches and along the sills. All new RAV4s, but the base Active model, now have Toyota's Safety Sense system with pre-collision braking, adaptive cruise control, lane keep assist, automatic high beam headlights, road sign assist, traction control, stability control and hill start assist.

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Within its overall length of 4,605 mm (15.11 ft), inside there is ample room for five passengers with a boot capacity of 501 litres (17.69 cu.ft) expanding up to 1,633 litres (57.67 cu.ft) with the split rear seats backs folded down. With no under-floor battery pack, or electric motor for 4WD versions, non-Hybrid models have a boot space of 547 litres (19.32 cu.ft) going up to a maximum of 1,735 litres (61.27 cu.ft). For those owners who want a RAV4 for towing, the Hybrid 2WD version I tried only has a braked towing weight capability of 800 kg (1,763 lb), half that of the Hybrid 4WD version and the 2.0 litre diesel. The 2.0-litre petrol models have a braked towing weight of 1,500 kg (3,306 lb).

The Business Edition Plus spec level is ideal for both high mileage fleet/business and private retail customers. In addition to the comprehensive Safety Sense package, the specification also includes automatic lights and wipers, electric windows, keyless entry with push-button start, dual zone climate control, DAB radio, rear view camera, front and rear parking sensors, Toyota Touch 2 with Go, sat-nav, on board computer with a 7.0-inch touchscreen, Bluetooth, on-line connectivity, heated door mirrors, power tailgate, 17-inch alloy wheels, front fog lights, LED daytime running lights and LED rear lights. The vehicle is covered by Toyota's five year/100,000-mile warranty.

Rather than use the Toyota Hybrid Synergy Drive system with its 1.8 litre petrol engine and electric motor for models such as the Prius and new C-HR smaller SUV, the RAV4 Hybrid has the 2.5 litre Hybrid system as used in the Lexus NX Crossover and GS Saloon ranges. It



is simple to use; get in, push the start button, engage Drive, release the handbrake, press the accelerator and off you go, almost always in quiet electric drive mode but only for a few metres/yards before the petrol engine chimes in.

Around town the petrol/electric Hybrid gives decent driving performance but during acceleration on the open road it doesn't feel as responsive as the acceleration figure suggests, and it can be hard-pushed to maintain effortless high speeds on motorways. Use more than part-throttle with the CVT gearbox and the engine revs soar noisily without much gain in speed. And it's the same going up a steep hill, lots of noise but little 'grunt'.

It is not as sharp in the handling department as the petrol or diesel models, feeling less agile because of its near 1.8 tonne kerb weight. The vehicle is unsettled with impacts from potholes, the ride isn't that compliant and the steering is vague offering little feedback.

## VERDICT

It does have its plus points in terms of low emission levels, potentially reasonable fuel economy and comprehensive specification but it is too compromised in other important areas to make it the most recommendable RAV4 model in the range. That said it has proved popular as its sales figures show. Outright performance, 4WD traction and driving refinement are no longer driving forces when it comes to buying an SUV; lower taxation and running costs and high spec are it seems.

**For:** Hybrid power reduces CO2 emissions and lowers taxes, well-equipped, roomy, looks like a proper SUV.

**Against:** Not as good to drive as conventional petrol/diesel versions, worse real-life fuel economy than a diesel version, no plug-in electric facility which reduces CO2 emissions and increases the EV driving range, plus most PHEVs get the Government's plug-in vehicle grant, 2WD Hybrid models have a poor braked towing weight, hard to justify the extra purchase cost over a diesel 2WD model.



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Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech.Spec. in Brief:

Toyota RAV4 2.5L Hybrid 2WD Business Edition Plus SUV.

Price: £28,530.

Engine/drivetrain: 2.5 litre, four cylinder VVT-i non-turbo petrol engine with front electric motor, 195 bhp total power output, CVT automatic and front 2WD.



Performance: 112 mph, 0-62 mph 8.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 57.6 mpg (42.3 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 115 g/km, VED £0/£30, BIK company car tax rate 20%.

Insurance Group: 27E.

Warranty: Five years/100,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,605 mm (15.11 ft), W 1,845 mm (6.05 ft), H 1,675 mm (5.50 ft), boot/load space 501-1,633 litres (17.69-57.67 cu.ft), braked towing weight 800 kg (1,763 lb), five doors/five seats.