



Latest Toyota RAV 4 PHEV – Road Test

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Author: Robin Roberts

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The new Toyota RAV4 PHEV Dynamic plug-in petrol/electric hybrid put through its paces by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Toyota's original SUV is now its flagship hybrid and most powerful. However, it's not all about power as it also delivers excellent economy and a long electric-only range with good



real-world performance.

For the new model year 2023 it's sold in Design, Dynamic and Dynamic Premium specifications, a far cry from when it hit our roads in the mid-1990s. Prices start at £44,140 and equipment fitted and option packs push this up, so our test car was from £45,755, meaning it does not get the Gov. assistance grant and you pay more in subsequent years for road tax.

We have always appreciated the RAV4 qualities and generally these continue with the new PHEV version tested but this also offers the ability to maximise electrical power for daily commutes and your real world petrol consumption can be dramatically reduced.

Importantly, the traditional gutsy 4 cyl 2.5 litre petrol engine is there to give you a sensible daily range if required and back up when you do run out of electricity. Essentially you will not get stuck if the traction battery is exhausted as would be the case in a pure BEV.



As a four-cylinder engine of its size, the Toyota RAV4's unit is not intrinsically quiet but it packs a good punch and so long as you keep within torque limits the noise is not too intrusive.

It's perhaps not as smooth as some other multi-cylinder engines but its pulling power - torque - is delivered in a better way so you do get good pickup when needed for overtaking.

The system is very sophisticated and extra urge can be summoned and pours out when the electrical generator kicks in, the battery delivers its charge and the timing and amount of electrical assistance can be fine tuned through the on-board computer. The pure electric power only range is over 40 miles.



Generally it's a very smooth relationship between ICE and fire and the transmission provides seamless support with hardly a hiccup and it gives 4×4 grip when the system judges it is required.



There are excellent brakes underfoot with strong retardation from only modest pedal pressure and the parking brake was highly effective.

The steering was light yet had good feedback and the turning circle was fairly compact for urban driving without being twitchy on winding country roads.

For all these virtues though the RAV4 PHEV did not feel particularly agile in the manner of previous generations and you become aware how large it has become since those early 90s



models. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but despite its system settings it is not a sporty drive, and you have to work with what you have underhand and feet.

Grip was good and there was little body roll on bends or dipping under acceleration or braking and the springs and dampers did a fine job absorbing the worst holes and bumps.

Secondary controls on the wheel-spokes, fascia and console are straightforward and work with a satisfying solidity as if crafted out of a solid piece of plastic and when you become accustomed to them, their layout is logical. Some marks on the column stalks were obscured by the transmission paddles or spokes so needed familiarisation to become second nature.

There is a good sized infotainment screen atop the centre of the fascia and it offers plenty of features for linking up social media, phones, navigation as well as selecting the driver's desired settings for the powertrain and suspension and all are clearly visible with shortcut buttons down the side.



The interior can be very carefully customised to individual taste for temperature, distribution and output direction and you have powered windows all round for maximum choice.

It's a similar story with the seating, depending on how many are using it, or if the luggage capacity has to be maximised or somewhere between and the capacity rises from a good 520 litres (18.36 cu.ft) to triple that with a long, wide floor and generous headroom.

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The front and back seats are among the most comfortable in any SUV, even some premium models don't get anywhere near as supportive and yet locate occupants so well. You really can undertake a marathon journey with confidence.

Visibility is very good all round, with big windows, excellent wash/ wipe system front and back and possibly the brightest non-dazzling headlights on a vehicle of this class. Heated seats aided comfort and the air conditioning kept the interior cosy and windows clear. All round sensors help when manoeuvring.

Noise levels were generally modest but in pure electric mode the road rumbles and suspension working away was much more noticeable.

Charging the PHEV could not be simpler. A plug-in point in the rear quarter is set at chest height and the RAV4 comes with both three-pin and fast charger connections, long cables and charge capacities clearly displayed on the lead or the fascia display, depending upon which is used.

VERDICT

The Toyota RAV4 PHEV is a further step forward for the brand as we all transition towards an electric-only future and it really is all we need for now with its room, refinement, comfort and overall performance.

For: Very sophisticated powertrain and features, roomy with comfortable seats, excellent economy and grip, effortless performance, no driving range anxiety.

Against: Expensive to buy and tax in subsequent years, some extraneous noises, felt bigger than it was.



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FAST FACTS

Toyota RAV4 PHEV Dynamic petrol-electric plug-in hybrid SUV

Price: £45,755

Mechanical: 302 bhp 4cyl 2487cc petrol engine/ electric, auto AWD

Max Speed: 112 mph

0 - 62 mph: 6.0 sec



Combined MPG: 52.8

Insurance Group: 35E

C02 emissions: 22 g/km

Tax costs: Bik rating 8%, VED £ZeroFY, £510SRx5

Warranty: 10 years/ 100,000 miles

Size: L 4.60 m (15.09 ft), W 1.86 m (6.10 ft), H 1.69 m (5.54 ft)

Bootspace: 520 to 1604 litres (18.36 to 56.64 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,995 kg (4,398 lb)